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community leadership and the strategic housing role in local government

1. why is the strategic housing role important?

The Local Government White Paper¹ sets out a role for local government to take up an enhanced role as place shaper and leader of communities. Having a clear vision for the kind of housing that is appropriate for your area and how it might be delivered, is an important component of your sustainable community strategy.

‘Local authorities’ work in producing housing strategies has been a lever for economic and social change in many areas, reflecting a shift towards ensuring local housing markets meet local demands, rather than a narrower focus on directly providing social housing. This strategic housing role is at the heart of achieving social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place.’²

¹ Ref. Strong and Prosperous Communities. Local Government White Paper. October 2006. Cmnd 6939, CLG

² p41, Part 2, Strong and Prosperous Communities

An appropriate balance of good quality housing, which provides variety, choice and is accessible, is fundamental to the well-being of the citizens of any local authority area. It involves making the best use of the housing that is already there, as well as working effectively with the market to supply new homes. Crucially, it is also about looking and working across all tenures, and ensuring that appropriate links are made to the support services which people need to live in their homes. Life chances and housing aspirations are a factor in the democratic mandate of any local authority.

The housing role in local authorities has changed greatly in recent years as the majority of local authorities have now transferred their Council housing stock to a separate and distinct organisation (a Housing Association or ALMO) or to an internal landlord service. The core housing function of local authorities is now enabling and strategic, rather than direct provision.

The challenges for housing strategy vary greatly across the country. The major issue that most areas face is a shortage of affordable housing which in many urban and rural areas now threatens the sustainability of communities. The regeneration of run-down urban areas and mono-tenure social housing estates is a pressing issue for the well being of many other disadvantaged communities for which the strategic housing role is crucial. The critical role of the private rented sector in housing many groups of people,

including young people and economic migrants, means that local authorities role in ensuring this element of the market offers safe housing at a decent standard for the most vulnerable is as much a part of its strategic housing role as any other intervention.

Nationally, local authorities and their partners are working towards the 'decent homes' targets, and maybe beyond that to creating mixed, balanced and sustainable communities. Underpinning this, we all have a duty to assess housing needs, tackle homelessness and to help our citizens access a home suitable for their needs in whatever tenure they choose, and making the critical links with support services and the Supporting People programme. How well we do all of this, recognizing the diversity of needs across communities, is profoundly important for social cohesion and the health of our communities.

Shaping places means coordinating activities in relation to the public realm, planning, housing and economic development and much more. It starts with creating a vision for how a place should look and feel, including creating attractive places and good quality affordable housing, in all tenures, that attracts investment and workers for a vibrant economy. It is also about offering people opportunities and choices over where they live. And it's about creating high quality well-connected homes, enhancing people's life chances, making positive impacts on health and wellbeing,

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connections to skills and employment and an improved environment.

Government is also urging local authorities to be a commissioner of services par excellence. In relation to housing this is about influencing the nature of the housing outcomes in your area. Are the housing products in your area the right ones for your citizens? Is best use being made of existing housing stock across all tenures? Are all possible appropriate affordable housing options being provided? What is the quality of the local service providers and landlords? Is housing contributing to community wellbeing, including making appropriate linkages between housing and support?

There is also the challenge of making local governance relevant to the citizen at a local level. Government is asking for housing strategy to become a part of the local Sustainable Community Strategy, and it will need to be a recognized component of Local Area Agreements. This paper explores some of the issues and barriers that may need to be overcome in your authority in responding to these changes.

We are pleased to be able to draw on much good practice, some of which is highlighted from parallel IDeA work – the Beacon scheme highlights exemplars on affordable housing and resident involvement, the rural excellence programme, the Planning Advisory Service and the 'effective democracy in growth areas' project.

Your feedback about how you see the future strategic housing role and any barriers facing you in performing this role would be very welcome. You will find details of how to provide your feedback at the end of this guide.

2. the strategic housing role and community leadership

Joined up government, neighbourhood working and the complex operation of housing markets are rapidly changing the environment within which local authorities operate. This is also changing the strategic housing and enabling role for local authorities. The community leadership role now requires enhanced skills of council members and the professionals (not just housing provision and housing aid but also planning, legal, finance property, environmental health who support them). This is the skill of formulating, leading and working within partnerships that can place housing into its wider context of the local Sustainable Community Strategy.

'Local authorities are the only parties at the local level with a cross-cutting remit and the democratic legitimacy to intervene to ensure that all the aspects of the housing market in their area operate effectively'.³

³ Sustainable communities: Homes for All: 2005 ODPM

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In practice what does this mean? One way of conceptualizing this is to understand that housing professionals are now tasked with a very broad range of responsibilities that must be negotiated with other professionals in a partnership environment, namely:

- establishing a robust and shared understanding of the trends and drivers which influence housing needs and demand, and the wider implications for planning, infrastructure and communities;
- activities that involve creating new housing and managing existing housing in the built environment (the harder/physical/material side of what makes a community);
- activities that involve creating functioning neighbourhoods, supporting individuals and providing a safe area to live within (the softer side of what makes a functioning community)

In turn, these combinations of a shared understanding and the hard and soft elements of a functioning community are reflected in the work of local councillors and many stakeholders. For these reasons, housing strategy has an important place at any table where Sustainable Community Strategies are being planned and delivered. Proposals developed in the housing strategy will be articulated in many other plans both inside and external to the local authority, and will be made real by housing providers, including Arms Length Management Organisations, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), private landlords,

developers and providers of accommodation for vulnerable people. Your housing strategy may well be an umbrella for more specific plans to tackle homelessness, for example, or to enforce standards in the private rented sector, and will link to a range of other strategies, such as, community safety and supporting people. The vision articulated in your Sustainable Community Strategy will set the context for your housing strategy, and housing will be an integrated part of the overarching Strategy and its delivery vehicle, the Local Area Agreement.

The strategic housing role has an important part to play in the local leadership that local authorities are being required to show. For example, it can help to secure a joined-up strategic approach to securing mixed and sustainable communities, including:

- ensuring good design which encourages informal social mixing and support community cohesion within estates and neighbourhoods;
- supporting the economy by having the right number of homes of the right tenure and price for workers;
- linking where people live to the services they want and need;
- linking where people live to good transport networks;
- ensuring that all residents' voices feed into shaping strategy.

So, what are the activities that comprise the strategic housing role? The Chartered Institute of Housing and the Local Government Association have recently suggested⁴ the following;

- understanding the housing markets operating within and around the local authority area
- assessing existing and future housing requirements, aspirations and types of housing across all tenures
- creating a long term vision for 15 years that is compatible with the sustainable communities strategy for the area
- appraising and testing options that can balance the various housing markets within the area (including for the vulnerable etc)
- producing shorter-term investment strategies and action plans in collaboration with local stakeholders and communities
- involving local stakeholders in communities in sharing and communicating the housing strategy
- working with others by commissioning, funding and coordinating the activities to implement the strategy in order to bring about desired change
- evaluating and monitoring the strategy.

The scope of a local authority housing strategy, which results from these roles, is set out in guidance by Communities and Local Government (CLG) at **www.communities.gov.uk**.

Many local authorities, and particularly some two tier areas, are still coming to terms with this broad strategic housing role. It requires a more effective level of dialogue, communication, partnership and analysis. For example, there needs to be a new focus on collaboration with planning and economic development colleagues as they tackle the integration of the Local Development Framework (LDF) with the Sustainable Communities Strategy. The LDF and the housing strategy also need to influence and be influenced by iterations of sub regional and regional plans.

The Government's view of the strategic housing role is that it should start from the unique ability of local authorities to identify local needs and priorities. This will be done in the knowledge that the right quantity, quality and type of housing are essential to the health and wealth of an area. Local authorities are able to take an overview across all tenures using their planning and enforcement powers as well as housing policy to deliver national, regional, local and community priorities. They are in the right place to work with and influence others including social housing providers, private sector landlords, developers, regional housing and planning bodies and residents to deliver successful communities.

⁴ Ref. Visionary Leadership in Housing; a new future for local housing strategy. CIH/LGA. Nov 2005.

3. the strategic housing role and overall performance of the local authority

The strategic housing role and the Housing Landlord Service in those authorities still owning stock may be having an impact on the CPA performance score your authority is currently receiving. The evidence suggests that performance on housing is very variable.

There is a wealth of good practice but it is a concern that the results of Audit Commission housing inspections suggest a problem. These are based on risk assessments (weighted towards weaker performers) and report that 84 per cent of relevant housing service inspections conducted over the past two and a half years have been judged to be less than good⁵. At August 2006, after four years of opportunity, almost one quarter of authorities had not achieved fit for purpose accreditation of their housing strategies.

⁵ Based on all housing inspections published from April 2004 to Sept 2006. The total was 118 inspections – of which 1 received excellent and 18 received good – the remainder were fair or weak.

The Audit Commission, when judging performance within the comprehensive performance assessment framework, will look for evidence in relation to housing as follows:

- that the council's overall ambitions and priorities are encapsulated, in its housing, homelessness, community and supporting people strategies and that they are effective in addressing the area's housing requirements
- that the council's overall ambitions include alignment with the local development framework and the Sustainable Communities Plan
- the council's influencing of the local housing market contributes to, and drives the delivery of, the other shared priorities of the council.

If the housing inspectorate of the Audit Commission inspects your council, it will be judged against a number of key lines of inquiry (KLOE).

The KLOE for 'the strategic approach to housing' is different from many of the others as it does not cover a discrete service. It is designed to establish the overall corporate effectiveness of the council's strategic housing activity. It looks at whether the council is using all available powers and influence to bring about an improved balance in the housing market and to address the challenges faced, such

as high demand or an over supply of housing. It specifically examines the quality of the council's strategic approach to housing and how it relates to strategies such as area renewal, private sector safety and standards, homelessness, and enables the provision of new housing through partnership working and planning powers.

Some examples of the kind of inquiry made are given below:

- how does the organisation respond to the diversity of its community to ensure that housing provision is strategically planned and delivered appropriately to meet local needs?
- how well do different sections within the council work together to understand the housing market and to develop joined-up and coherent strategies?
- how effectively are the council's internal and external partnerships contributing to balancing the housing market?

In other words, the Audit Commission is looking for, and expects to find, housing strategy integrated and prioritised within the broader corporate objectives of the council. Failure to demonstrate that this is taking place risks a reduction in the scoring for the whole of the assessment.

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The IDeA will be working with partner organisations over the coming months to develop tools that will enable authorities to scrutinise their own strategic housing functions and to consider how they could better integrate them with other area or authority-based strategies and performance management frameworks. These tools will highlight authorities that have been judged by the Audit Commission to have succeeded in this area.

4. what are the challenges for local authorities?

The policy environment for local authorities is changing rapidly at present. This is particularly so for housing as place-shaping and Sustainable Community Strategies come to the fore. The IDeA commissioned some background research in 2006 in order to achieve an understanding of these challenges and the potential areas for improvement by local authorities. This research identifies five key issues for the strategic housing role:

- 1 better understanding the relationship between housing strategy, planning and the economy, so that local authorities understand the housing needs and the aspirations for their area in the short, medium and long term. Based on this, they are able to intervene appropriately to create a balanced supply of good quality housing
- 2 the respective roles of the regional, sub-regional and local levels of housing strategy
- 3 how to integrate housing strategy into Sustainable Community Strategies, create effective alignment with the Local Development Framework, and translate this into delivery plans, through the Local Area Agreement (with particular issues for two tier authorities)

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- 4 building capacity and providing the right leadership from Members and Directors involved in developing housing strategy within local authorities, drawing on a range of professions and skills within and outside the authority

- 5 involving residents and communities in major decisions and in providing feedback on service delivery.

Each of these challenges is examined in turn in subsequent sections of this guide.

5. the relationship between housing strategy, planning and the economy

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of strategic housing and other disciplines working together to improve existing neighbourhoods and to develop new communities. This integration is a fundamental tenet of the Local Government White Paper, and the principle of Sustainable Community Strategies.

The key practical question for local authorities is what form this integration should take. Whilst there is much overlap between disciplines, they also stretch well beyond their common ground. The quantity, location and, to some extent, the type of new housing provision is regulated by the planning system where joint working is essential. The quality, accessibility and suitability of housing is now identified also as a key economic driver and the overall levels of housing demand are driven substantially by economic change. The geography of housing markets is strongly shaped by transport changes, which again are integral to the planning system.

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The guidance in the recently published Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing⁶ underlines the importance of the planning system for delivering the right quantity and types of new housing. The guidance aims that the planning system should deliver:

- high quality housing that is well-designed and built to a high standard
- a mix of housing, both market and affordable, particularly in terms of tenure and price, to support a wide variety of households in all areas, both urban and rural
- a sufficient quantity of housing taking into account need and demand and seeking to improve choice
- housing developments in suitable locations, which offer a good range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure
- a flexible, responsive supply of land – managed in a way that makes efficient and effective use of land, including re-use of previously-developed land, where appropriate.

⁶ CLG, Nov 2006.
http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/931/PlanningPolicyStatement3Housing_id1504931.pdf

Local planning policies need to be supported by an evidence base about the level of need and demand for housing and the opportunities that exist to meet it. This should be provided by Strategic Housing Market Assessments⁷ and land availability assessments⁸. The former, in particular, should be prepared jointly by planning and housing so that it draws on all existing information and a good understanding of the trends and drivers of future housing need and demand.

Housing policy also has to recognise that future housing supply and quality will be dominated by the influence of existing housing provision as, even in 20 years' time, 85 per cent of England's housing stock will be that currently existing in 2007. The good management and improvement of this stock are therefore also fundamental issues, which reinforces the view that the local authority strategic housing role includes the powers and duties available to ensure that owner occupied and private sector housing contributes to building vibrant and sustainable communities by being in demand and in good condition, as much as it includes powers and duties to enable the development of new housing to meet future need.

⁷ CLG, March 2007 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1509040>

⁸ Guidance to be published in summer 2007

A report prepared jointly by the LGA, RTPI and CIH in 2004⁹ argued that there should be a ‘blurring of the edges’ between strategic housing and planning. It offered a variety of models and case studies for closer working in the planning process, whilst recognising that strategic housing has other important roles in preventing homelessness, improving existing housing, supporting neighbourhood renewal, promoting community cohesion and enabling access to housing. In addition to closer joint work, this report suggested:

- a single strategy, or housing development document, for both the Local Development Framework and inclusion in the housing strategy
- joint commissioning of housing assessments, affordable housing policies and supplementary planning guidance, followed by shared working on S106 agreements
- joint policy development also covering housing market renewal and Best Value reviews
- joint protocols and training programmes.

This all suggests that housing and planning should be closely linked, as does the imperative to do more about environmental concerns and climate change. Emerging evidence from examination of positive local authority practice, suggests that close, or even integrated working arrangements, deliver successful results as can be seen in the examples in the boxes below.

The experience of Ashford District Council in Kent, which is in one of the four designated ‘growth areas’ in the South East of England is briefly reported in example a. The Housing and Planning Teams work very closely, for example tailoring affordable housing development briefs for every qualifying site over their threshold for affordable housing. Overall leadership is exercised by the Chief Executive who chairs bi-monthly meetings to consider the status and progress of ‘major sites’, which coordinates the Planning, Housing and Legal Departments of Ashford District Council with Kent County Council and Ashford’s Future (the delivery vehicle for the growth area).

⁹ Intelligent Approaches to Housing August 2004. LGA, CIH and RTPI

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example a

creating a great town within the great garden. planning and strategic housing in Ashford District Council

Ashford in Kent is an example of a district council which has had to rise to the challenge of thinking long-term. Ashford will add 31,000 homes and 29,000 jobs by 2031. This poses significant challenges for both the council and its community. Ashford have worked hard and imaginatively to create a new vision for the 'Great Town within the Great Garden'. The council, along with the local strategic partnership, has adopted a ten-year Community Strategy. It used imaginative planning tools such as masterplanning and design workshops for community and all other stakeholders, alongside good quality analysis of its housing markets to make this real. The outcome is the creation of compact urban models that sustain the transport network and provide a high level of mixed-use development, catering for all needs in balanced urban communities. These are models developed with and endorsed by the community of Ashford.

Schemes now being built out include a healthy mix of housing and jobs, with affordable housing pepper potted throughout and local centres with social and commercial facilities scaled to meet future needs. Sustainability principles have also been incorporated. For example all new homes have to consume 30 per cent less water than the current averages and there will be no loss of water quality in the River Stour despite a planned doubling in the size of the town.

Across the other side of London, Basingstoke and Deane District Council is a growth point. It was awarded Beacon status for affordable housing in 2006 and its success is described in example b. Its housing, planning and regeneration services are all in the same directorate and the leadership has insisted on joint working. The council has recently achieved Beacon status for creating sustainable communities through the planning process.

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example b

an integrated management structure for Basingstoke and Deane District Council

Basingstoke and Deane District Council was awarded Beacon status in 2006 for affordable housing. They were commended for management structures that have been reorganised for improved delivery of affordable housing in ways that support the creation of sustainable communities and tackle social exclusion. Whilst regeneration and design, housing services, property services, planning services and legal services cover all corporate directorates, the council insists that all of the relevant business units work collectively on housing developments. The housing team is consulted on every residential planning application and also works to ensure housing requirements are fulfilled on the borough's own land releases prior to advertisement.

Basingstoke also has a regeneration design team whose responsibility is to focus upon vision - the vision for the central district, for green areas and for the business district. It is separate and distinct from the housing, property and the planning teams, with a deliberate creative tension with them because it has the time to consider and think. This 'creative tension' has been key in driving up the quality of the place within Basingstoke and is respected by internal and external partners because of its successful record of delivery.

This is not, however the only successful type of model. London Borough of Greenwich is a major player in the Thames Gateway growth area and is also an affordable housing Beacon. Greenwich has a projected 20,000 new homes in the period 2006-2020. The strategic housing team operates as part of a Neighbourhood Services Directorate whilst Planning is in a separate Directorate. But there is effective joint working and, perhaps crucially, in the word of a senior officer 'the council from the Cabinet down has encouraged a cross-departmental and cross-agency approach to delivery'.

In a different policy context, where the major strategic concern is the importance of regeneration, the Tees Valley local authorities have continued¹⁰ to make good progress on developing both their housing market renewal proposals and a complimentary sub-regional housing strategy. Alignment of housing and planning roles has been assisted by co-location within the individual local authorities, by cross-membership on the Tees Valley Living Executive (the housing market renewal partnership) and by the sub-regional co-ordination provided by the Tees Valley Joint Services Unit. The role of the latter has been especially important in aligning the sub-regional element of the Regional Spatial Strategy with the sub-regional Housing Strategy and individual Local Authority plans.

In an area with a similar regeneration focus, an appreciation of the critical relationship between housing, planning and the economy has been very influential in Merseyside. Chief Officers and Leaders work together as a sub-regional group to promote the economic interests of Merseyside. The importance of the quality of the 'housing offer' to the sub-region's ambitions for driving economic growth is recognised in the Liverpool City Region Development Plan. This document required a high degree of collaboration in its writing and drew upon well established sub-regional groupings such as the Merseyside Housing and Planning Officers Group. A sub-regional housing strategy is currently under preparation as a component of the development plan and uses economic and spatial analysis that was jointly commissioned by all of the authorities in Merseyside.

¹⁰ Tees Valley Living featured as a case study in 'Intelligent Approaches to Housing'. August 2004. LGA, CIH and RTPI.

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The practical implications and further evidence about good practice in strategy development and joint work between housing and planning for achieving 'balanced housing markets' will be explored further in the next topic guide on balanced housing provision (due out in the autumn). This will, amongst other things, consider further the key questions for local authorities on:

- what are the best ways of achieving integrated working by planning, strategic housing and related disciplines? Is it by integrating these functions, or can it work equally well through properly coordinated working arrangements?
- do the preferred solutions vary between different types of authority (unitary/two tier, large/small) or for different policy environments (e.g. growth v. regeneration)?
- what are the best tools for establishing successful strategies for balanced housing provision?

6. regional, sub-regional and local levels of strategic housing engagement

The IDeA is committed to profiling examples of effective cross-authority working, to improve places. Our Planning Advisory Service and Strategic Housing team would like to hear from you if you feel that your authority has developed innovative approaches.

email strategic.housing@idea.gov.uk.

There is currently an evolving agenda about the respective housing strategy roles to be played at local authority, sub-regional and regional levels. Regional Housing Boards were created in 2003, but in 2006 responsibility for their work passed to the Regional Assemblies (and in London to the Mayor). The regional planning role also sits with the Assemblies and the Mayor. Each has inherited a regional housing strategy from the former Boards.

The English Core Cities¹¹ are now making development strategies at the 'city region level'. The emergence of growth areas and the Housing Market Pathfinders has also contributed to sub-regional housing strategies being prepared. This has been further promoted by the guidance from Government about strategic housing market assessment, which stresses the importance of working across local authority boundaries and aligning housing strategies with sub-regional market areas.

¹¹ The Core Cities group are the larger provincial Cities, viz Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Liverpool, Bristol, Nottingham and Sheffield.

¹² Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing. CLG, Nov 2006.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1504591> - 14k - 21 November 2006

All local housing authorities are expected to have a 'Fit for Purpose Housing Strategy'. Given the policy priorities of this period, many of the fit for purpose housing strategies written over the past five years have had an emphasis on decent homes, stock transfer and ALMO's. Not all fully explored the wider strategic housing considerations - particularly as now envisaged by the Local Government White Paper. It is also apparent that some local authorities have been struggling with the production of compliant and timely Local Development Frameworks and a new White Paper on the planning system is expected by the time this paper is published. There is therefore a mixed picture across the country - with widely varying quality and content in the housing strategies at all three levels of analysis: local, sub regional and regional.

At the same time the benefits of working strategically across a number of authorities is recognised. The desirability of understanding how housing markets operate across local authority boundaries was a feature of the Barker Review and is reflected in the PPS3 guidance¹² that there should be Strategic Housing Market Assessments.

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There are also practical considerations. District councils in particular, may have only one individual or a small team who are devoted to the strategic housing role. Examples are now emerging where authorities are pooling their resources to strengthen professional skills and expertise, improving the quality of a strategic analysis and delivery they are capable of making.

The Regional Assemblies, together with the Government Offices for the regions are working to establish the most effective outcomes from this situation. Sub-regional working is here to stay and in some cases the sub-region is the appropriate level at which housing strategies should be produced. The East of England is an example of where the application of this approach is showing promising results. The local authorities in the East of England established sub-regional working arrangements over the past few years. The progress achieved in this region is described in example c.

example c

sub-regional working in the East of England

The East of England has forty-eight district councils, four unitary councils and six county councils. It has no big metropolitan area. There has been an element of sub-regional working taking place for several years following the first East of England regional housing statement. However, following the setup of the Regional Housing Board this tendency has become stronger. Several funding recommendations of the Regional Housing Board have been made to the sub-regional level. This has also proven to be an opportunity to consider the capacity issues that many of the district councils face.

Encouraged by the East of England Housing Board virtually all of the nine sub-regions of the East of England have now appointed staff to act as coordinators and be a resource. These partnerships are beginning to mature and a natural progression is taking place, from that of the initial analytical and strategy-making phase, into one that is now considering the practical issues of delivery.

In a similar move, the Government Office for the North West in conjunction with its Regional Housing Board has encouraged the local authorities in Cumbria to collaborate together, appoint staff and write a sub regional housing strategy. This has now been approved as 'fit for purpose', and is the first such strategy in the country to be accredited at the sub-regional level

In the South West of England it was economic drivers that were the initial catalyst for sub-regional working as shown in example d of the Plymouth sub-Region.

example d

the Plymouth housing sub-region

A step change has occurred in Plymouth and its surrounding sub-region. This has taken place following responses made to the Machie Report on the economic prospects for Plymouth. The city council began working with the local authorities that share its housing market and travel to work areas. In this case the partnership consists of four local authorities, Dartmoor National Park Authority, three developers, two housing associations and the Housing Corporation. There is agreement that all the partners should contribute financially to the partnership.

The partnership has successfully commissioned and received a housing market assessment and plans to develop a high level sub-regional housing strategy in conjunction with more detailed individual area based housing strategies. It has agreed that it will continue to meet four times each year to promote the interests of the sub-region and to help deliver against investment targets.

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Clearly central Government believes that sub-regional working is the way forward for the development of housing strategies in sub-regions based around housing markets. This is true not only for sub-regions comprising all or mainly smaller district councils, but also for more urban and metropolitan areas where the councils may have greater capacity to deliver an effective strategic housing role.

We have seen, for example, a high level of cooperation between councils in areas where there are Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders. We have referred in the previous section to Merseyside and the Tees Valley area, but there are further examples in South Yorkshire where the four councils are all part of the Transform HMR partnership and work together with RSL partners as SYHARP (Housing and Regeneration Partnership). This grouping has prepared a sub-regional housing strategy and an investment programme, which formed the basis of a bid for resources from the Regional Housing Board and provided the context for the HMR Pathfinder Scheme Update 2006/08.

In London, sub-regional working has been firmly established comprising the councils and other partners in five geographical sectors of Greater London. Each sub-region has its own housing strategy and this is the basis for delivery of affordable housing through the Housing Corporation, and for investment in the private housing sector through the London Housing Board. It is expected that these sub-

regional partnerships will continue to play a key role in the delivery of the forthcoming statutory Greater London Housing Strategy. This will be the only statutory regional strategy.

The South East London Housing Partnership is taken as an example, described in example e.

example e

sub-regional working in South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP)

This partnership comprises the boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark and includes the Housing Corporation, 'London Councils' (formerly called The Association of London Government) and housing association partners. It is one of five sub-regional partnerships in London. By sub-regional working, SELHP believes it can offer:

- effective working by sharing and pooling information and good practice
- increased mobility and choice to customers
- a coordinated link to the London Housing Strategy and the Housing Forum for London.

A South East London Housing Partnership operates at member and officer levels. A coordinator has been in post since April 2004. The partnership has established eight work groups and can point to a series of achievements including developing an integrated approach to investment in private sector homes to meet the decent homes standard, joint working on homelessness prevention and a guide to development standards for RSLs and developers.

It is notable that the Partnership continues to be successful in spite of political changes in the boroughs in 2006 because the members think it works, and they see it as adding value in tackling common issues. The enthusiasm for the sub-regional approach amongst the officers, to whom we spoke in researching this issue, was clear.

See more at <http://www.selondonhousing.org/>

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We can also expect that cross-authority and sub-regional working will be encouraged by the new Communities England. Both The Housing Corporation and English Partnerships (the two bodies which will form Communities England) support sub-regional approaches for the delivery of investment programmes and for planning strategic interventions at a scale where strong links can be made with economic development and infrastructure planning. The work of both in relation to examples such as the County Durham Coalfields initiative, or the Meden Valley partnership in the East Midlands signals the approach which seems likely to be favoured.

Working across local authority boundaries, and as part of wider partnerships, is increasingly becoming a normal part of the approach to the strategic housing role. But what are the appropriate matters to be settled regionally, locally and in cross local authority partnerships? Are the partnerships about research, shared resources and efficient delivery or how far are they also about policy-making? If so, what are the implications for the local authority role and responsibilities? Should this vary between different types or sizes of authority? There are further practical questions which the partners will need to address:

- what are appropriate governance structures, given that policy decisions will have to be taken in the sub-regional partnerships, for subsequent ratification by each local authority?
- how closely should the sub-regional areas match strategic housing markets?
- to what extent are dedicated resources necessary for such partnerships?

These issues will be explored further during subsequent topic papers as we aim to identify relevant good practice which will best deliver your objectives for sustainable communities and quality housing for all.

7. integrating housing strategy into sustainable community strategies and local area agreements

Housing strategies can no longer stand on their own. In reality, they have always been referenced to, and take account of, other strategies. But the government's intention is that:

'local authorities' Housing and Homelessness strategies should be incorporated within the unitary or district Sustainable Community Strategy, wherever possible.'¹³

But it is less obvious how this integration will best be achieved. The role of housing strategy within the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is not specifically defined in the Local Government White Paper. This is probably right, as the nature of housing problems varies across the country and national targets would be inappropriate. Housing strategy is also cross-cutting: housing programmes impact on all the four themes around which Local Area Agreements¹⁴ (LAAs) will be negotiated. LAAs will be the delivery plan for the SCS.

¹³ Strong & Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper. CLG Oct 2006 para 5.64

¹⁴ The 4 themes are children and young people, safer and stronger communities, healthier communities and older people, economic development and enterprise. For further information on LAAs see the IDeA Knowledge web-site <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=1174195>

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The Government clearly expects that Sustainable Community Strategies will articulate how the local authority and its partners will tackle housing issues. Local authorities will continue to prepare housing strategies as part of their SCSs, and that partnership working on these will be considerably strengthened. The White Paper proposes a new duty to co-operate for key local players to work in partnership to agree joint targets through the LAA to enhance local authorities' leadership role, furthering their ability to set a strong, coherent vision and to bring partners together behind that vision in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The primary link being introduced in the revised framework for LAAs is that housing will be part of the economic development and the environment theme. At the same time, housing strategies can contribute to the delivery of all themes in the proposed framework. The briefing paper prepared by the Chartered Institute of Housing on 'Delivering Housing Strategy through Local Area Agreements'¹⁵ showed the range of approaches being taken. It found that housing was included as an essential element for place shaping and achieving other social outcomes in 95 per cent of the LAAs reviewed. In addition to the mandatory outcome about achieving decent homes in the target areas for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, local targets had most frequently been developed for:

- better quality housing and improved access for older people
- reducing homelessness generally and specifically for young people
- increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Many authorities have invested much effort into developing a SCS, through the Local Strategic Partnership, and to developing a delivery plan in the form of an LAA. LAAs are set to become even more important. The Local Government White Paper promises that from 2008, LAAs will be the only place where central government will agree targets with local authorities and their partners on outcomes delivered by local government on its own or in partnership with others. Up to 35 core targets will be drawn from a national indicator set of around 200 that will emerge from the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2007 (CSR07). LAAs will give local areas greater scope and flexibility in target setting. Agreements may also include locally agreed targets drawn from Sustainable Community Strategies.

¹⁵ CIH and IDeA. Feb 2007

The White Paper envisages the following conditions for effective partnership working on the SCS and the LAA:

- the local authority must prepare a draft of the local area agreement, but partners and stakeholders must agree to cooperate with each other to establish targets
- the sustainable communities strategy must have regard for other local and regional strategies
- the local authority and its partners offers streamlined processes for engaging the community in decision-making
- there must be better management processes to integrate the writing of the strategy and local area agreement.

From the perspective of those involved in housing, this work through the Local Strategic Partnership on the SCS and LAA must now be seen as vital to the strategic housing role because:

- the local strategic partnership has now become the ‘partnership of partnerships’ and has a central role in local governance
- meaningful local authority leadership in all aspects of the local strategic partnership is vital to its effectiveness, because the local authority holds the democratic mandate
- housing and its implications for spatial policy need to be embedded in aspects of the SCS to be a priority for delivery
- it is a primary route to achieve community endorsement for housing and planning policies that can be locally controversial
- it will contribute to the understanding by officers and members to the key social, economic and environmental and community cohesion issues that go into good housing plans and are manifested in effective planning policy
- LAAs will be vital to an understanding of the inter-dependencies of poverty and social exclusion in an area.

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The White Paper also recognises that

‘there are a number of outcomes which may be best delivered through collaboration at a sub-regional level. In particular, many of the interventions needed to deliver sustainable economic development rely on action at a broader geographic scale than a single local authority’.

Multi Area Agreements provide the scope for further progress on issues at a sub- regional level. This could be economic development in its very widest sense.

At this stage in developing an enhanced SCS, a key question is how the integration of housing strategy can be best achieved? How far does this require different approaches to developing housing strategies than those used to date?

Some of the recent experience suggests that a thematic partnership focused on housing can play an important and constructive role in helping develop the SCS and shaping the delivery plan through the LAAs. A key issue is to ensure that housing makes the right links with other services, rather than adopting a ‘silo’ approach. The positive experience of London Borough of Croydon is summarised in example f. It has a strong partnership ethos supported by strong performance management. The council’s endeavours have been awarded Beacon status for community involvement with residents and tenants.

example f

housing and community involvement London Borough of Croydon

The Local Strategic Partnership now provides the structure for much of what the council and its partner housing associations and developers do in relation to both planning and delivery of good quality housing outcomes. Housing is a thematic priority within the sustainable community strategy.

The Local Strategic Partnership provides the infrastructure for a whole range of engagement in relation to housing issues. For example tenant and leaseholder panels, community housing panels, the housing sounding boards (with more than 1000 active participants), and engagement with a whole range of specialist groups such as the disabled and BME groups. There is a range of imaginative techniques for engaging with residents and tenants that can be viewed on the IDeA Beacon websites.

**[http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/
page.do?pageId=5615406](http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5615406)**

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example g

integrating housing and the Local Development Framework within the Community Plan Hambleton District Council

Hambleton District Council is a rural authority that understands the influence, impact and contribution a robust local planning policy can have on the delivery of an adequate supply of affordable housing. A strong corporate philosophy recognises the potential of the planning system to deliver community and corporate priorities, including those for housing and regeneration. Therefore the council has chosen to embark on a rapid timetable for the production of its Local Development Framework (LDF). It is one of the first authorities to reach the stage of public examination of its core strategy.

The LDF and the Hambleton Community Plan are inextricably linked – which is one of the most important features of the Hambleton approach. Both depend upon each other for their delivery. Hambleton is taking steps towards ensuring the sustainability of its communities through an integrated process of creating the LDF within the Hambleton Community Plan.

Organisationally coordinated, both plans are being developed from the same unit. There is a corporate consultation strategy that provides coherence to this process. Its methodology and standards were used for example to guide the Hambleton housing strategy challenge events in 2005. Consultation is integrated rather than duplicated. The development of the LSP into a strong and mature structure of main board, strategic theme and area groups has strongly influenced this process. It is able to achieve a full dialogue at district and community level through the networks, which have been built over recent years. Integrating sustainability principles has been a main strand in both areas. This has led to a positive approach to development. Examples are in the process of being developed in affordable housing schemes throughout the district and of regeneration initiatives in the market towns of the district.

The current policy and guidance framework for the local authority strategic housing role can be found on the CLG website www.communities.gov.uk. The White Paper sets a new context where housing becomes an integral part of the vision and strategic plan for the area, and is therefore linked to local authority functions more broadly.

Although new guidance is likely to emerge from Government on this broader strategic housing role, some authorities are already developing the techniques and expertise which will serve them well for the future.

It is therefore well worth all authorities considering some key questions:

- how well does the Sustainable Community Strategy articulate the vision for places as well as people and themes? Is there a sense of place in the SCS?
- how well does housing need, condition and market analysis help to articulate this sense of place?
- does the local authority as a whole, its key partners and the community understand the relationship between housing and other outcomes in the community – for instance how a healthy housing market supports the economy?
- how can the Local Area Agreement be used to deliver housing outcomes, and how can housing contribute to outcomes for people and communities?

8. involving residents and communities in planning and delivering the local authority strategic role

Top performing Councils systematically recognise the value of resident and tenants' feedback and seek to empower them to work alongside the council in shaping services and delivering customer focused outcomes. Top performers usually have staff employed on the consultation and involvement of residents and tenants. Residents become key partners in monitoring the quality of the outcomes for the areas in which they live.

Common features of successful organisations that are customer focused include:

- better strategic engagement and a willingness to understand the customer perspective
- improved customer service standards
- customer service charters that are monitored with input from service users
- customer information available in a variety of accessible formats
- a higher profile given to equality and diversity issues and the engagement of hard-to-reach groups.

There is useful discussion in the 2006 CLG publication 'Formative evaluation of community strategies' about the value of good quality community engagement. The evaluation shows that the level and types of engagement with local citizens have become very important. The report shows that 84.7% of respondents, to a survey of local authorities, reported that community consultations inform their sustainable community strategies to a significant extent. A commitment to communicate evidence to different groups of stakeholders was also important. It is now commonplace for local strategic partnerships to use consultation techniques to test out and confirm whether priorities are correct and to identify the best way to prioritise and implement their strategy.

Quality community engagement is critical. It can fulfill a number of roles. Some authorities, such as London Borough of Croydon in example h, explicitly acknowledge this contribution in their published partnership documents and thank the community for its many roles and the contribution it makes to a better community life in the borough.

example h

London Borough of Croydon

In the borough of Croydon the local voluntary and community sector is specifically acknowledged for playing the following important roles:

- **representation** – the voluntary and community sector is embedded into the local strategic partnership
- **consultation** – structures for consultation are already in existence and make mature judgments
- **delivery** – the voluntary sector is a major deliverer of services within Croydon
- **scrutiny** – being closer to the public service agencies means that they act differently as agencies
- **audience** – there are always volunteers to help implement the community strategy

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In example i you will see that in Woking the outcome from a quality consultation process on affordable housing and development achieves a more sophisticated policy

Salford City Council's integrated work on private sector housing is underpinned by a partnership approach to working with private landlords which gives additional weight to its enforcement action in exceptional cases, as can be seen in example j.

example i

seeking creative solutions through community engagement – Woking District Council

Woking District Council has written its affordable housing and planning policies following a very consultative process with its citizens. This included information to all households, a series of workshops, two rounds of questionnaire surveys to the citizens' panel and the wider community. Specific attention was paid to contacting hard to reach groups. These are defined in the council's social inclusion strategy as those within the geographic areas of highest deprivation, residents with low skills and qualifications, children and young people, older people, and residents with long term limiting illness.

Woking's approach has a number of innovative components:

- developing a vision of the future through workshop sessions focusing upon 'what should the future be like', rather than 'how do we change or protect the present'?
- validating decisions and understanding the key issues for local people, through statistically representative questionnaire surveys
- developing a range of options setting out alternative ways of delivering the vision based upon different levels of future development. Getting public feedback on these through workshops and statistically representative questionnaires

The outcomes from this process show that contrary to expectations, people in a prosperous place like Woking do not wish to see the lowest possible levels of development in their area. Issues such as affordable housing, access to good quality facilities and climate change are of greater importance. They do have concerns about the transport system, social and community infrastructure, the greenbelt and the quality of new development. The emphasis though is on finding creative solutions. Achieving this level of understanding and engagement takes real effort but brings with it real rewards in terms of trust and community confidence.

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example j

Private Sector Housing working with landlords to improve the local market

Salford City Council

Private Sector Housing is a key component of Salford's Housing Strategy. In seeking to improve the local market, raise standards and encourage greater community involvement the Housing Market Support Team was developed in 2004. This brought together key teams dealing with Landlord Accreditation, HMOs, Housing Standards, Empty Properties, and a Burglary Reduction Initiative.

Salford is the first authority to make an area a Selective Licensing Designation. This is in an existing renewal area which had experienced both low demand and the problem of anti-social behaviour linked to the private rented sector. The implementation of selective licensing will be linked to the proactive inspection (using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System) of all privately rented properties in the designation.

Salford has a strategy for the delivery of selective licensing over a number of phases, the first of which covers approximately 522 privately let properties. Subsequent phases are to be introduced covering the remaining areas of the Manchester & Salford Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder.

A detailed consultation programme included the establishment of a Landlord Licensing Working Group in 2004 which consists of a small focus group of private landlords and council officers. This group meets regularly and has provided a mechanism for private landlords to have a real input into the development of the licensing policies and procedures.

The Landlord Licensing Team in Salford have developed close links with the RESPECT task force and are involved in the development of a Housing Management Standard for the private rented sector. By raising standards of housing management (and in particular, improving private landlords' expertise in handling complaints of anti-social behaviour) this will improve perception of the area and create more sustainable communities. The Licensing Team has a dedicated ASB officer who is funded through the licence fee to provide support and advice to landlords in dealing with their tenants' anti-social behaviour.

In the rather different context of substantial and radical change in particular communities, the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders have been developing extensive and innovative community consultation. Working with the strategic housing authorities, they have needed to demonstrate that, where there are proposals for redevelopment, that there is informed community support.

The Audit Commission annual review 2005/06¹⁶ of Pathfinder progress highlights two examples as case studies. These are, firstly, Elevate East Lancashire, where no project is approved until the pathfinder is satisfied that local people are being involved appropriately. A number of innovative approaches to consultation have been used including getting local school children to design their perfect place, holding young people's conferences to discuss the future of their areas and inviting residents to contribute to masterplanning.

In Gateway Hull and East Riding there have been extensive community consultations on plans for the next four years and extensive coverage of the proposals in the local media. The consultation showed that nearly 80 per cent of people agreed with demolition plans.

¹⁶ <http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONALREPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=D9720DA3-ED2C-4190-BF55-7D1816AFE780&fromREPORTSANDDATA=NATIONAL-REPORT>

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We cannot expect that resident and community engagement in housing strategy will normally be easy. The issues are usually complex or controversial, or both, but it is critical to the planning and delivery of a strategic housing role for LAs which in turn is at the heart of the place shaping agenda. Changes affecting peoples' homes are often the most sensitive and high-profile elements of regeneration and development plans, therefore putting the housing role in the centre of the debate. In a healthy democratic society this requires community consent and therefore planning for effective community involvement is an essential part of the strategic housing role, working in partnership with others.

The implications of this for the design and delivery of the strategic housing role will be explored in the further work during 2007. In the meantime learning can be found in the practice offered by the Beacon authorities for 'Improving Housing Services through involving tenants'. These show that good quality, effective tenant involvement is integral to improving housing services. The four Beacons, Bolton, Carrick, Croydon and Kirklees have proven this and using the information available found at <http://beacons.idea.gov.uk/> you will be able to tap into their wealth of expertise.

9. building capacity and leadership for housing strategy within and beyond local authorities

It is a common problem for local authorities, as they drive to achieve the decent homes standard for social housing, that this presents major political and operational resourcing issues. This can deflect authorities from their wider strategic housing responsibilities. In practice, this often means many of the best staff and most significant resources being devoted to stock options and transfer activity and subsequently being allocated to work for the newly created landlord organisation.

An analysis of this phenomenon was undertaken in the report 'Improvement Drivers in Local Authority Housing'¹⁷. This identified several crucial factors that must be present if there is to be improvement in housing strategy teams. These factors remain central to an effective strategic role and include:

- the crucial importance of good governance and member commitment
- changes to management practice – being prepared to do things differently
- improved performance management
- enhanced tenant and resident participation in service delivery
- better procurement methods
- additional human resources.

The Report shows that where services have improved, members have shown leadership. This has led to a renewed commitment to providing good quality housing services and increased understanding of the importance of this service. Housing moves up the political agenda as a result. Active scrutiny committees and a good understanding between members and staff are also invaluable. Without good member level involvement it was found to be very difficult to put the things that drive improvement into place.

Good governance also means good role definition. Members and officers need to consider how to integrate, through the Cabinet and Committee structure, the complex melange of 'place making' activities - including housing, planning, regeneration and social inclusion.

It is commonplace to find that councils have reorganised their housing services as part of their drive to improve performance. Bringing more functions into a larger and more co-ordinated management framework can often ensure better service delivery. Rethinking the role in relation to Local Strategic Partnership thematic or housing partnerships can help the drive to change, and relates to the issues in the previous section.

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The commitment and energy of frontline staff is an essential ingredient of a successful housing service. This requires that effective support is available for staff – which can include recruiting new staff, filling vacancies in good time and providing good training to support people to carry out their duties. This can produce a virtuous circle, with improved morale leading to the delivery of improved performance,

An effective performance management framework is also an essential ingredient for success. The best performers can be found to have comprehensive systems in place that cover:

- action plans
- milestones
- traffic light information systems
- improved performance indicators (PIs)
- named officers with patch responsibilities.

It is members and the Chief Executive who must ultimately lead the council's performance management system, supported by sound and comprehensive information systems. There are also tools that a number of local authorities have found very useful when making improvements to their services. These include:

- informal peer review undertaken between authorities
- benchmarking with a group of other authorities
- challenge days to share learning by inquiry and analysis.

Service improvements are hard to achieve against a background of traditional working methods. A common issue is the need for better procurement methods. For example, a thorough procurement exercise that looks carefully at the options and the market for services such as homelessness and advice is likely to drive improvement, whatever the outcome (for example providing the service in-house or outsourcing the services). The process of providing competitive scrutiny will usually lead to improved contractual arrangements and often to the developing of partnering arrangements that can bring mutual benefits to authority and partner alike.

Often, the improvements that are necessary to improve housing strategy and enabling services cannot be achieved without extra resources, both in the short and long term. Sometimes this is a direct input from the general fund but others have found imaginative ways of creating income from capital programmes or sharing costs as part of partnership structures. This might also, for example, be achieved by looking at savings in management time and technical co-ordination through working in teams with other disciplines, such as social inclusion or planners.

In the third example, that of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, a review of the housing function at the point of stock transfer and a strong performance management culture led to significant organisational and performance improvements.

Wychavon District Council is an example of an authority that was very aware of the type of factors detailed in the report discussed above and made a planned response. The council is one of very few in England that is rated as 'excellent' for its housing strategy and 'excellent' in relation to its capacity to continue to improve. How did they do this? Example k provides some insights, which reflect most of the principles outlined above.

In South Shropshire District Council similar levels of high performance and effectiveness in terms of creating new affordable housing have been achieved. This can be attributed particularly to the drive and initiative of the leader of the council. Example l highlights South Shropshire's experience.

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example k

achieving excellence in housing strategy **Wychavon District Council**

The council has, for several years, had a culture of challenging areas of weaker performance and being open to external challenge and scrutiny. For example, the prompt manner it addressed the weaknesses identified in the 'balancing housing markets' diagnostic section in its Audit Report of March 2004, which criticised the strategic approach to housing. The council responded by ensuring that the housing strategy achieved a 'Fit for Purpose' status from the Government Office and also addressed concerns about the quality of plans, partnership working and monitoring arrangements. Close attention was paid by the council officers and members alike to delivering against action plans and ensuring that service improvements actually took place.

The pace of change and improvement to the housing service was rapid and sustained. The council increased financial and non-financial resources available to housing. It increased the profile of the service among staff, members and stakeholders through the use of internal and external briefings, joint training and feedback sessions. The council emphasised the importance of partnership working by

carrying out sessions for staff at the two LSVT RSLs operating in the district, and involved all external partners at an early stage of the housing strategy development. External partners are now very positive about the openness of the council and the willingness of officers to engage with them.

There was a new focus on people management. Improvements were driven in part by strengthening the management capacity in the housing strategy section, adding new posts in critical areas, for example an Empty Homes Officer and a Property Standards Officer. There was restructuring to provide a more person-centred approach and a policy of recruiting for attitude followed by the right training. There was also a focus on learning from others.

Use of best value principles made the council develop service improvement plans and challenge existing services. This work has, for example, led to changes in the procurement of DFG work, a greater emphasis on externally influencing the regional housing strategy and a greater priority given to the importance of homeless prevention work.

The council has a sound five-year strategy 'Wychavon's Way Ahead' that sets out its priorities. This includes continued and sustained commitment to providing an 'excellent housing service'. Wychavon received the coveted 'Excellent and Excellent' Performance Assessment in April 2005 and is LGC's Council of the Year 2007.

example l

tackling the affordability problem South Shropshire District Council

In South Shropshire District Council, high performance and effectiveness have been achieved at least in part due to the drive and initiative of the leader of the council. A housing needs study showed that average house prices in Shropshire were 10 times the local average wage. Homes were not affordable to the average working family in the county. The leader challenged officers to do what they could within the envelope of the law to redress this affordable housing crisis.

Improved coordination between the planning and housing functions has taken place. New thinking on affordable housing was conducted – in part with the assistance of the Rural Housing Commission. A new housing strategy was written. South Shropshire has now achieved great clarity in its affordable housing policies and planning policies. Officers and members alike are entirely clear about what they need to do to create affordable homes. South Shropshire is being very successful in obtaining social housing grant in partnership with its local housing associations and has a good reputation at the sub regional and regional levels. It is making a significant impact for its citizens.

example m

reshaping the strategy role after LSVT Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

In 2002 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council was judged by the Government Office North West to have a housing strategy that was well below average. This occurred at the same time as the council housing stock was transferred to a housing trust. Knowsley questioned itself and considered how to respond to the factors discussed above. There was strong cabinet member and senior officer commitment to see improvement take place in an area that faces major challenges of regeneration, neighbourhood quality and economic development.

The staffing of the housing strategy team following stock transfer was increased and its capacity improved, without adding cost to the councils General Fund account expenditure. A lot of care was taken in the process of recruiting a number of new managers and specialists. New methods were found to involve residents in service delivery. A new Housing Partnership was formed within the structure of the Local Strategic Partnership. All of this was bound together by a strong performance management culture driven from the Chief Executive's office, shared by the Director of Development and Regeneration. Knowsley is

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now respected regionally and has a fit for purpose housing strategy, and achieved a 'Good ' inspection of its homelessness services with 'promising prospects for improvement.'

These examples underline the importance of leadership to ensure the strategic housing role is focussing especially on the priority issues for local communities, and that the available resources are being well deployed. Successful approaches will include a wider housing partnership and integrate with the Sustainable Community Strategy

10. what skills does your council need in order to perform its strategic housing role well?

As part of the IDeA's programme of work to enhance local authorities' ability to be 'place-shapers' through their strategic housing role, the CIH and IpsosMORI are conducting work to assess the level of understanding of the new role and of the skills required to effectively undertake the role. It is expected that the main findings from this work will be published in summer 2007 and will inform the shape of an improvement programme. This will help to provide assistance to local authorities as they adapt to the emerging housing strategy challenges.

The first substantial part of this programme of work is a telephone survey of local strategic housing authorities and the initial results are now available. There was an extremely good response rate to this survey with 209 Local Authorities responding within the period allowed.

Participants were asked about their authority's approach to housing strategy and their organisation's priorities. In listing these priorities almost 70% highlighted the supply of affordable housing in their borough as one of their top three priorities with only approximately 2% listing building mixed communities. There was wide recognition that partnerships are key to the success of housing strategies. Relationships with Housing Associations and other Local Authorities are reported to be working well. There is work to be done in improving relationships with the private sector, Health and Social Services. 36% of participants felt

they could be more successful in their roles with a better understanding of other agendas. In terms of the skills for the job, leadership, influencing and relationship building skills were highly valued. However, in some authorities there was a reliance on other departments or contractors to perform key tasks such as influencing the allocation of resources.

In terms of delivering the role 80% of the authorities have a dedicated team working on housing strategy and the mean size of this team is around 8 posts. However, 82% found it difficult to recruit people with the right skills.

This feedback confirms that the variety of skills and experience in your housing strategy team is a key issue. Some skills are geared to the specialist areas of homelessness, housing market analysis or private sector housing, etc. There will also need to be knowledge of housing development, management, renovation processes and the relevant powers and responsibilities of local authorities. It confirms that there is a set of generic core skills that authorities should also be looking to establish if not already there. Below is a suggested list of the skills that a good housing strategy team should possess, or be able to draw on from others.¹⁸

¹⁸ This list is loosely based on that developed by the CIH in 'Visionary Leadership'

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- ability to build trust with, and support council members
- ability to engage with communities and partners
- commissioning of research and understanding housing markets – intelligence led and evidenced
- good influencing, communication and negotiating skills
- financial understanding sufficient to deliver complex funding agreements, loans and equity release products
- commissioning of consultants and service providers
- skills in establishing and maintaining partnerships and understanding the connections between programme areas
- ability to influence the allocation of resources
- ability to write strategies and action plans.

More specific knowledge and skill will be required in:

- understanding the planning system
- understanding social care and supporting people
- understanding local economic drivers.

This programme of work continues with both IDeA and CIH currently developing further initiatives, including regional improvement partnerships and work through the CIH's regional branches, to promote a better understanding of the nature of the role and of further development of the skills required to undertake the role successfully.

11. helping local authorities to grow emerging good practice

This paper is the first of five topic papers about the strategic housing role to be published by the IDeA during 2007.

Its purpose is to bring to your attention the importance of, and the challenges of achieving, good quality housing strategy as a component of your corporate and community planning. The paper has argued that for a local authority to be an effective 'place maker' it has to have staff and members who understand how to integrate strategies for housing, planning, economic development and regeneration to improve their 'places'. Similarly, for places to be socially inclusive then their strategies must also be integrated into a sustainable community plan for the whole of the local authority area.