

The role of the service

Strategic Housing Services

- Improve and promote the energy efficiency of all housing stock.
- Ensure that the Housing Strategy contributes to the improvement of the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of communities in Wealden.
- Record and assess the district's housing needs and to allocate available housing to those in priority need, whilst seeking to maintain sustainable communities.
- Respond to and prevent homelessness by ensuring that quality, comprehensive advice services are available free of charge on all aspects of housing, with the emphasis on providing housing options and preventing homelessness.
- Promote the repair and improvement of private dwellings in the District, in accordance with standards laid down in housing legislation.
- Address in partnership the issues and needs arising from unauthorised camping with the aim of preserving a balance between the reasonable needs of the travelling community and the protection of the environment and the settled population.
- Contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate agenda, including Equalities and Youth Matters, sustainability and climate change, making Wealden a safer place to live by working closely with Members, officers and partners.

Landlord Services

- Manage the Council's housing stock of 3,133 dwellings to provide a decent standard of accommodation for our tenants.
- Proper and timely maintenance and modernisation of the Council's housing stock within approved financial limits.
- Provide and promote high quality customer responsive estate management services.
- Provide high standard specialised accommodation and related support services to improve the quality of life for vulnerable people.
- Ensure that every tenant has, is aware of, and uses opportunities to be involved in decisions which affect their homes and local environment, to the extent that they choose.

The service is planning to achieve the following outcomes by March 2011:

- Increase the provision of affordable housing
- Develop a landlord accreditation scheme
- Provide a more efficient and a better value for money housing repairs service
- Prevent more households from becoming homeless through initiatives such as mortgage rescue, advice and a deposit guarantee scheme.
- Create more awareness and better understanding of the need for rural affordable housing
- Increase resident participation in decision making
- Increased access to our services for our customers
- Independent assurance of the quality of our services in line with the highest national standards

- Continue to provide a value for money service and provide efficiency savings year on year
- Working as efficiently as possible, meeting agreed key priorities, and cutting 'red tape' wherever possible
- A highly efficient, cohesive service as a consequence of the planned Transformation Programme.

What have we achieved in 2008/09?

Putting People First

Providing Quality Services
Health, Prosperity and Community Safety

- The housing service achieved Charter Mark Status in May 2008.
- We achieved 85% satisfaction rate from our tenants and leaseholders regarding our services as a landlord
- We supported the development of 3 new residents associations
- We supported the development of our new umbrella residents representative group known as Wealden Residents Action Group (WRAG)
- We developed a fast track mortgage rescue scheme in partnership with Communities and Local Government and the other authorities across East Sussex
- We prevented 109 households from becoming homeless
- We improved the information we give to customers with a new range of leaflets, improved web pages and through the introduction of a bi-annual housing applicants newsletter.
- We enabled a discounted private contents insurance for all of our tenants.

Pride Of Place

Sustainability
Place Shaping

- We enabled 64 new affordable homes to be created through new build development or via the Homebuy (shared ownership scheme)
- Our first extra care scheme for older people achieved planning permission and was awarded funding
- We gave over 2,000 customers energy efficiency advice.
- We brought 11 long term empty homes back into use
- In our own housing stock we made 36 homes Decent and prevented 288 properties from becoming non-Decent. In the private sector we assisted in helping 52 properties meet the Decent Home Standard.

Purpose Through Partnership

Improving Performance and Efficiency
Strong Community Leadership

- We raised awareness of the need for affordable housing in rural areas in 5 parish councils as part of the Council's Affordable Housing Parish Roadshow
- We improved the performance of our voids process and decreased the time our council properties were empty (35 days in 2007/8 to 28 days in 2008/9)
- We improved the performance of our affordable housing delivery (13 dwellings in 2007/8 to 54 dwellings in 2008/9)
- We helped residents groups to secure external funding of £145,000 to develop their communities
- In partnership with developers, housing associations, planning, policy and review teams and key Councillors, we held a Housing Delivery Summit to identify blockages and solutions to improve the delivery of housing within Wealden
- We held two housing delivery summits to identify barriers and develop solutions to housing delivery in the district in partnership with developers, RSLs, planners and Members
- We published a new housing strategy, homelessness strategy, private sector housing strategy older persons housing and support strategy and empty homes strategy
- We developed with our partners across East Sussex a county wide Youth Homelessness Strategy
- We saved £15,000 by improving the efficiency of our lettings process
- We saved £250,000 (2004-8) by procuring our services more efficiently through the Corporate Procurement Unit
- In partnership with our stock holding RSLs, we continue to help fund an Anti Social Behaviour Officer who helps to tackle anti social behaviour across the district
- We have established an inter-agency group to tackle worklessness

What we plan to improve

Target for 2010/11	2008/09 Baseline	2009/10 Milestone	2010/11 Milestone
Putting People First Providing Quality Services Health, Prosperity and Community Safety			
Continue to prevent households from becoming homeless	109	130	130
Strengthen resources in the housing options service in light of the credit crunch		Carry out business process review of current service	Implement findings of review
Continue to reduce the use of B& B and temporary accommodation (NI 156)	65 Households in TA 31/03/09	60	55
We will retain Charter Mark Accreditation for Housing Service and further improve our service standards as we work towards Customer Service Excellence.	Award by June 2008	Retained June 2009	Consider further accreditation
Develop a move-on scheme for the Hailsham Foyer to house young adults in partnership with YMCA		Move on scheme in place	4 moves
Investigate development of a foyer for young people in Uckfield or Crowborough		Undertake feasibility study	Identify site
Improve customer access to services – such as through Electronic document management, Tenant access portal and remote working for staff		EDM in place, additional laptops rolled out Tenant access portal goes live	Explore further information requests for tenant access portal
We will publish the results of consultation, provide feedback to those who responded and explain how the results inform future service delivery and decisions.		Improved consultation log in place within the service	Continuously improve consultation techniques
Continue the training programme to raise awareness of the Safeguarding Children Policy and duties under Section 11 of the Children's Act	20 staff trained	30 Staff trained	28 Staff trained
Pride Of Place Sustainability Place Shaping			
Construct the District's first extra care scheme for older people	Possession of the site	Start on site	Completion & opening of scheme
Develop information specific to wards and parishes through a regular article in the Parish e-bulletin which is being developed by Democratic services.	At least 2 articles per annum	At least 2 articles per annum	At least 2 articles per annum
Increase affordable housing delivery (NI155)	54	75	85
Increase partnership working with private sector landlords through a range of new incentives		Implement new Letstart initiative New accreditation scheme goes live	Establish baseline data of number of customers directed into private sector
Continue to deliver improvements in the energy efficiency of homes in the district		Deliver 580 energy efficiency measures	Deliver 580 energy efficiency measures

Target for 2010/11	2008/09 Baseline	2009/10 Milestone	2010/11 Milestone
		through the East Sussex Energy Partnership	through the East Sussex Energy Partnership
Improve private sector housing conditions		60 homes made decent	75 homes made decent
Develop a new affordable housing policy within the LDF		Draft policy prepared	
Evaluate new build powers that Councils may be granted by the Government		Undertake feasibility study	Implement findings of feasibility study
Implement the outcomes of the Temporary accommodation review and decommission Rochester House		Cabinet report	Implement Cabinet Decision
Implement a revised Tenants Incentive Scheme to encourage more Council tenants to release properties they are under-occupying		Cabinet report June 2009 15 homes released	20 homes released
Identify additional sites for rural affordable housing	8	10	15
Purpose Through Partnership Improving Performance and Efficiency Strong Community Leadership			
Deliver stronger partnership working with tenants through a range of Compacts and develop the community & environmental budget	Draft compacts developed	Compacts published & monitored	Compacts monitored
Improve leaseholder involvement and review charging for services	Review existing practices Develop new procedures	Implement new charging regime Establish leaseholder consultative group	Monitor feedback from leaseholders on new arrangements
Implement the actions agreed from the repairs review to deliver cashable savings	Undertake repairs review	Restructure the service Publish OJEU notice Award new contracts	Report on new contracts savings through annual corporate procurement strategy
Deliver increased provision of pitches for gypsies and travellers	Appoint consultant	Identify potential sites	Bid for new site
Work with colleagues in the East Sussex chief Housing Officers Group to review housing partnership working across Sussex and implement improved structures	Undertake review	Implement new structure	Review efficiency of structure and outcomes of groups
Deliver 3% cashable efficiency savings year-on-year	3%	3%	3%
Deliver the improvements outlined in the Housing Services Action Plan.	Monitor on quarterly basis	Publish annual outcomes in an achievements record	Publish annual outcomes in an achievements record
Deliver the actions set out in the Climate Change action plan alongside the Home Energy Conservation Act and the Affordable Warmth Strategy	Combined within the housing services action plan	Outcomes monitored and achieved	Outcomes monitored and achieved
Implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection of Strategic Housing Services	Inspection undertaken	Consider recommendations and incorporate suggested improvements in the Housing	Monitor improvements made

Target for 2010/11	2008/09 Baseline	2009/10 Milestone	2010/11 Milestone
		Services Action Plan	

Risk

Staffing – Staff turnover within the housing service is traditionally quite low. However, uncertainty caused by the Transformation programme could result in a rise in staff leaving. This could mean that work is not completed on time and it could mean that less experienced and knowledgeable staff will be recruited and will take time to build up their knowledge.

Budget – The expectation is that all services should produce 3% cashable savings. Due to the recession and the Council's increased emphasis on housing delivery, these two areas may require growth and will be unable to deliver cashable savings

Recession – The recession has already resulted in an increased demand for some of our services, such as homelessness and rent arrears advice. This increased workload will result in extra pressure for staff and may require additional staff resources. If resources are not forthcoming, we may be unable to respond to service requests within dedicated timescales.

Other Considerations

Customer Satisfaction

The Housing Service already achieves high levels of satisfaction. Housing customers are surveyed on completion of a number of transactions such as after they receive a repair, a visit from an environmental health officer or as a result of using the choice based lettings service.

Information about customer satisfaction needs to be collated across the whole service in order that learning can be shared and dips in performance be improved.

Customer Involvement

Wealden as a landlord has a good track record of involving customers in service development. This trend will be further strengthened with the publication of the generic Compact, the Sheltered Housing Compact and the estate based Compact. These agreements between residents and the housing service will be monitored at a formal quarterly liaison meeting.

Strategic housing particularly housing options and homelessness will be enhancing its approach to involving customers in developing services in 2008/9 through the use of the private sector landlords forum, a focus group of housing options clients and through regular surveys.

We will continue to demonstrate that the Council listens to public opinion through feedback to groups and individuals and by publicising how we have listened and what we have changed as a consequence.

Access to Services

Housing services is a front line customer facing service. It has undertaken a 100% customer profiling survey within it's council owned stock. Results of this survey have enabled us to find out what barriers there may be to our customers accessing services and working with customers to remove those barriers. A similar exercise has been incorporated into the new Housing Register application form and a private sector housing survey to ensure we are gaining detailed profile information about our customers across the whole service.

Alongside this customer profiling work, we have held focus groups with specific customer groups to identify barriers to access and we have focussed on improvements to ensure better access to services.

Value for Money

Through the Transformation Programme we will review all services to determine how we could improve the value for money over the next three years. The following options will be explored:

- Service cessation (where the service is discretionary)
- Reduce the service
- Improve the service by doing it differently
- Shared service with partner / other local authority
- Service provided by others

Workforce Priorities

The following key workforce areas will be investigated as part of the Service Transformation programme during 2009/10.

- Identify additional resources within the organisation to manage the increased workload (as a consequence of the recession) in the housing options team
- We will use any opportunities to develop staff within the team and encourage them to assume new responsibilities and skills.
- In the event of any vacancy we will seek to extend the available resource in preference to the engagement of agency staff.
- We will review the structure and roles within the repairs and asset management service early in 2009/10 in order to deliver an improved and streamlined housing repairs and major works service for 2010/11.

Learning & Development

The service is committed to continuing professional development for all staff and the pursuit of relevant qualifications by individuals, subject to available resources. We are currently supporting three members of staff to study for the Chartered Institute of Housing qualification which has ongoing benefits for the organisation. In the short term, the research and learning undertaken by the individuals contribute significantly to keeping up to date with new developments in that professional field. In the longer term, the benefits are from more efficient working from suitably qualified staff who have a stronger loyalty to the organisation as a consequence of the support they have received.

Equalities and Diversity

Equality is embedded in all aspects of the service. We strive to be fair and transparent in the way that we provide our services and ensure that they are accessible to all in our communities. This is reflected in our Customer Charters and in the Council's Statement of Values. All of our strategies and services have undertaken Equality Impact Assessments. We use and support the BME and Disabilities focus groups within the district, to help us shape and improve services.

Sustainability

New affordable homes that are developed by RSLs within the district must comply with Sustainable Homes Code Level 3. We have retro-fitted two council homes with energy efficiency features, in order to gather information and data about the suitability of products that could be installed in council homes across the district. During 2009/10 we will evaluate the learning from these products and use the data to inform the council's improvement programme.

Rural impact

The delivery of new affordable homes in our rural areas is a key council priority. We will continue our parish council roadshow in 2009/10 in order to raise awareness and gain a better understanding of the need for affordable housing. In addition we will continue to support the development of new residents associations across the district, particularly in rural areas, which will help with community cohesion and sustainability of communities.

Communication

We will continue to improve communication with our customers in 2009/10. We will continue to develop newsletters and consider more use of e-bulletins in order to be more efficient and sustainable. We hope to increase access to information for our customers through new technology. We are working with a group of tenants to introduce internet access to customer information held on our housing management information system, which will enable customers to access some information 24 hours a day.

Health and safety

Health and safety remains a key consideration in the way we provide local services and in the way the service is run. Working practices take proper account of the health and safety of our employees and work in ways which minimise the risks to lone workers and of violent incidents associated with the various roles we undertake.

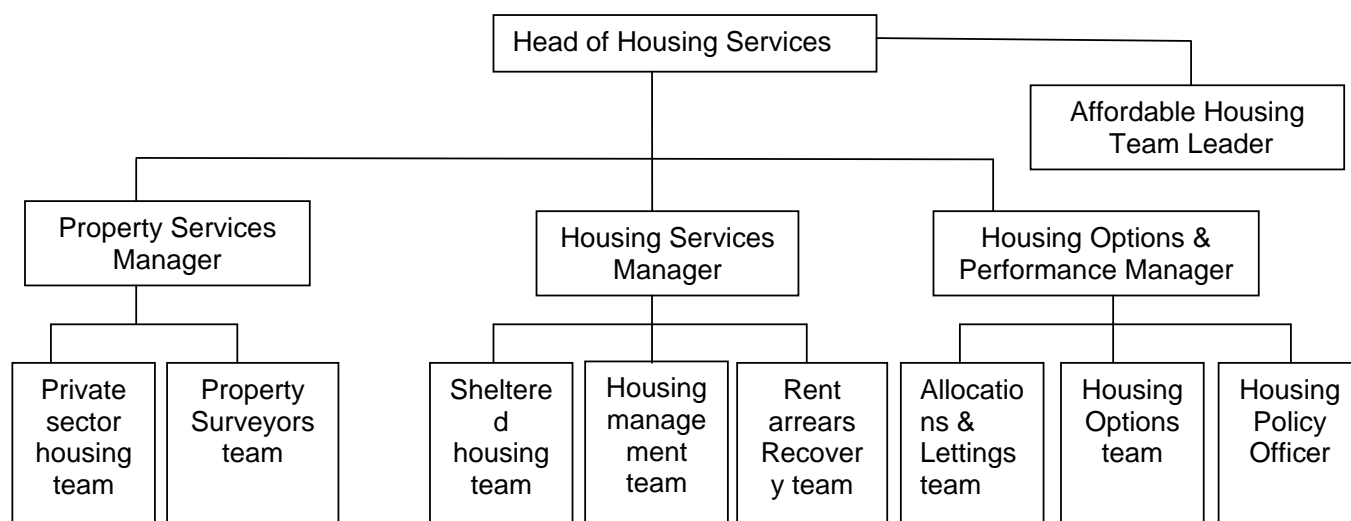
Standards

Private Sector Enforcement Concordat -

Customer Service Standards – We have a range of customer service standards within housing services. We will continue to develop more service standards in partnership with our customers and to monitor them on a quarterly basis.

Resources and budget

Staff Organisation Chart (64 FTE)



Budget (Revenue)

General Fund (Strategic Housing Services)

2008/09 £(000)		2009/10 £(000)	2010/11 £(000)	2011/12 £(000)
282	Private sector housing	248	248	248
9	Unauthorised caravan sites	9	9	9
229	Housing Strategy	332	282	289
393	Homelessness	346	346	346
913		935	885	892

Housing Revenue Account (Landlord Services)

2008/09 £(000)		2009/10 £(000)	2010/11 £(000)	2011/12 £(000)
1,801	General Management	2,001	1,941	1,883
1,648	Repairs & Maintenance	1,750	1,698	1,647
282	Estate Maintenance	299	290	281
1,441	Group Dwellings	1,405	1,363	1,322
4,575	Contribution to National Subsidy Pool	4,824	5,169	5,499
757	Capital Exp met from Revenue Acc	770	-	-
758	Capital Financing Costs	589	600	600
11,262		11,638	11,061	11,232

Budget (Capital)

2008/09 £(000)		2009/10 £(000)	2010/11 £(000)	2011/12 £(000)
250	General Fund Housing			
202	Support to Housing Associations	250	250	250
678	Renewal and Repair Grants	250	250	250
	Disabled Facilities Grants	620	620	620
1,130		1,120	1,120	1,120

2008/09 £(000)		2009/10 £(000)	2010/11 £(000)	2011/12 £(000)
3,417	Council Housing			
413	Planned Repairs	3,040	3,040	3,040
546	Other works (inc. Disabled Adaptations)	325	325	325
55	Shared Ownership repurchases	500	500	500
4,431	I.T. Equipment	11	112	-
		3,876	3,977	3,865

Performance indicator targets

The National Indicator Set was introduced from 1 April 2008. In 2008/09 we gathered baseline data which has been used to set targets for 2009/10 and beyond.

PI No.	Description	2008/09 Actual	2009/10 Target	2010/11 Target
NI139	The extent to which older people receive the support they need to live independently at home	30.7%	No Survey	TBC
NI 155	Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)	64	75	85
NI 156	Number of households living in Temporary Accommodation	65	60	55
NI158	% non-decent council homes	8%	0%	0%
NI160	Local authority tenants' satisfaction with landlord services	83% (triennial survey)	83%	83%
NI187	Tackling fuel poverty – percentage of people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy efficiency rating	187a - 18.54% 187b - 15.54%	187a - 17% 187b - 16%	187a - 15% 187b - 17%
WLI080 1	Average relet times for local authority dwellings	26 days	25 days	23 days
WLI HO01	Average relet times for general needs dwellings	24 days	24 days	24 days
	Average relet times for sheltered dwellings	46 days	36 days	35 days
	Average relet times for temporary accommodation	33 days	30 days	28 days
WLI090 1	DFG applications approved within 12 weeks	New indicator	90%	95%
WLI090 3	% Home repair assistance applications approved in 1 month	99%	99%	99%
WLI HO02	Number of private sector dwellings occupied by vulnerable households made decent	52	60	75
WLI HO03	Satisfaction with Private Sector Housing Service	95%	96%	97%
WLI180 1	Council house repairs completed within relevant priority time	95%	97%	98%
WLI180 2	Satisfaction with Council house repairs	95%	98%	98%
WLI HO04	Satisfaction with council house modernisations	-	96%	97%
WLI HO05	Number of working days taken to process a housing register application	12 days	10	7
WLI HO06	Energy efficiency of Council owned dwellings (Ex. BV 63)	75	78.5	80
WLI HO07	Number of long term empty homes brought back into use	11	15	20
WLI HO08	Local authority rent collection (Ex. BV 66a)	99.58%	99.1%	99.2%
WLI HO09	Rent collection arrears and recovery (Ex. BV 66b)	1.5%	1.74%	1.73%
WLI HO12	Length of stay (weeks) in temporary accommodation (B & B) (Ex. BV 183a)	5.8 weeks	3	2

PI No.	Description	2008/09 Actual	2009/10 Target	2010/11 Target
WLI	% of telephone calls answered within 15 seconds	78.6%	90%	95%
Management indicators				
HSSA A7a2	Number of private sector homes vacant for six months or more	602	400	350
HSSA B3a	Number of private sector (non RSL) dwellings with category 1 hazards made free from those hazards as a direct result of action	51	35	40
BPSA E1	Average weekly management cost	£20.74	£20.85	£20.85
HSSA E1a	Number of Households accepted as homeless and in priority need during the year	180	115	110
P1E E101c	Number of cases where homelessness is prevented or relieved	109	130	150

Previous year's performance data can be viewed on the Council's website.

How this Service Plan will be monitored

The Council's performance management framework is critical to monitoring and reporting the achievements of the Service and as a catalyst for improvement when targets are not achieved.

In the same way that targets cascade down to individual appraisals, the achievement of those targets is managed at individual, team or service level. Day to day management is used to identify good performance and also those areas where delivery is slower or below the standard expected. There is an underlying principle of "no surprises".

At the end of each quarter, performance against key targets is collated and reported to a directorate management meeting. Based on the above system, management should already be aware and have taken appropriate action to improve a situation subject to the availability of appropriate resources. This quarterly meeting and information review should allow the Corporate Director to balance the outcomes from each of the service areas for which they are responsible and take appropriate action within their directorate.

A quarterly report is prepared by each directorate which is then collated by the Policy Officer with responsibility for Performance Management. This report then forms an appendix to a Cabinet report, with portfolio holders commenting on performance for their respective portfolios and recommending any improvement to Cabinet. The Cabinet report is circulated to all Members. Cabinet recommendations are then implemented by officers.

In the Scrutiny cycle following Cabinet's consideration of performance, the three Scrutiny Committees review the decisions of Cabinet and scrutinise the actions taken to improve performance and whether these have been effective.

At the year end, provisional outturn figures are prepared and considered by Cabinet. These must then undergo a process of data quality checks internally and validation by the Audit Commission prior to final publication around June 2010.

Other key reference documents for the service

[Housing Strategy 2008-13](#) which sets out the key objectives for improving housing issues across the district in partnership with a range of stakeholders

[Housing Services Action Plan 2008-11](#) sets out a detailed improvement plan for housing services which has been developed using the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry

[Homelessness Strategy](#) sets out how we will respond to homelessness within the district

[Private Sector Housing Strategy](#) identifies the key issues within the private sector housing stock in the district and how we are working in partnership with a range of stakeholders to tackle the issues.

[Empty Homes Strategy](#) details the scale of empty homes in Wealden and how we are bringing these back into use.

[Wealden Older Persons Housing and Support Strategy](#) sets out a plan for how we will ensure there is a sufficient range of accommodation and support for older people in Wealden in the future.

[Corporate Plan](#) - setting out the Council's overall strategic direction and priorities

[Performance Management Framework](#) - the Council's arrangements for monitoring and acting on performance information and ensuring data quality

[Wealden Sustainable Community Strategy](#) - Wealden Local Strategic Partnership's arrangements for organisations working together for the good of the district

[East Sussex Local Area Agreement](#) - a three-year agreement between East Sussex County Council on behalf of service providers, including Wealden District Council, and central government. which identifies priorities for improvement in East Sussex and how they will be delivered

[East Sussex Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy](#) - a description of East Sussex as it is now and a vision of how it should be in 20 years time and the key priorities for people in East Sussex

[Communications Strategy](#) - the Council's approach to communicating with people in the district and local and national media

[Wealden Sustainability Strategy](#) - how the Council will seek to enable the current needs of the district to be met without compromising the ability of future generations living in Wealden to meet their own needs

[Climate Change Policy](#) - the principles by which the Council is responding to climate change

[Climate Change Action Plan](#) - what we will do to respond to climate change

[Community Engagement Strategy](#) provides a framework for co-ordinated and effective engagement of stakeholders and individuals by the Council in its decision-making.

[Wealden Equality Scheme 2007-2010](#) which sets out how we will ensure that all our services and employment opportunities are provided with equity and fairness to everyone.

Amanda Hodge, Head of Housing Services

T: 01323 443364 E: housing@wealden.gov.uk E: privatehousing@wealden.gov.uk