



**DENBIGHSHIRE
LOCAL HOUSING
STRATEGY**



2007 - 2012



FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce the Local Housing Strategy. This sets out the current local housing situation across all tenure in Denbighshire and provides strategic direction for the next five years. All those who have contributed toward the significant progress made since the previous version in 2004 should be very proud of their achievements.

These include:

- The County's affordable housing policy which in conjunction with local housing associations and private developers has produced twenty one new affordable homes. Many of these have been built in rural areas. There are also a further 202 affordable units that have been given planning permission, which will hopefully be completed over the coming years. The Welsh Assembly Government, Housemark and the Chartered Institute of Housing have also highlighted the policy as being an example of good practice, which other authorities can follow
- The council's homelessness team's success in 2006/7 in eliminating the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families, except in emergencies
- Improving older peoples' housing options through the development of extra care and new private sector accommodation
- The Council's Private Sector team has introduced the highly successful Houseproud scheme and has made 450 dwellings fit, through offering grant assistance and enforcement measures
- Housing associations and the council investing heavily to improve the quality of their housing stock to reach Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012

Housing issues have moved up the political agenda particularly with affordable housing. A good quality home plays a central role in the wider agenda of improving living standards, health, the economy and education. This is why it is important that everyone should have a say in how housing issues are taken forward within the County over the coming years.

Consultation for the Local Housing Strategy has been a continuous process over the last four years. Please take the time to feedback comments and help us to improve it.



Councillor Pauline Dobb
Lead member for Health and Well being

FEEDBACK INFORMATION

This version of the Local Housing Strategy has been developed through extensive consultation (see Appendix A for details) and adheres to the guidance provided by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Operational Plans will be reviewed annually.

Your comments are **welcomed** and please send any comments by using one of the following methods:

In writing

Denbighshire County Council,
Housing Services,
Housing Strategy Officer,
Fronfraith,
c/o Russell House,
Churton Road,
Rhyl,
Denbighshire,
LL18 3DP.

By fax : 01824 708453

By e-mail: housing@denbighshire.gov.uk

This Local Housing Strategy is also available at:

www.denbighshire.gov.uk/housingservices, under the Local Housing Strategy option.

A Welsh version of this strategy will be made available as soon as possible.

A large print version of this strategy is available on request.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Denbighshire Local Housing Strategy (LHS) sets out the current local housing situation across all tenures and provides strategic direction for the next five years. The broad thrust of this strategy differs from the 2004 version in a number of ways:
 - Use of Local Housing Market Assessment rather than Housing Needs Assessment evidence reflecting the significant role of private sector housing
 - Use of more detailed action plans (Operational Plans) divided into completed and ongoing actions
 - More emphasis on sustainable development and equalities including Gypsy and Travellers and migrant workers
- Significant progress has been made since the first version of the LHS in 2004 and the completed Denbighshire Operational Plan (**Section 12**) provides details.
- Key areas of progress include:
 - All new planning applications must now provide an element of affordable housing. To date 202 affordable units have outstanding planning permission
 - Greater emphasis being placed by all agencies on preventing homelessness
 - Development of the Houseproud scheme to allow some owner occupiers to repair/adapt their property through a free managed process and/or access loans
 - The first Extra Care” development in North Wales is being built in Rhyl
 - Development of a Countywide Low Cost Homeownership register
 - Excellent progress is being made by the council and Housing Associations to ensure the housing stock are brought up to Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012.
- Ongoing projects are detailed in the Denbighshire Operational Plan and include:
 - Developing regional housing projects including Local Housing Market Assessments and an affordable housing website

- A private sector Housing Condition Survey is being undertaken in 2007
- Developing a Local Development Plan to provide an even stronger base for future policy, particularly for affordable housing
- Investigating the issue of empty homes in the County after the results of the private Housing Condition Survey are made available
- The housing system in Denbighshire is characterised by:
 - Affordability issues with high house prices and market rents compared to relatively low income levels within the County
 - High levels of homelessness presentations, but limited levels of funding to tackle this issue
 - An ageing population with the associated extra demands placed upon accommodation and local services
 - Greater investment being required to improve housing standards within the private sector particularly to address the high numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
 - Long housing waiting lists being exacerbated by high levels of homelessness, the limited availability of, and low turnover, within the social rented sector
 - The need to develop a wider range of housing options tailored towards the requirements of specific groups with support needs
- The new LHS vision closely links this strategy with the County’s vision for 2025:

“Everyone will have the opportunity to access good quality, affordable housing designed to meet their needs now and in the future, whether they choose to rent or buy a home within Denbighshire”.
- The LHS is divided into two key parts:
 - The main strategy, detailing the wide range of housing issues facing the County
 - The Denbighshire Operational Plans detailing the completed and ongoing actions that are being taken to address these issues (essential reading).
- Any comments are always welcome – see page 3 for contact details.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) sets out the current local housing situation across all tenures in Denbighshire and the strategic direction for the next five years.

2.2 The LHS has evolved and significant progress has been made since the last version in 2004 including:

- The development of a more detailed operational plan and a reduction in the number of strategic objectives - please refer to **Section 12**
- The introduction of an affordable housing policy to provide more affordable housing throughout the County particularly in rural areas
- The mainstreaming of equalities issues across the operational plan and ensuring sustainability are integral to all housing related projects
- Development of Local Housing Market Assessments for two regions of North Wales to help identify local housing markets, assess how they operate and the extent to which they go beyond Local Authority boundaries
- More regional working with other North Wales Local Authorities
- Stronger strategic links with the County's vision and Local Development Plan
- The establishment of a Housing Strategy team to develop work with key partners to drive forward housing projects

2.3 The housing market in Denbighshire is facing a number of pressures:

- Affordability. Increasing housing prices and relatively low local incomes have meant entrance to owner occupation has become more difficult
- High levels of homelessness presentations
- High market rents for good quality private rented accommodation
- Reduced access to the social rented sector due to low stock turnover and loss of properties through the Right to Buy
- The poor quality of some private rented housing stock particularly Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Demographic change. The County has an ageing population and the second highest proportion of older people in Wales.

3. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

3.1 Undertaking a strategic assessment is an essential part of the consultative process of developing the LHS. A wide range of strategic models are available and Denbighshire has chosen to adapt the Chartered Institute of Housing Good Practice model to include six stages of assessment:

- (i) Housing vision
- (ii) General option analysis
- (iii) Core values
- (iv) Strategic Environment Assessment
- (v) Strategic objectives
- (vi) Action points with target outcomes

3.2 Housing Vision

Any vision should be aspirational, take a positive long term view and be consistent with other national, regional and local strategies/policies. At the national and regional levels, key strategies within Wales include the Spatial Plan, Making the Connections and the National Housing Strategy. At a local level, the LHS should link to the Community Strategy/Vision for Denbighshire, and the Local Development Plan.

Taking into account these wider plans the specific needs of Denbighshire, the new housing vision is that:

“Everyone will have the opportunity to access good quality, affordable housing designed to meet their needs now and in the future, whether they choose to rent or buy a home within Denbighshire”.

3.3 General Option Analysis

Housing systems consist of a series of opportunities and issues, based upon an examination of differing variables, levels of intervention and timescales. Denbighshire adopts a partnership approach in analysing and identifying the most appropriate strategic housing options for the County. The main mechanism for this has been through the Housing Strategy Consultation Day, with over ninety representatives attending the latest event in October 2006. Full details of all consultation undertaken in developing the LHS are contained in **Appendix A**.

Four fundamental opportunities/issues arise from any strategic option analysis:

- Has the strategic assessment taken due account of consultation, the corporate agenda and wider influences on local housing issues? The LHS has utilised consultation with a wide range of organisations and individuals throughout its development. Housing appreciates and needs to understand the wider corporate

agenda and issues such as health and the economy, which have a profound influence on housing issues

- Where resources should be targeted? It is important that we target resources on areas of greatest need in both rural and urban areas. Resources are targeted towards vulnerable people whenever possible, to ensure they have the necessary housing opportunities. Resources are finite and need to be targeted at sustainable projects
- What is the best way to address housing issues? Partnership working is the most appropriate way to maximise expertise and scarce resources for priority projects. The council's Housing Strategy team works with a range of partners including the Welsh Assembly Government, other Local Authorities, private landlords, RSLs and other council departments
- Given the level of resources available, is the Action Plan realistic? The Operational Plan has been evaluated to ensure the objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound targets, and is updated annually.

3.4 Principles

The LHS's core principles reflect those at national, regional and local strategic levels. These are:

- A home is a **basic right** for all the people of Denbighshire
- All residents of Denbighshire should have **equal opportunity** to access housing of good quality to meet their needs
- The needs of **vulnerable groups** must be carefully considered (see **Section 10**)
- There should be a **choice** of housing for all residents of Denbighshire
- A home or a lack of a home has a fundamental impact on a wide range of factors which significantly influence any individual's **quality of life** such as health and well-being, educational achievement and economic circumstances
- A **socially inclusive** approach will assist in **sustaining** communities
- Meeting **local needs** is a key part of this strategy
- Ongoing **consultation** is required to determine needs and identify gaps in service provision.

3.5 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The council's Housing Strategy team is working closely with planning to develop a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which meets the requirements of the

LHS and Local Development Plan. This extensive research will examine the need/demand for affordable housing, promote mixed use developments, steer developments away from flood risk areas and assess how to make the best use of previously developed land. The strategic objectives of the SEA relate directly to those of the LHS specifically in relation to tackling housing need, promoting healthier communities, improving accessibility to homes and promoting energy efficiency. The full SEA report is currently being developed and will become available on www.denbighshire.gov.uk/planning when completed later in 2007.

3.6 Strategic Objectives

The number of strategic objectives set out within the LHS have halved since 2004 in recognition of the greater interrelation of themes. Within the context of the housing vision, a number of more specialised housing objectives have developed as a framework to help understand housing issues. Each of these objectives is reflected as a heading for the different sections of the Denbighshire Operational Plan. These are:

1. **AFFORDABLE HOUSING, SUSTAINABILITY AND WELSH CULTURE**

To increase the supply of affordable accommodation throughout the County in accordance with housing need. Working with local communities to preserve the Welsh Culture and ensure developments are sustainable.

2. **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING CONDITION**

To improve the quality of private sector housing across Denbighshire. To improve the energy efficiency of private sector housing and eliminate fuel poverty. To ensure that a wide range of housing options are available to people within the private sector.

3. **HOMELESSNESS**

To prevent homelessness and provide a wide range of accommodation for homeless persons when homelessness is unavoidable.

4. **SOCIAL HOUSING**

To ensure the quality of social housing throughout Denbighshire and develop services that are responsive to customers' needs. To make the best use of existing social rented housing stock by reducing levels of under-occupation and overcrowding.

5. **EQUALITIES**

To ensure a wide range of housing options are available within the County and that there is no discrimination on the basis of age, disability, marital/family status, race, religion, gender, gender identity, sexuality or language

6. **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

To improve community safety through working with local communities.

3.7 Action Points and Target Outcomes

The Denbighshire Operational Plan contains completed and ongoing actions under each of the strategic options shown above. (see **Section 12**).

4. THE MAIN PRINCIPLES

4.1 National Strategies/Policies

There are a number of high level strategic documents, produced by WAG that are important within a housing context. These include a *Plan for Wales (2001)*, *Winning Wales (2002)*, *Wales: a Better Country (2003)* and *Making the Connections (2004)*. *A Plan for Wales*, develops a clear direction for Wales, underpinned by the issues of sustainable development, social inclusion and equal opportunities. *Winning Wales* concentrates on economic development. *Wales: a Better Country* establishes a strategic agenda with emphasis on ten top commitments all working towards creating a sustainable future for Wales. It has been a very influential document outlining the vision for a sustainable future based upon a spatial perspective and greater regional working. *Making the Connections* focuses on making Wales a more prosperous, sustainable, bilingual, healthier and better educated country whilst improving public services through partnership working. These documents significantly underplay the role of housing in the wider agenda of the economy, education and health. As such the profile of housing and its role must be better highlighted in any future WAG strategies/policies and any subsequent resource allocation.

The National Housing Strategy (*Better Homes for the People of Wales*) 2001 sets out WAG's housing agenda. Its vision is for "everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, to be able to choose where they live and decide on whether renting or buying is best for them and their families". It prioritises key housing issues such as all social rented homes meeting WHQS by 2012; eliminating rough sleeping; improving the overall quality of the private rented sector; developing low cost homeownership; mainstreaming BME issues; and eradicating fuel poverty by 2010. Affordability and homelessness are currently the top priorities within Denbighshire and the Operational Plan contains details of completed and ongoing actions for each of these themes. TAN2 provides essential reading on the assessment of need for affordable housing and affordable housing policies in local planning authorities' development plans.

4.2 Regional Dimension

The policy challenges facing the County are not unique to Denbighshire. There are close links with adjoining authorities e.g. Llangollen with Wrexham CBC. There are also strong economic links between authorities, with many residents commuting between the County, Conwy, Flintshire and Cheshire. The County is covered by both the north east and central areas in the Wales Spatial Plan, whilst common policy challenges mean that various projects are often developed on a pan North Wales basis. From a housing perspective, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) also operate upon a regional basis.

The amount of regional working has significantly increased since the previous LHS (2004) due to:

- The Influence of the Wales Spatial Plan emphasising a more geographical Perspective
- Local housing markets crossing Local Authority boundaries
- Common issues facing many Local Authorities and the requirement to pool limited resources and share expertise
- A cultural shift towards sharing good practice within networks.

Current examples of regional housing partnerships include:

- The development of Local Housing Market Assessment groups (LHMAs) within North East and North West Wales. Links have also been made with Bangor University to access further resources for future projects
- RHAN and RHAG. A network of rural Local Authorities and RSLs operating across Wales to discuss housing and planning issues
- A joint project with Wrexham CBC and the three local RSLs to develop a common mutual exchange system and affordable housing website
- The local authority North Wales Housing Partnership that seeks to address cross boundary homelessness issues.

4.3 Locally Agreed Priorities Emerging from the Community Strategy

The County's Community Strategy is currently being revised and housing element will be expanded in the new version. The existing strategy identified housing as a key player under the theme of Health Social Care and Well being. Key issues being to support vulnerable people; tackle homelessness; the lack of affordable housing; and sustaining rural communities. The emerging Community Strategy will be closely linked to the new Denbighshire vision for 2025, which makes detailed reference to housing issues. These include the need to access good quality affordable housing; energy efficiency; developing mixed communities; and developing new technology to allow people to remain in their homes. The vision and Community Strategy are available on www.denbighshire.gov.uk. The linkage between the Housing Strategy Team and Strategic Policy Unit are well developed particularly through the IMPACT sessions. The Local Housing Strategy is likely to be incorporated into the Community Strategy as part of plan rationalisation and this will strengthen linkages even further at a local level.

4.4 Interface with Key Related Strategies and Plans

The LHS interlinks and influences a range of other strategies/plans. These are described in greater detail within **Appendix B**.

4.5 Partnership Working Arrangements

Throughout this LHS, there are excellent examples of partnership working as a method of providing better quality services; sharing local expertise and maximising the use of limited resources. Ongoing consultation and involvement has been essential in driving these partnerships forward. Further details upon which are contained within the Consultation Framework in **Appendix A**. The theme of partnership runs through every section of the LHS and the Operational Plans contain a specific column detailing the key partners involved with each project.

5. THE LOCAL HOUSING SYSTEM

5.1 The housing market is dominated by the private sector. The shift in focus to concentrate housing assessment upon this area has been a notable change since the last LHS (2004). The development of LHMA's, one for the North East Wales and the North West Wales has also enabled detailed housing research to be undertaken that has transcended traditional Local Authority boundaries and links clearly with the WAG vision for housing through providing a robust evidence base. The results of the North West Wales will be fed through into the Local Housing Strategy when they become available. These new style assessments have given authorities both a wider understanding of what constitutes local housing markets and the evidence base to develop housing solutions for both general needs and vulnerable groups.

5.2 Main Findings of the Local Housing Market Assessment (North East)

The partnership of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils, have undertaken a joint LHMA to inform their County's respective LHS and Development Plans (UDP/LDP) for 2007 and beyond.

5.3 Guidance

Methodologies for understanding and monitoring the housing supply/demand dynamic have become increasingly comprehensive and robust as approaches to assessing need and demand have been continuously refined. The recently released Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Guidance on Local Housing Market Assessments reflects and further refines the comparable Guidance produced for England by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) which provides a clear indication of a proposed approach to producing Local Housing Market Assessments. The LHMA follows this guidance and looks to answer the core questions and objectives which are outlined below providing an evidence base upon which to develop strategy. Ensuring a consistent approach is followed will permit joint strategy working within the sub-region.

5.4 Objectives

The National Housing Strategy for Wales, *Better Homes for People in Wales*, outlines WAG's vision for housing:

“for everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, to be able to choose where they live and decide whether buying or renting is best for them and their families.”

In order to address this vision this assessment addresses five key questions:

- **Where are we now?** A clear understanding of the spatial extent of the current housing market is required and its inherent challenges and distinct characteristics based on a robust analysis of the evidence base

- **How did we get here?** Identification of the current and future drivers of change within the housing market using analysis of past trends impacting on the housing market
- **Where are we going?** Development of the key characteristics/nature of the projected housing market in 2012 and forwards up to 2021. A clear identification of the factors creating these future housing markets and the likely broad future scale, type and location of housing demand
- **What are the implications?** Identifying what will be required to deliver the change required in terms of meeting future need/demand and providing an indication of the role that will be played through the provision of new housing as well as the conversion/regeneration of existing stock
- **How do we get there?** How does the LHS respond to the findings of the evidence base?

5.5 The Functional Housing Market Area

The WAG guidance promotes authorities to work together and form partnerships based upon 'functional housing market areas', defining these as "the geographical area within which there are clear links between where people both live and work". Emphasis is also placed upon building upon existing partnership structures.

The authorities of Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire have been grouped together as the 'North East Wales' functional area based on the analysis undertaken for the Wales Spatial Plan and the West Cheshire/North East Wales sub-regional strategy. A detailed study of migration and travel to work flows has confirmed these linkages and identified strong levels of containment within this defined 'functional market area', whilst also confirming important economic linkages with both Chester and Conwy, as well as Ellesmere Port, and specifically in Wrexham's case secondary linkages with Oswestry.

Figure one within the following section represents these identified spatial geographies with Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire forming the core study area. This area has a distinct spatial geography shaped by natural geographies as well as economic linkages which stretch across the English border, two important factors which help to shape the housing market.

5.6 Spatial Geographies of the Housing Market

The Core Study Area is made up of 376,700 people. The total dwelling stock comprises 158,441 dwellings. Over the last five years stock has grown by almost 2% (2,917 units) spread across the three authorities.

Figure 1:



Examining the tenure composition reveals 82% private and almost 18% social housing, although this masks distinctions between the three authorities and settlement areas. Within this, there is a strong reliance on local authorities to house social occupiers, with over 14% of all occupiers renting local authority property, as compared to just under 4% renting from registered social landlords. This is particularly acute in Wrexham, where over 21% of all occupiers rent from the local authority.

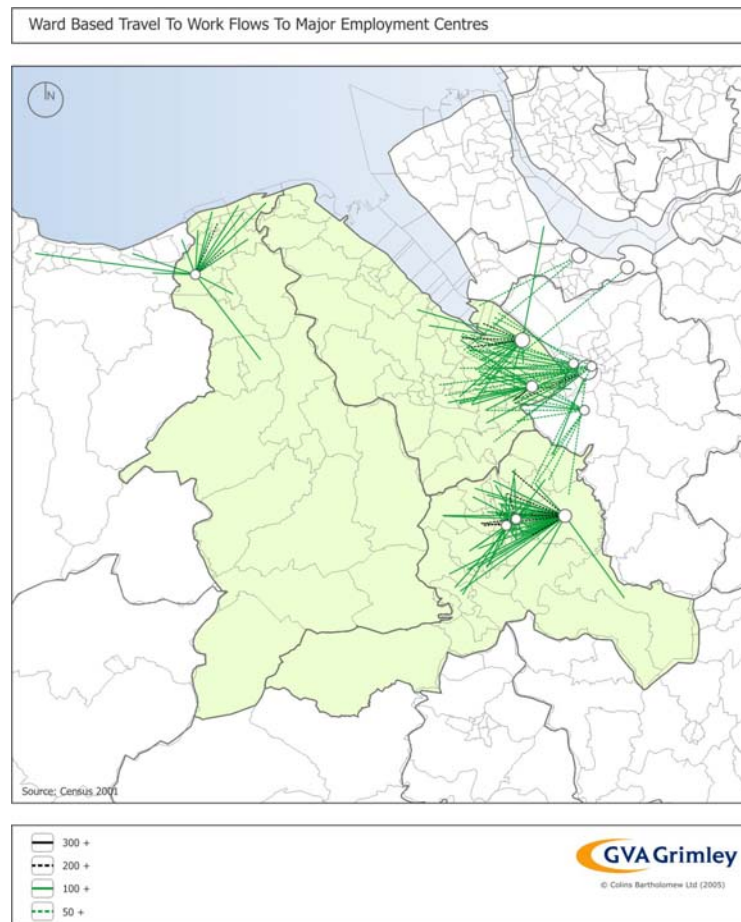
5.7 Strategic Drivers of the Housing Market

A number of key drivers have been identified, through a detailed assessment of the current housing market, which have impacted on its evolution and will continue to impact on future housing requirements:

- The identification of the functional market area showed key links with the Chester Economy, reinforced by the travel to work ward flows shown in the figure two

below. The future growth of this market will continue to be a key driver on housing demand within NE Wales.

Figure 2:



- All three authorities have witnessed a period of employment growth with the most obvious drivers being manufacturing, tourism and the public sector. This has led to a significant drop in unemployment, with the economy almost reaching full employment. Despite this growth trend, the structure of the sub-regional economy is skewed towards manufacturing sectors, which are exposed to increasing globally competitive pressures. In this context Flintshire is particularly exposed with approximately 35% of its workforce employed in manufacturing. The sub-regional economy is projected to witness employment growth in the period up to 2021, with Denbighshire in particular forecast to experience high levels of growth. This growth will have an impact on the level of housing required in the future in relation to the changing economic circumstances of existing households and the requirements of incoming households.
- The populations of all three authorities have grown over the last 20 years, with the core study area witnessing an increase in population of 8.7% between 1985 and 2005. Migration has played a major role in growth over this time period. Locally produced population projections and sub-regional projections produced by WAG

indicate that this trend is set to continue. These projections, combined with reducing household sizes, forecast a continued growth in the number of households creating additional demand for housing until 2021.

- The age structure of the population has changed over recent years with the three areas witnessing growing working age and elderly populations. This trend will continue to affect household need and demand.
- House prices within the core study area have risen sharply over recent years, the average house price within the area has risen from £74,753 to £155,032 between 2001 and 2006¹. These rapid increases in values follow national trends and also reflect the rapid growth in house prices seen over the border in Chester. This rise in prices has created a significant affordability issue across much of the area with growth in house prices far outpacing the rise in income levels. Average income to price ratios in the authorities range from 4.3 in Flintshire to 4.7 in Denbighshire based on lower quartile house prices and median income². This has significant implications for first time buyers and other households looking to purchase housing who do not have existing levels of equity, leading in turn to increasing pressure on other housing tenures.
- A falling level of social rented stock is further compounding the rising level of housing need. This has been driven by Right to Buys and a notable lack of development activity of replacement stock. Between 2000 and 2004³ there were 3,392 Local Authority Right to Buy sales in all three core authorities. Despite this, there were only 307 affordable units developed directly by RSLs in the same period, whilst there were no such units developed by local authorities.
- On average 785 private sector units have been delivered each year between 2000 and 2004, with levels growing year-on-year since 2001. Overall the existing housing stock within the core study area represents a relatively balanced offer, although there is an above average level of detached and semi-detached houses as compared to Wales and England, and a below average number of terraced and flats/maisonettes set against Wales and England proportions⁴.
- The core study area enjoys relatively low levels of vacancy indicating the degree of demand for stock. As at 2001, the core study area had a vacancy level of just 3.08% in terms of dwelling numbers, set against 3.13% in England and 3.99% in Wales. Demand for social rented housing has led to long term local authority void rates falling since 2001, with Denbighshire and Flintshire recording almost no vacancies in this tenure.

¹ Overall average prices rises taken from quarter 4 (Land Registry)

² Sourced from CACI Paycheck data

³ Figures represent the latest recorded Welsh Housing Statistics

⁴ Proportions calculated from 2001 Census

5.8 The Future Housing Market

A key element of the Housing Market Assessment is assessing the future level of housing required to ensure that all households have access to suitable housing. This assessment of housing requirement is broken down into two distinct components:

- **Housing Demand.** The quantity of housing of the type and quality that households both want and can afford to buy or rent in the open market without subsidy and
- **Housing Need.** The quantity of households who lack their own housing or live in unsuitable housing and who cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market.

Work is currently underway to establish projected future requirements of both these components factoring in the strategic drivers identified above. This will reflect the overall quantity of housing required, broken down by type and tenure, to realise the economic growth potential identified within the core study area. An assessment will be made of the implications of this projected demand on the availability of housing land and the capacity of authorities to develop housing until 2021.

Further work is necessary to incorporate the final findings of the Local Housing Market Assessments when they become available.

5.9 Assessing the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Gypsies and Travellers are becoming an increasingly important consideration for the County. A regional group is examining the issue including elected Members, police, other local authorities and the Commission for Racial Equality. Recent counts of gypsy and traveller caravans (undertaken in June 2006 and January 2007) identified four caravans within the County. Further research is proposed for this area, with consideration being given to developing a regional study for the North Wales area. Further discussion of this issue is provided in **Section 10.4**.

5.10 Assessing Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing Requirements

The LHMA is investigating the housing requirements of BME groups. The council also monitor the ethnicity of housing waiting list applicants. Further developing monitoring systems and impact assessing policies are key elements of the Operational Plan. Further discussion of BME housing issues is provided in **Section 10**.

5.11 Key Strategic and Policy Implications

The key strategic and policy implications arising from an analysis of the housing system within Denbighshire are:

- Despite the success of the council's affordable housing policy, there is still a high unmet need for affordable homes
- The relatively high income/house prices ratio and high rent levels of the private rented sector make it difficult for residents to access housing
- Loss of social rented properties through the Right to Buy, particularly in rural areas, has made it much harder for local people to access housing to meet their specific needs
- Slow turnover of social rented stock has made entry to the sector even more difficult than in 2004
- High demand for specialised accommodation to assist vulnerable people
- More research into the housing needs of BME groups, Gypsies and Travellers and migrant workers is needed.

6. LAND USE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

6.1 Denbighshire has benefited significantly from having the first adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP) in Wales. This has provided a robust basis for developing more specialised policies including the affordable housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and simple guidance for builders/developers on affordable housing.

6.2 Adopted Unitary Development Plan

Denbighshire's UDP was adopted in July 2002. A new Local Development Plan (LDP) is being developed through extensive local consultation and should be adopted by 2010. There are very close working relations between the council's Housing and Planning departments, which emphasise the interdependency between the current UDP and LHS. Key elements within the UDP include:

- Identifying an overall requirement to develop 4,100 additional dwellings within Denbighshire during 1996-2011 (Policy HSG 1). This equates to approximately 274 additional dwellings per year
- The settlement strategy. This proposes that most new housing will be concentrated in the main urban centres. Other housing developments will be located within the County's six main villages, with limited development permitted in the 27 other villages
- An affordable housing target is being devised as part of the LDP, which will in part be based upon the findings of the LHMA
- The affordable housing SPG (available at www.denbighshire.gov.uk), relates affordable housing needs to the UDP. The key parts include:
 - An affordable housing threshold of 3 units or 0.1 hectares for all new planning sites
 - 30% of housing upon these sites should be affordable
 - Use of a minimum density figure in affordable housing calculations
 - Minimum spatial standards for units are defined

No exceptions sites outside the agreed development boundary have been identified through the UDP, Planning are reviewing this position as part of the emerging LDP.

6.3 The Emerging Local Development Plan

Denbighshire is considering the following planning issues as part of the LDP process:

- Setting targets for affordable and market housing units
- Reviewing affordable housing policies particularly for regeneration areas

- Reviewing the local connection criteria for affordable housing
- Developing template section 106 agreements for affordable housing
- A Hamlet policy for villages to allow certain development on exception sites if provision is 100% affordable
- Investigating Community Land Trusts as a mechanism for producing rural housing
- Further research into the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and how these might be met

The key interaction between the LHS and LDP is through the affordable housing agenda (see **Section 7.1**) with links to other housing/planning issues. The council, private house builders and the local RSLs have invested considerable time and resources considering this issue. The LDP Plan will also:

- Provide a stronger framework for affordable housing as the agenda has moved significantly forward since the UDP was adopted
- Clearly define development boundaries and therefore allow Rural Housing Enablers a stable base for negotiations with landowners on behalf of communities
- Clarify what constitutes local connection when developing affordable housing planning sites.

6.4 Strategic Objective and Targets

Please refer to strategic objective one within the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**) for key projects and targets relating to this section.

7. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

7.1 WAG, Housemark and the Chartered Institute of Housing have highlighted Denbighshire's Affordable Housing policy as good practice. The key features of this ambitious policy are contained in **Section 6.2**. The Affordable Housing SPG and guidance notes are available at www.denbighshire.gov.uk (Planning pages). The policy is aimed predominantly aimed at first time buyers and targets those with specific needs e.g. disabled applicants and promotes the freeing up of social rented properties whenever possible. A full review of the affordable housing policy will take place during 2007/2008 and an Affordable Housing Officer is being recruited by the council.

The policy was developed in response to substantial evidence of unmet need/demand for affordable housing in the County. This included:

- A Housing Needs Assessment (2004) revealed a substantial need for affordable housing of 645 new dwellings per year for the next five years. For more details, see www.denbighshire.gov.uk. (under F for Fordham's on the A-Z icon)
- The 2007 Local Housing Market Assessment (main findings are detailed in **Section 5.2**)
- The County's social rented housing waiting list for each place. This can be found under the public portal icon of www.denbighshire.gov.uk/planning
- Research undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Housing into affordability has revealed a house price to income ratio of 4.91 within Denbighshire (*Young working and still homeless* - 2005).

7.2 Social Housing Sector: Council Housing and Registered Social Landlords

(i) **Stock Transfer**

An ongoing debate has taken place over the last five years, as to how the council could best bring its stock up to Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2012. After undertaking two detailed stock condition surveys and extensive consultation with tenants, the council ruled out the possibility of transferring its stock to another landlord to meet WHQS. The council has instead chosen to use Prudential Borrowing to improve the quality of its stock.

(ii) **Improvements Under WHQS**

A specialist tenancy liaison team has been established by the council to help deliver its' improvement programme. The team ensures that the specific needs of harder to reach tenants, such as older or BME tenants, are fully catered to by delivering a personalized 1:1 service. This includes making suitable adaptations to properties when general improvements are undertaken.

Local firms have been successful in securing contracts for heating and ongoing maintenance contracts, which has positive effects for both the local economy and a regeneration affect overall. Links with the local colleges have also led to the development of additional construction skills courses.

All three local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are also undertaking investment programmes that will bring their stock up to WHQS by 2012.

(iii) Lettings

Significant pressures are facing all social landlords due to lengthening housing waiting lists and reduced turnover within their housing stock. All landlords actively monitor their allocation systems and there are few areas with hard to let stock. To improve standards further the council is intending to review it's Allocation Policy and update nomination agreements with RSLs during 2007/08.

(iv) Community Sustainability and Safety

All social landlords are currently working with their residents and tenants to review participation and consultation strategies. It is imperative that to build strong local communities, their views underpin any future developments. Other key sustainability projects include:

- The development of affordable housing projects across the County (see strategic objective one within the Operational Plan)
- All social landlords have recently developed robust anti-social behaviour policies and procedures. More work is required however to tackle such issues within the private housing sector
- Various initiatives to support existing tenants to remain within their homes including homelessness prevention and the provision of free housing advice (see strategic objective one within the Operational Plan).

(v) Partnership Working

Denbighshire County Council and the three local RSLs have been working together on various recent projects including:

- Developing 69 new affordable homes within the County during 2006/07
- The launch of a joint low cost home ownership waiting list
- Mortgage rescue scheme and preventing homelessness.

In addition to which, private developers, builders and estate agents have increasingly become involved in developing the County's affordable housing policies. Work has also commenced with Wrexham council to develop both an affordable housing website and a

mutual exchange scheme that will be available to tenants and residents across both counties.

7.3 Assessing Need Within the Intermediate Sector

The intermediate sector is mainly comprised of various low cost homeownership schemes that are currently available within the County such as Homebuy and shared ownership (for further details of schemes see **Section 7.4**) The need/demand for intermediate housing has been established via:

- The County's Low Cost Homeownership register. This has over 100 applicants and has been developed in partnership between the council, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, Pennaf and Wales & West Housing Association. The majority of applicants are first time buyers
- Evidence supplied from local housing needs surveys that have been undertaken in conjunction with the Rural Housing Enabler and local community councils
- The 2004 Local Housing Needs Assessment and the 2007 LHMA,

7.4 Meeting Intermediate Need

Many of the properties that have been provided through the County's affordable housing policies have been within rural areas where the gap between house prices and incomes are generally more notable. Over two hundred affordable properties have been given planning permission since the affordable housing policy was introduced. Current schemes include:

(i) **Homebuy**

Homebuy is funded by WAG and operated locally by Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd. Homebuy targets purchasers who are unable to afford to buy their own property on the open market. Eight properties were purchased through this scheme in 2006/7.

(ii) **Shared Ownership**

The local RSLs have developed eleven new shared ownership properties within the County during 2006/07. This allows purchasers to minimise their initial housing costs by only buying a percentage of a property and paying rent on the remainder. This means that a potential purchaser who could not afford to buy a property outright, could buy 50% of the property and pay rent on the other 50%. Both Pennaf and Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd currently operate differing schemes.

(iii) **Discounted Low Cost Homeownership**

As part of its affordable housing policy, the council has negotiated discounts of up to 55% off the market price on various new housing developments across the

County. The value of discounts negotiated to date is worth over £1 million. During 2006/7, nine discounted units of low cost homeownership have been completed with many others in the pipeline.

(iv) Sub market rented housing

The option of developing sub market rented housing is available to builders as part of the County's affordable housing policy. No units of this type have been developed to date and ways of making this option more attractive will be investigated.

(v) Right to buy/Right to acquire

The stricter guidelines relating to the sale of council properties, known as the Right to Buy, have seen a reduction in the numbers sold during recent years. These have been from 125 sales in 2004/5, 45 sales in 2005/6, down to 18 sales in 2006/7. No RSL properties have been sold, known as the right to acquire, during the last year.

7.5 Working with Private Sector House Builders

Developers/builders have been consulted throughout the development of County's the affordable housing policy. Many have seen the need for affordable housing and are working with the council and RSLs to provide it. Ongoing consultation takes place with the private sector through an annual affordable housing workshop, the Local Housing Strategy consultation day and individual site negotiations. The sector has also been instrumental in providing over £1 million worth of discounts to help local people access affordable housing. Developers have expressed concerns however over the length of time taken to complete legal agreements for affordable housing, and this will be undertaken as part of a wide ranging review of the County's affordable housing SPG during 2007/08.

7.6 Rural Housing Enabler

The Rural Housing Enabler project was established in 2004 and has proven to be an essential source of information about housing need/demand in rural areas. Eighteen surveys have been undertaken within both Denbighshire and Conwy who are partners within the project. The Enabler is also preparing to submit their first planning application to develop a scheme within the south of the County by late 2007.

7.7 Strategic objectives and targets

Please refer to strategic objective one within the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**) for key projects and targets relating to this section.

8. THE PRIVATE SECTOR

8.1 The private sector dominates the housing of Denbighshire. Although the majority of this sector is in good condition a small proportion of owner occupied and private rented properties are in poor condition. A strategic objective of the LHS is therefore to improve stock condition within this diverse sector. Successful partnership working between the council, developers/builders, landlords, owner occupiers, Care & Repair, and local RSLs can ensure that limited financial resources can be used to tackle key strategic projects. The implementation of the Housing Act 2004 has also brought about major changes in the way local authorities deal with properties in the private sector. This has included the introduction of a new hazard based system to assess housing conditions, and the licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO).

8.2 Housing Renewal Policy (Private sector)

Denbighshire's Housing Renewal Policy was adopted in July 2003 and will be reviewed once a new Private Sector Stock Condition survey is completed later this year. The adopted policy (2003) embraced the need to develop a more flexible approach to providing assistance to help residents with repairs, adaptations and improvement to their homes. This was underpinned by a 2002 stock condition survey that revealed higher than average rates of unfitness in Denbighshire (7.3%) and a worsening private sector stock condition. (Michael Howard Associates 2002). The key elements of the current policy are:

- Strong links with the Community Strategy, Local Housing Strategy and other strategies
- A vision to ensure that all households in Denbighshire are given the opportunity to live in good quality homes within the given resources
- For the private housing stock to move towards meeting appropriate or Welsh Housing Quality Standards. This will be achieved by improving housing, business and community developments, and the built environment within Renewal Areas
- The policy also seeks to undertake general improvements within private sector housing and to reduce energy consumption.

8.3 Area Renewal

Details upon the County's current renewal areas are outlined below. Research is being undertaken into the possibility of declaring another renewal area in Rhyl, which would support the wider regeneration of Rhyl including Rhyl Going Forward projects. These areas have targeted public sector grants to regenerate some of the poorest areas within the County. Grant uptake amongst owner occupiers has been excellent, but often private landlords have been unwilling or unable to invest in their properties.

(i) Denbigh (declared August 2001)

- Local companies are benefiting from improvement work contracts, enabling them to expand their skills base and learn about conservation methods and materials
- The long awaited Phase II of Denbigh Townscape Heritage Initiative has now been declared with critical projects identified. This initiative will continue to improve the town, encourage confidence in the area and link with other major contributors to the regeneration of Denbigh.
- The council are working in partnership with the Townscape Heritage Lottery to bring back into use both commercial and residential empty properties to improve the environment within the town
- To date over £3.5 million has been spent in the Denbigh Renewal Area.

(ii) South West/East Rhyl (declared 2001)

- Key objectives are to reduce disrepair in housing, reduce the fear of crime and improve the local environment through partnership working
- By 31st March 2006 154 existing properties had been improved. These improvements cover all types of properties - owner occupied/private rented, commercial and retail.
- Two empty derelict properties have been brought back into use
- In partnership with North Wales Police an alleygating scheme was introduced to some problematic rear alleyways, which attracted fly tipping, and anti social behaviour. Other environmental improvements have been undertaken as part of this scheme including works to boundary walls and walkways. This scheme is being extended across other areas in the Renewal Area.
- An ambitious scheme to develop a disused cemetery in the Town Centre was completed in March 2006
- To date over £6 million has been spent in the South West Rhyl Renewal Area.

8.4 Regeneration

In addition to work being carried out in the renewal areas, other community regeneration projects include:

(i) Rhyl Going Forward

This project involves a number of different elements to regenerate Rhyl. Work undertaken has included the conversion of a former house in multiple occupation into

micro business units. There are proposals to selective demolish blocks of rundown housing and business units. Housing is a key theme for Rhyl Going Forward, various projects have been led by the council, local developers/builders, WAG (DEIN), and RSLs. Private sector investment has been heavily involved on a number of key planning sites, which are in the process of being developed or where new schemes have been proposed. Further information is available at www.denbighshire.gov.uk (Select R for Rhyl Going Forward under the A – Z icon on the home page).

(ii) Communities First

Two Communities First partnerships exist in the County - Rhyl West managed by the Police and South West Rhyl lead by the Co-operative society. Both of these partnerships are currently developing their own local action plans. Housing has strong links with both partnerships and is represented on the South West Rhyl partnership board.

(iii) Community Safety issues

The safety of local communities is a key issue within Denbighshire. A three year plan has been developed by the Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership. In terms of housing, the key areas are anti-social behaviour and improving security. The Council and RSLs have specific policies and work closely with the Police and other agencies under agreed protocols and to prevent and deal with anti-social behaviour. Introductory tenancies for new Council tenants allow the opportunity to take more action against the low number of perpetrators. Secure by design is incorporated into all new RSL rented properties and the Council and RSLs are significantly improving the security of properties as part of the improvement programme for Welsh Housing Quality Standard. The Fire Service provide free home safety checks. They work with the private sector housing team and have recently closed down two properties which did not meet the requirements.

Please refer to strategic objective six within the Operational Plan for key projects and targets relating to this area.

8.5 Resources to Support Housing Renewal Policies

Improving private sector housing is a key element of this strategy as the private sector dominates the local housing system. The council currently spends £1.9 million per annum on housing renewal and Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs). Additional WAG funding is received to support work within the Renewal Areas detailed above in section 8.3. Inflationary pressures and the increasing cost of adaptations however mean that fewer people can now be assisted. Alternative methods of funding such as Houseproud are therefore being promoted when appropriate (see section 8.11).

8.6 Housing, Health and Safety Rating System

This new system measures housing standards, through identifying and assessing hazards. The higher the hazard rating the more immediate the need for improvement works to remove or minimize the hazard and prevent recurrence of an accident to the

occupiers. The council will continue to work proactively and reactively to reduce hazards identified in the private rented sector. Revised Housing Renewal Policies based upon this new system will be introduced by February 2008. Under the existing system two prohibition notices have been served closing flats within Denbighshire under the Regulatory Reform Order 2005 as they posed a serious fire risk. This was undertaken by North Wales Fire Service and the council's Private Sector Housing Team.

8.7 HMO Licensing and Selective Licensing

Under the Housing Act 2004 the local authority has a duty to licence houses in multiple occupation. This includes properties which are three or more storeys high (attic, basement and commercial included), have five or more persons living in them, or two or more households, who share amenities such as a bathrooms toilet or cooking facilities. As part of the transitional arrangements for this new licensing scheme, properties that have already been registered under the authority's existing HMO Registration Scheme will automatically be transferred to the new scheme.

There are no plans at present to consider introducing further or selective licensing within the County to cover the many large multi-occupied properties within the County that are in self-contained units, which do not conform to building regulation standards. These properties will be monitored using the new Housing Health Safety Rating System.

8.8 Empty Properties

The Private Housing Sector Condition survey due to be completed later this year will provide evidence about empty homes. Denbighshire County Council has been unable to fund an Empty Homes Officer post and is now the only County within NE Wales in this position. The LHS consultation day in October 2006, did however identify that the investigation of empty homes should be adopted as a key priority by the County. As part of Rhyl Going Forward some empty properties have been purchased and brought back into use by RSLs, whilst the purchase/compulsory purchase of some empty housing is also being considered. The council's Private Sector Housing team will also be investigating new powers under the 2004 Housing Act to issue Empty Dwelling Management Orders. This may enable selected empty dwellings to be brought back into use.

8.9 Care and Repair

Denbighshire Care & Repair assists older and/or disabled people to remain independent in their own homes, and works in partnership with the council's Private Sector Housing team. They also run the Rapid Response Adaptations programme, which can assist hospital patients to return to their own home, through undertaking minor repairs and adaptations within their home.

The agency's Strategic Business Planning Committee guides its work, planning future service provision and monitoring the agency's performance and financial situation.

Membership comprises representatives from the council, Denbighshire Local Health Board, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd and Clwyd Alyn Housing Association. In addition to funding from WAG, the agency has received around £26,000 per annum from the council's Social Services department, with other funding sources including Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association and Denbighshire Local Health Board.

8.10 Mobile homes

Within Denbighshire all licensed mobile home sites are for holiday purposes only. A survey of these sites has recently been undertaken by the council. Although the preliminary findings are not yet available, it is anticipated that the research will identify key issues for the council in relation to the take up of local services by this transitory population.

8.11 Loans and equity release

Denbighshire County Council working in conjunction with Wrexham and Flintshire has developed the Houseproud scheme to assist homeowners over 60, or disabled homeowners of any age, to get essential repair works done in a managed way. The "not for profit" partnership with the Home Improvement Trust means that homeowners can access loans without the risk of potential repossession if the loan is not paid. Houseproud can help with repairs, improvements or adaptations. Many scheme applicants have self financed their works, but wanted the council's assistance in managing the process. Around £280,000 of private finance has been levered in using the scheme without the need for grant assistance. The scheme has been a huge success with over 100 enquiries and 56 live enquiries being processed at present. Over 50 enquiries have received advice only, which has enabled them to proceed without further assistance.

8.12 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

DFGs are a mandatory grant, available to carry out works that will enable disabled applicants to remain in their own home. A recent national review by the Welsh Assembly Government of the DFG system has identified the need to reduce the time taken to complete such works. The average time taken from application to completion in Denbighshire has reduced by over 100 days in the last two years. Due to the high number of applications received for these grants the council is considering capping the maximum amount of grant that can be paid. A 'fast track' adaptation grant has also recently been introduced to speed up the processing of stair lift installations.

8.13 Adapted Housing Registers

A waiting list of Council, RSL and private tenants requiring adapted accommodation within the County has been developed. It is reviewed regularly between the RSLs and the council's Social Services and Housing departments. The list is also used to secure adapted properties on new planning sites, which can then be built to meet the specific needs of the successful applicant. Further investigation into the numbers

and type of current adapted properties required, and ways to improve the current adapted housing list are planned.

8.14 Energy Efficiency

Energy efficiency is rising up the national housing agenda as part of the challenge to reduce climate change, carbon emissions and the running costs of our homes. Energy Efficiency and affordable warmth are intrinsically linked, with affordable warmth considering a wider agenda include low income and issues of vulnerability. Denbighshire is on track to meet a WAG target of achieving a 12% improvement in energy efficiency in residential accommodation between 1997 and 2007.

The North Wales Energy Efficiency Advice Centre provides free impartial advice on energy efficiency, fuel poverty and how to access available schemes. The main incentive for reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency is the Home Energy Efficient Schemes, which provides grants for heating and insulation for older and vulnerable persons.

In Denbighshire, the majority of properties are privately owned or rented (around 34,000 properties) and, therefore, are the target of incentives for energy efficiency measures. The County has an Energy Efficiency Strategy for the private sector, which focuses on latest stock data; maximizing the contribution from energy companies towards energy efficiency measures; and publicity campaigns to raise awareness.

An Affordable Warmth Strategy is also being developed within the County. This is being co-ordinated through the Affordable Warmth Group, which involves the council's Private Sector Housing team, Local Health Board, Care & Repair and the North Wales Energy Efficiency Advice centre. The council has also appointed a local Member to champion the importance of affordable warmth. A Business Plan is being developed by Warm Wales, as part of the affordable warmth strategy, to help bring warm homes and improved health to Denbighshire.

A new affordable housing scheme in Llangollen, which is due to be completed in summer 2007, has met the very good Eco-Homes rating and demonstrates what can be achieved when building new housing. This is the highest rating ever awarded to a builder in Wales and was achieved through installing 'A' rated appliances, a high efficiency boiler, sound insulation and recycling facilities, that will result in lower running costs for the occupants.

8.15 Strategic housing objectives and targets

Please refer to the private sector housing strategic objective (Section 2) within the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**) for key projects and targets relating to this section.

9. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

9.1 The principle of sustainable development is mainstreamed along with community well being and mixed communities throughout national, regional and local strategies, particularly in relation to the wider climate change debate. At the local level, the principle of sustainable development underpins both the Community Strategy and Denbighshire's Vision for 2025. A definition of sustainable development is being developed by Denbighshire County Council. The County's emerging Local Development Plan is also undertaking a comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment, which will further extend the boundaries of research into this agenda.

9.2 Housing and Sustainable Development

The key area of interaction between housing and sustainable development is in sustaining the Welsh culture and language particularly in rural areas. The County's Affordable Housing Policy (see section 7.1) has particularly benefited rural areas by providing a range of affordable housing tenures. These rural areas have often lost all or part of their Council Housing through the Right to Buy (RTB), and have seen significant house price rises with local people struggling to be able to afford local housing. The use of Section 106 legal agreements has enabled the needs of local people to be prioritised when developing new affordable housing. The Rural Housing Enabler (see section 7.6) and local RSLs have also played a crucial part in working with Local Authorities and rural communities.

Sustainable development has become key in developing both new build and maintaining the existing housing stock. The emerging LDP will include an assessment of the impact on biodiversity of sites of new housing, which will be an important measure of sustainability. Access to services and facilities especially in rural areas is a crucial consideration for any new housing sites. The Affordable Housing Policy crucially includes minimum spatial standards to be met for all new affordable units, making them more sustainable, healthier for residents/tenants and integrated into the local community. Any properties developed with Social Housing Grant are built to a high specification by RSLs and this includes meeting or exceeding Lifetime Homes and good Eco Homes standards, and ratings, which make running costs lower and more sustainable. We believe that all new homes should be built to Lifetime Homes standard but this would require WAG amending existing Building Regulations. The Lower Dee Mill development in Llangollen has a very good Eco-Homes rating and shows how affordable and market properties can be integrated in a sustainable manner. The design of affordable properties including running costs will be considered as part of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance review.

Denbighshire County Council and RSLs are working hard to ensure that their housing stock meets the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2012. In terms of sustainability, DCC has not only used a local contractor/labour for part of its improvement programme, but is significantly improving the energy efficiency of its stock. RSLs have also established work programmes to ensure their properties meet WHQS by 2012.

DCC has produced a Sustainable Development Report detailing the wide range of work being undertaken by Local Authority departments on related education, health care, social well being and housing issues. Key areas of work include affordable housing, energy efficiency/affordable warmth, homelessness and the improving the condition of the social rented housing stock. The finalised report will be available later: www.denbighshire.gov.uk.

Welsh Language: the Way Ahead (2005) recommends that Local Planning Authorities insist developers produce a Language statement to accompany any relevant proposal and highlight the need for any further Language Impact Assessment. Welsh Language Scheme of the RSLs and Denbighshire County Council commit organisations to promote the use of Welsh whenever possible and have dedicated action plans.

All housing organisations in Denbighshire and regionally need to undertake more research into sustainable development and its links to energy efficiency and affordable warmth. The recent World Wildlife Fund report – *Building Sustainable Housing* provides many examples of what high quality developments can be achieved, should appropriate resources become available. There is a requirement locally to undertake more detailed research into this topic area.

9.3 Strategic Housing Objectives and Targets

Please refer to the strategic objective one within the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**) for key projects and targets relating to this section.

10. EQUALITIES

10.1 One of the key differences between this and earlier versions of the LHS is that greater consideration has been given to mainstreaming the needs of all vulnerable groups throughout the LHS. The needs of these groups are significant and communities should understand that greater specialised provision to assist them is required. Other vulnerable groups are covered later on in this section but there are other equality issues not covered by the WAG guidance for preparing Local Housing Strategies. These include age, gender and sexual orientation, equality issues upon which more guidance is needed.

10.2 Homelessness

Homelessness can severely affect a person's quality of life and is a key area of interaction between housing and health. Tackling homelessness and ensuring its prevention, whenever possible, is one of the two top priorities identified within the LHS. Although the number of homelessness presentations to the council have reduced slightly in the last two years. A significant amount of work is going into both prevention and developing housing options for those cases where homelessness couldn't be avoided.

The work of the council's homelessness team has recently been recognised as an example of good practice that can be followed by other council departments. Many voluntary agencies also offer advice, assistance, training and other valuable services to homeless people throughout the County.

(i) **Review of the Homelessness Strategy**

The County's Homelessness Strategy was adopted in 2003 and included a detailed action plan. A three-fold approach has been undertaken to review the Homelessness Strategy:

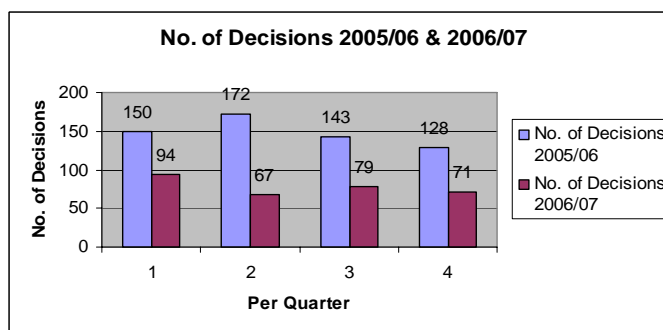
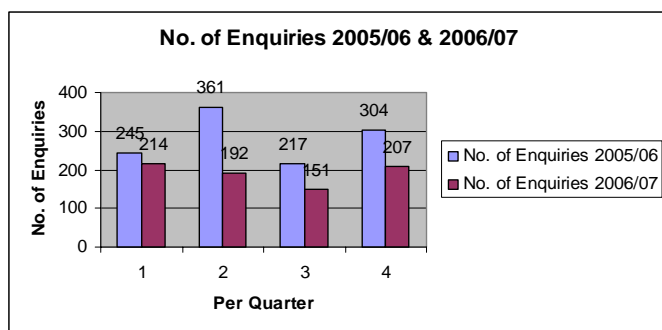
- Undertaking an independent assessment on the council's homelessness services. This advocated the promotion of developing both housing options and preventing homelessness whenever possible
- A WAG progress report visit identified positive practice including evidence of political support for tackling homelessness, a commitment to the prevention agenda, and eliminating the use of Bed & Breakfast for families except for emergencies
- A subgroup of the Homelessness Forum has worked on making the Denbighshire Operational Plan more focused. The subgroup, which consists of a range of agencies and the Local Authority, has contributed to developing both the text with this LHS and also the Operational Plan's actions and targets. These actions are to be updated annually

These reviews have highlighted some of the excellent work practice within the area of homelessness whilst recommending a number of improvements. These include:

- Reviewing all first contact processes for homeless applicants and redesignating the council's homelessness assessment officers, as housing option officers. The planned relocation of Social Services and Housing to the same office will provide opportunities to improve first contact
- The prevention agenda needs written procedures (WAG)
- Reducing the length of Operational Plan for homelessness to focus on priorities and note the significant progress made since 2003
- Streamline performance and other information collection methods

(ii) Summary Homelessness Profile

The number of homelessness enquiries has reduced significantly since 2005/2006 for 1127 to 764 enquiries in 2006/2007, this is partly because of the switch to a more preventative and proactive approach. The graphs below provide more information. Of the homeless enquiries, 58% are from single people with more males than females and 42% from families with children. The majority of presentations are in the North of the County, with accommodation options in the South being very limited. Less than 0.1% (7 enquiries in 2006/2007) of all homelessness applications are made by someone from an ethnic group and these are assessed in the same way as any other homeless presentation.



(iii) Main Causes of Homelessness

Examining the statistics collected for homelessness reveals a wide range of causes (WHO12). Parent or other relatives no longer able/willing willing to accommodation is the most significant cause of homeless (29%). This is closely followed by the loss of rented accommodation (28%) and the breakdown of a relationship (16%). Only a small proportion (4.7%) of eligible enquiries are due to rent or mortgage arrears but affordability issues are becoming more apparent with changing interest rates. There is a continuing shortage of social housing, which means the numbers of homeless applicants in temporary accommodation is going to increase. Young

people and ex-prisoners, to which the council may have a statutory duty, can face particular rehousing difficulties if support services are also required. Young people are faced with further affordability issues that when landlords improve properties that the rents go beyond their reach, particularly because of the single room rent rule for those on Housing Benefit and may cause them to become homeless.

(iii) Homelessness Prevention

The emphasis of the council's homelessness team is now focused towards prevention. This has included the appointment of a Prevention Officer with specific targets being set for preventing homelessness. A wide range of good quality accommodation has also been leased for homeless people for situations where prevention has not been possible. The council has appointed an additional Accommodation Support Officer to support this approach and manage its ever widening leasing portfolio. The Housing Panel will assess cases referred to it and preventing homelessness is a key part of the agenda for young people.

(iv) Reflecting the National Agenda

The national housing and homelessness strategies reflect the importance that WAG attaches to this key policy area. The LHS Operational Plan reflects the six key themes of the National Housing Strategy and links them directly to the key projects and targets within strategic objective three.

(v) Corporate Implementation

Within Denbighshire, the role of homelessness champion has existed since May 2006, to promote homelessness issues throughout the County. The Lead Member for Health Social Care and Well-being also provides a link to Denbighshire's Local Health Board and is a member of the council's Cabinet to promote housing/health issues including homelessness. Homelessness is included in the Denbighshire Vision 2025 and Community Strategy and is a key issue for this strategy.

(vi) Support and Advice Services

A range of agencies currently provide support and advice including Shelter, the council's Welfare Rights Unit, NACRO and RSLs - including a mortgage rescue scheme - as well as advice from the council's Homelessness team. The council is proposing to undertake a review of all housing advice services that they fund during 2007/08. Similarly a number of other North Wales Local Authorities are also reviewing their housing advice functions and are investigating the option of developing a regional advice service and moving the agenda even more towards a prevention led approach.

10.3 Black Minority Ethnic Groups (BME)

Within a Welsh context, Denbighshire has a relatively small BME population. Ranked 17th amongst all Welsh Authorities, 1.1% of the resident population is from

BME groups (Census 2001). It is crucial to support and reflect the needs of diverse communities and individuals.

(i) Strategic approach

BME is defined as “all people who are members of minority ethnic communities whether they are visible minorities or not” (*Preparing Local Housing Strategies - WAG 2007*). This LHS will examine the work that has been undertaken on BME issues at different levels - national, regional and Denbighshire perspectives. The main emphasis throughout this document, including the Operational Plan, is to mainstream BME housing issues wherever possible.

(ii) National

The *BME Housing Action Plan for Wales* (2002) and related legislation, including the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, require Local Authorities and RSLs to develop their own BME Housing Strategies. Tai Pawb, the first BME RSL in Wales has also been established as a direct result of WAG’s national action plan. WAG research into BME issues in Wales (2005) has revealed that:

- In 2001, the BME population represented 2.1% of Wales population. This figure is increasing and is projected to rise to 3.2% of the population by 2011.
- There are BME populations in all parts of Wales, but they are diverse, with some groups being more likely to be extremely deprived.
- The BME population is significantly younger than the white population
- BME families are larger than the average household size (3.6 persons rather 2.8 persons).

The Commission for Racial Equality has recently produced a race equality Code of Guidance. The code expects Local Authorities to develop ethnic monitoring systems and impact assess their policies on race, as part of meeting the BME agenda. Specifically in relation to housing within Denbighshire, there may also be issues regarding the use of Section 106 agreements to prioritise new affordable housing for sale within local communities.

(iii) Regionally

A pan North Wales housing study in 2003, identified a general lack of awareness of the housing requirements of the local BME population and the need for more research. As a result, the six Local Authorities in North Wales published the *Local Challenges: Regional Solutions* report, which made a number of regional/local key recommendations including:

- A commitment to race equality

- Making equalities central to our work
- Maximising the involvement of diverse communities - more work is necessary to engage BME people in North Wales
- The creation of individual Local Authority Action Plans.

The authorities have also been working together to launch a pilot project to develop an online equalities training package, which has recently been nominated for a good practice award.

The RSLs in North Wales have also developed a regional approach to BME issues and are currently in the process of consulting upon their action plan. For more information about this RSL partnership please refer to www.nwrep.co.uk.

(iv) Denbighshire Organisations

Within Denbighshire, the council is corporately committed to the Equalities agenda through the Community Strategy and Integrated Equality Policy. Key initiatives include:

- Supporting the North Wales Race Equality Network through subscribing to their corporate membership scheme
- Providing training and awareness raising for staff on race equality issues
- Subscribing to Languageline, which provides confidential translation and interpretation services into, and from, a wide range of minority languages.
- Tackling racial harassment
- Developing a Race Equality Scheme, which includes an Action Plan outlining specific actions to promote racial equality and prevent discrimination
- The council's Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy sets out the procedure for dealing with any employee complaints of bullying or harassment including those on racial grounds
- Complaints of a racial nature relating to the council's service provision can be raised via council's corporate complaints procedure
- Issues relating to racist incidents unrelated to the council are also signposted to the Police and/or the North Wales Race Equality Network.

Denbighshire is a member of the North Wales Race Equality Network (NWREN) which has been set up to:

- Encourage the development of race equality work and better race relations in North Wales
- Support initiatives to challenge racial discrimination against individuals and groups
- Increase awareness of the impact of racism and prejudice on people's lives in North Wales

- Promote opportunities for race equality education, training and action planning among the public, voluntary and private sectors
- Increase the awareness of the ability of all racial groups to make a positive contribution to a successful and diverse community within North Wales.

NWREN enables better consultation with BME groups and supports organisations like DCC in understanding the needs of different communities in North Wales. They have also recently appointed a new Project Development Outreach Worker.

(v) Specific BME Work by Social Housing Landlords

People from an ethnic background are under represented on the both the council's housing waiting list and the County's Low Cost Homeownership list. These lists will be monitored and ways to encourage applications from BME groups investigated. As highlighted earlier the local RSLs are developing a BME housing action plan, further details about which can be obtained at www.nwrep.co.uk. Both the council's and RSL's tenancy agreements include clauses prohibiting racial harassment.

10.4 Gypsies and Travellers

(i) National context

A significant amount of national research has recently been undertaken in relation to Gypsies and Travellers. WAG research in 2006 revealed, that Wales' 2,000 Gypsies and Travellers, are one of the country's most socially excluded groups. There is also a need to develop a variety of different types of accommodation for this group, including 150-200 Local Authority site places, 50 private site places, and 50-100 units of bricks and mortar housing. This provision needs to include both transient and permanent sites.

This ethnic group has the poorest life chances of any ethnic group in Britain today, due in part to the significant shortage of authorised transit and permanent sites.

(ii) Regional Context

Within the North Wales region there are three authorised Gypsy and Travellers' sites providing permanent pitches in Gwynedd, Wrexham and Flintshire. Denbighshire as part of the North West Wales LHMA group (see **section 5.9**) is proposing to complete a specific study into the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers by June 2008.

(iii) Denbighshire

Under the Housing Act 2004, Local Authorities are required to assess the accommodation needs and plan strategically to meet those needs. There are no authorised Gypsy and Travellers' sites within Denbighshire, but over recent years there have been a number of unauthorised encampments. Two Gypsy and Traveller caravan counts have been undertaken over the last year. They identified four caravans upon an unauthorised site within the County in June 2006 and zero

caravans in January 2007. Specific Gypsy and Traveller research is required regionally and the Knowledge Transfer Initiative (Bangor University) will be investigating the possibility shortly. A robust evidence base is required before an effective strategic plan can be fully developed.

The council's Education Department have provided educational support to twenty six Gypsy and Traveller children in the last twelve months and offer assistance to children on unauthorised encampments. Conwy and Denbighshire work very closely on this issue and are incorporating a regional approach for consultation events. The council have also recently established a corporate Gypsy and Traveller group to assess the authority's response to meeting any identified needs.

10.5 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

(i) **National**

The Home Office provides assistance for Asylum Seekers and Refugees through its national dispersal scheme. Wrexham is one of the four clusters for dispersal in Wales.

These groups represent a small population in Wales and are located mainly in larger urban areas according to WAG research (2005), which was based on Census data. WAG has recently consulted on its Refugee Inclusion Strategy, which sets out its vision and a three year strategy.

(ii) **Regional**

Refugees following a positive decision need upon their leave to stay, need to secure accommodation in their dispersal area or another part of the United Kingdom. As a neighbouring authority, Wrexham's status as a dispersal area may have some as yet unquantified impact upon housing demand within Denbighshire. Anecdotal evidence suggests however that the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees are very small. Based on this available evidence it would appear that this group has a minor impact on the housing market within Denbighshire.

(iv) **Denbighshire**

The council received homelessness applications from three asylum seekers and three refugees between June 2005 and January 2007. Procedures are in place to deal with such applications and each is assessed on a case-by-case basis. Independent advice can be obtained from the Immigration Advisory Service or Welsh Refugee Council. More research into this area is needed at national, regional and local levels.

10.6 Migrant Workers

(i) **National**

There is an emerging national policy from WAG in relation to the needs of migrant workers. There is anecdotal evidence that migrant workers in Wales tend to be young and single. Often they move to the United Kingdom in order to provide financial assistance to their families back home and in these circumstances, the move is generally temporary.

(ii) **Regional**

Official figures from the National Insurance Reading System (2006), suggest there are 500 non-UK nationals registered for Denbighshire. This figure is lower than in Conwy (550), Flintshire (730) and Wrexham (1400). It is highly likely to be an underestimate of the total number of migrant workers, as people sometimes fail to register with the appropriate authorities. Wrexham County Borough Council estimates they have significantly greater numbers of migrant workers within the County and have developed specific literature targeted towards them. The numbers of migrant workers in Wrexham are likely to influence the Southern Denbighshire housing market. Further localised research is required upon this area.

(iii) **Denbighshire**

The council has received approximately ten enquiries about council housing in the last twelve months from migrant workers. Partnership working with the Police and Fire Service has suggested that there are concentrations of generally single people between 18 - 34 years old living within the private rented sector in Rhyl West and Denbigh. The majority of these migrant workers are from a Polish or Lithuanian background (A8 countries). Private landlords are increasingly specialising in providing accommodation for these migrant workers. This may cause issues in terms of fire safety and the quality of the accommodation provided particularly for those in houses in multiple occupation.

10.7 Older People Provision

(i) **Denbighshire**

Denbighshire has the second highest proportion of older people in Wales and this proportion is increasing. This group has a high profile in the County and the significant number of consultation events. The range of housing options for older people has significantly increased since the previous LHS in 2004. The extra care scheme currently under construction in Rhyl and private older person's accommodation in Llangollen, means that older people have more choice in terms of accommodation type and where they choose to live. These options are in addition to the more traditional housing options such as sheltered accommodation and residential care.

The older persons' agenda is pushing forward in a number of ways:

- Increasing political power of older people (increasing proportion of the population)
- Denbighshire's Older Persons Strategy
- The County's Older Persons Partnership Board (OPPB) allows housing and various health professional and voluntary agencies to discuss older people issues and inform policy
- An OPPB Housing sub-group has been developed
- Councillor Pauline Dobb is the County's champion for Older People and council Lead Member with responsibility for housing and health
- The work of voluntary agencies including Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council and Age Concern through various forums and events

10.8 Young People

Housing is a strategic priority within the Young Persons Partnership (YPP) Annual Delivery Plan. This highlights the need for audit of housing needs of young people in the YPP area is up-to-date and develop an action plan. The key linkage with this plan is the delivery of supported housing necessary to meet the needs of young people. Specific consultation with young people has highlighted the importance of Gypsies and Travellers. The Head of Housing regularly attends Young Person Partnership meetings. The Housing panel is being established to bring together Supporting People, Social Services and Housing to discuss specific cases and future plan support and accommodation. This is specifically targeted at young people and especially care leavers to ensure all relevant parties are present to discuss the necessary action.

Please refer to the Denbighshire Operational Plan – some actions are mainstreamed and others are contained in the equalities section.

10.9 Disabled people

One in three people in Denbighshire has a disability (Census 2001). A list of persons from the private sector, Council and RSL tenants requiring a specifically adapted or built property is held by Social Services. Using this information we negotiate specific provision wherever possible for disabled people and currently have approximately seven properties in the pipeline. These properties will mainly be bungalows in Llandrillo, Ruthin, Meliden and Rhyl and will meet Lifetime Homes standards. Existing properties can be adapted through Disabled Facility Grants and specific funding for Council and RSL tenants. The Affordable Housing Liaison Group have been utilised by Social Services to link in RSLs to specify their requirements in terms of supported housing. The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act have

meant offices of the Council and RSLs have had to meet specific criteria to ensure access for disabled people.

Please refer to the Equalities section of the completed and ongoing operational plans for further information.

10.10 Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)

Welsh Assembly Government research “The housing needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales” (2006) into this diverse group has revealed:

- Harassment in and around the home was the most prolific cause of housing problems
- Homophobia was a significant cause of housing problems
- A lack of resources and help can lead to them leaving the home to avoid further harassment
- Those participants located in shared housing or renting privately often experienced problems around sharing communal areas
- The majority of LGB participants in the survey did not seek or receive assistance from statutory or voluntary housing support services
- Homelessness and living in insecure accommodation increases levels of vulnerability for LGB people.

Further investigation into the methods of monitoring and circumstances of this group is needed.

10.10 Strategic Housing Objectives and Targets

Please refer to strategic objective three within the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**) for key projects and targets relating to homelessness. Actions for all other groups have been mainstreamed across all sections of the Operational Plan, with certain specific targets contained within strategic objective five.

11. SUPPORTING PEOPLE

11.1 Supporting People involves providing housing-related support services for a wide range of vulnerable groups, a key priority within this strategy. The council's Supporting People and Housing Strategy teams work closely with the local RSLs to develop projects and specialised accommodation for vulnerable people. Increasingly however, services are being delivered in the private rented sector due to the general shortage of council and RSL accommodation.

11.2 Supporting People Operational Plan

The Supporting People Operational Plan (SPOP) identifies priorities and gaps in service provision. This plan is monitored by the multi-agency Supporting People Planning Group (steering group). The main elements from the SPOP have been mainstreamed within this LHS. The SPOP has seen WAG funding cut by 11.5% for 2006/7 and is facing the possibility of a substantial further reduction in funding. There is therefore a requirement to review and prioritise all existing and proposed future projects. Further information is available at www.denbighshire.gov.uk – under S for Supporting People (A-Z listing).

11.3 Strategic Approach

The SPOP has been developed through a process of ongoing consultation with key stakeholders and client groups within Denbighshire and North Wales. This has included local forums, council committees, RSLs, the Homelessness Forum, the Young People's Partnership, Denbighshire Drug and Alcohol Forum and voluntary agencies. Consultation across both North Wales and the County has consistently identified that a lack of suitable accommodation is the number one priority for Supporting People.

11.4 Client groups

The current priority projects for Supporting People to develop are outlined in **Appendix C**.

11.5 Cross boundary issues

Developing cross boundary services has been seen as one way of minimising the impact of the Supporting People budget cuts within Denbighshire. Denbighshire is an active participant within the North Wales Supporting People Information Network. This network, which regularly meets to discuss common issues and cross boundary projects, includes Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey. Specific initiatives have included the North Wales Supporting People Forum away day which is developing a North Wales Strategy for substance misuse. Denbighshire and Conwy have also launched an Integrated Mental Health Service that covers both counties. The Supporting People team have also made links with Flintshire and Wrexham with a view to developing some cross boundary work on the needs of people with HIV and travellers.

11.6 Interface between capital and revenue funding

Regular discussions between the council's Supporting People and Housing Strategy teams ensure that the necessary revenue funding is in place before bids are made to WAG for Social Housing Grant to deliver specialist schemes. Working in conjunction with the local RSLs a number of successful joint project bids have been made including the Doorstop project, which provides six dispersed units for people with substance misuse issues. A number of specialised units across the County are also in the pipeline. Working with key partners, the Supporting People team consult closely with local communities when seeking to develop more specialist schemes. This is to ensure that residents are fully aware of the purpose of any scheme and the quality of support to be provided. The intention being to reduce the incidence of nimbyism towards such schemes, which may be based upon false assumptions, rumour or conjecture.

11.7 Strategic Interaction

The vision of the SPOP and the LHS are intrinsically linked in seeking to meet the needs, specialised or otherwise, of all groups within the County. Mainstreaming the homelessness strategy within the LHS has also meant that a wide range of agencies/organisations providing Supporting People services have contributed in the development of the Operational Plan. The Supporting People team have been directly involved through the Homelessness Forum (bi-annual) and the homelessness action plan sub-group.

Other important groups/forums that interface with the Supporting People agenda include the mental Health Strategic Planning Group, Domestic Abuse Forum, Age Concern's Forum of forums, the Health Social Care and Wellbeing needs assessment working group and the North Wales Substance Misuse Forum.

11.8 Strategic housing objectives and targets

Please refer to strategic objective three within the Operational Plan for key projects and targets relating to homelessness. Other Supporting People actions have been mainstreamed across all sections of the Operational Plan (**Appendix E**).

12. DENBIGHSHIRE OPERATIONAL PLANS

- 12.1 The Denbighshire Operational Plans (**Appendix E & F**) set out a range of ongoing and completed actions for this strategy. The six strategic LHS objectives are detailed in **Section 3.6**. Under each strategic housing objective there are actions and targets.
- 12.2 The Denbighshire Operational plan includes details of the partners involved for each strategic objective.
- 12.3 Wherever possible key projects and targets on Homelessness, Supporting People and BME issues are mainstreamed across the Operational Plans.
- 12.4 The Operational Plans will be updated on an annual basis and will be available via the council's website or on request through the Housing Strategy Team.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The revised strategic assessment (see **section 3**) has meant halving the number of strategic objectives and developing a new housing vision for this updated LHS. Significant progress has also been made since the previous LHS was produced in 2004. All partners involved should be proud of their achievements but there is still a substantial amount of work to be undertaken (see attached Operational Plans).
- 13.2 Housing projects have become increasingly regional in nature, sharing both resources, expertise and maximising capacity. Ongoing regional work such as the Local Housing Market Assessments will improve our understanding of local housing markets and influence future policy.
- 13.3 The council's Affordable Housing Policy has been a significant breakthrough in increasing the housing opportunities available to local people. This policy has been highlighted as an example of good practice by WAG, Housemark and the Chartered Institute of Housing. The emerging Local Development Plan will also be crucial in determining future affordable housing development. The ability to designate sites for 100% affordable housing is an option being considered as part of the process.
- 13.4 The private sector plays a key part within the local housing system and the council's Private Sector House Condition survey due to be completed in late 2007, will influence future policy.
- 13.5 Both sustainable development and energy efficiency have risen up the political agenda as part of the wider climate change debate. Improving the quality and design of future housing developments can contribute towards this process and the council will review the minimum standards of all new affordable housing.
- 13.6 Homelessness remains a key priority with work increasingly focusing upon prevention.
- 13.7 Supporting People projects are facing an uncertain future with imminent spending cuts that will have a detrimental affect on some of the most vulnerable people in society.
- 13.8 Further research is needed to better understand the housing facing minority groups such as Gypsy and Travellers. A high level commitment is also required with all housing organisations to promote equal access to all our services.
- 13.9 The key part of this strategy is the attached Operational Plans (**Appendix E & F**), which are essential reading. The process of monitoring and updating the Operational Plans will be undertaken every year, thereby continuing the process of annual updating established in 2004.