IT’S ALL IN THE MIX: A HOUSING STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum
Draft June 2007
Foreword

We are proud to present ‘It’s all in the mix’: a Housing Strategy for Torfaen.

We hope that two things will immediately capture the attention of the reader. The first being our Local Housing Strategy is a local one and not a local authority one. It has been informed and developed over a period of time by the multi-agency Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum – a strategic alliance which has shown an un-rivalled commitment to promoting the importance of housing issues in Torfaen for 4 years. The strength of our 2006/7 Housing Evidence Days event, which has formed the basis of this Strategy, is testament to our success and integrity as a partnership.

The second highlight is the title of our strategy. ‘It’s all in the mix’ is symbolic of a LHS that is more than a paper based document. It is a framework for action that is steeped in the fundamental belief that housing is about more than just the straightforward provision of homes: it is about people and therefore it is about balanced and viable communities.

Our LHS is one which, thus recognises that Housing is uniquely placed to influence and deliver a wide range of non housing policies and objectives. Housing is cause and effect of economic prosperity; it is a driver for area regeneration and community cohesion and it underpins the health and wellbeing of our communities.

With countless challenges facing Housing in Torfaen over the next 5 years and beyond, we recognise the inherent opportunities to provide good quality homes for all in ways that harness regeneration benefits, boost the local economy, help conserve and protect our environment and improve social wellbeing. To achieve this we acknowledge and accept that continued strong strategic leadership will be key to our future success.

Our Local Housing Strategy aims to position Housing within this important broader social and economic context. Housing is not a bricks and mortar issue: it is a quality of life issue. Housing is not solely a local issue: it is has a clear cross-boundary dimension. Housing is not just a place shaper: it is a place maker. Housing is not a peripheral issue: it is a central issue. We hope that these messages are reinforced and exemplified as you read on.

We commend this Strategy to you because we believe it represents vision and commitment and most of all – a reinvigorated and vital role for Housing in Torfaen.

Cllr Gwyneira Clark
Chair, Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum
Setting the Scene: Living in Torfaen

Torfaen is the most easterly of the South Wales Valleys and has an estimated population of 90,949. The area comprises of the three main urban centres of Cwmbran, Pontypool and Blaenavon. Declining iron and coal industries in areas of Pontypool and Blaenavon have historically resulted in social and economic declines in the surrounding communities. Although a wealth of initiatives are underway to renew and regenerate these areas and in the majority of cases have yielded significant success, Cwmbran the most southerly settlement has traditionally been the focal point of growth since its New Town status in 1949. The largest of the urban centres with a population of 48,000 the area is characterised by industrial and high quality commercial development and is promoted internationally as a prime location for inward investors. In relation to areas of Mid and North Torfaen in more recent times, it is important to note that change is afoot and in many cases has been driven by rising house prices which have effectively ‘rescued’ many low demand areas and encouraged the arrival of the private sector.

In terms of age structure, the population composition is similar to that of Wales as a whole. Black and Minority Ethnic groups make up some 2% of the population.

In relation to housing stock, the estimated total stock is some 39,000 dwellings. Nearly 70% of this is owned outright or with a mortgage. 4% falls within the private rented sector and 26% is social rented. Torfaen has, proportionately, the second largest social housing stock in Wales. 33% our market housing is terraced, but almost all detached homes are in the market sector. 43% of all social housing is terraced but almost all flats and maisonettes are in the social sector. Nearly 12% of all dwellings are currently unfit, compared with the Welsh average of 8.5% and almost 23% of our homes pre-date 1919. The average house price in Torfaen currently stands at £136,000 (Quarter 4, 2006).

Figure 1 Shows the Increase in Average house price over the past 10 year in Torfaen
Torfaen contains areas of real social deprivation – particularly in the South West area of the County Borough and parts of Mid and North Torfaen. Eight out of twenty five wards within the County Borough feature within the top quartile of the most deprived wards in Wales in relation to health deprivation, mental health and disability. 17% of Torfaen’s population as a whole has a limiting long-term illness or disability – compared with 16% for Wales overall.

Of the working age population, 34.6% are registered as economically inactive. Unemployment however, continues to decline. 50% of the population of Torfaen aged over 50 possess no formal qualifications. For the young population, 20% of everyone in the 25-49 age brackets has the equivalent to a degree of higher. The most commonly occurring household income range in Torfaen currently is £15-20k.
1. DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGY
OUR VISION AND AIMS FOR
HOUSING IN TORFAEN
Vision

Our vision has been formed in response to the overarching vision for Housing in Wales as set out in the National Housing Strategy (2001) ‘Better Homes for People in Wales’, which is to

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

Our vision is also one which responds to a wider central and Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) vision for community cohesion and sustainability. This view and resultant vision and priorities have been informed and formulated by a wide range of housing and non housing stakeholders. This includes both housing providers and consumers and also organisations and individuals’ whose services and experiences impact upon or are impacted upon by, housing. Our strategic direction has therefore been developed through looking at the broader role played by housing in Torfaen and the ways in which it acts as a catalyst for social mobility, driver for regeneration, facilitator of environmental improvement and a spur for better health and wellbeing. Housing is not and cannot be a standalone function or service. Housing goes to the heart of the ‘communities’ agenda and jobs, transport, health, community safety and environment are all intrinsic parts of the picture.

A Local Housing Strategy that reflects such inherent linkages within its vision is one which, we feel will be effective and worthwhile:

Torfaen will become a place in which everyone is able to meet their housing requirement and in turn, realise their wider social and economic potential.

Evidence & Engagement

Our priorities for Housing in Torfaen have been informed in the first instance by the evidence base established through our Housing Market Assessment. In addition, from intelligence gathered through our Private and Public Sector House Condition Surveys, Supporting People Needs Mapping, homelessness statistics, Key Performance Indicators and a range of sub-strategies such as the Black and Minority Ethnic and Older Persons’ Strategy.

In the second instance our Strategic Housing Forum held a Local Housing Strategy ‘Evidence Days’ event in February 2007, to which more than 90 stakeholders representing over 50 services, agencies and consumers attended. The purpose of the event was to present core evidence, to ‘reality check’ emerging issues and findings and identify strategic priorities for Housing in Torfaen over the next 5 years. Evidence Days was the culmination of preparatory work undertaken by the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum over the last 12-18 months. This included involvement in consultation exercises for the Community Strategy, sessions with local community councils and day to day contact with service ‘users’, such as those households seeking housing advice, and applicants for our Help2Own scheme.
Aims

The process described above has enabled the formulation of 8 core aims; these are supplemented and supported by further key objectives which are embodied within this Strategy:

1. To improve the supply and affordability of homes through the development of a broader range of housing options & ‘products’
2. To improve the quality and suitability of all housing in Torfaen
3. To tackle homelessness and ensure appropriate housing and support is available for vulnerable people and those with special requirements
4. To ensure access for all to good quality housing advice and promote an approach that is based upon housing options, flexibility & choice
5. To deliver core aims, 1, 2, 3 & 4 in ways which seek to optimise the regeneration, socio-economic and wellbeing gains to the wider community
6. To demonstrate and develop the ‘wider’ role of housing and key connections both across administrative and professional boundaries as a means of attracting greater housing investment
7. To exemplify the fundamental role played by housing in creating communities in which people want to live, work and play

And finally,

8. To achieve all of the above through strengthening and reinforcing the local authority strategic housing role

Monitoring our Strategy

The Housing Operational Plan provides the practical means through which our Strategy will be monitored. The Strategic Housing Forum plays a key role in the monitoring and review of targets set out in the Operational Plan. The Forum meets on a quarterly basis and will receive reports relating to progress, significant policy developments & financial forecasting.

Annually the review mechanism will be ‘Evidence Days’. This will ensure priorities remain current & relevant and that all necessary partners are engaged in delivery.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Given the high level nature of our Strategy, a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not deemed necessary; however we recognise that SEA principles remain relevant to many of the aims listed above, in particular in the more operational process of delivery of aims. We continue to work closely with planning in the preparation phases of the Local Development Plan and the call for candidate sites process seems to provide the strongest link between our Housing Strategy and SEA.

The potential impact of the required scale of new housing in Torfaen is likely to be significant for the environment. However, this is considered and set out in the LDP Strategic Options Paper (2007) and will be further covered in forthcoming Sustainability Appraisal Reports.
2. OUR MAIN PRINCIPLES & FRAMEWORK FOR OPERATION
Introduction

‘It’s all in the mix’, is Torfaen’s 5 year Housing Strategy. This framework builds upon the aims and priorities set out in its forerunner ‘Better Homes, Better Lives’ and sets out our new vision and aims for Housing in Torfaen to 2012.

Stronger Strategic Housing Role

The section begins with commentary on the locally based strategic housing function as we firmly see this as a pre-requisite to delivering on all housing issues and challenges set out in our strategy. The main principle of our LHS is establishing a clear framework that is the principal means through which the LA and its partners can assess, plan and meet the housing requirements of Torfaen. This places a strong emphasis on the need for strategic leadership and therefore the skills and capacity required within the strategic housing function to organise local priorities and co-ordinate actions to deliver them. The ‘renaissance’ of the strategic housing role at both central and Welsh Assembly Government levels is something we have played a direct role in informing and developing. This comes back to our core belief that the success of all housing in Wales is dependent upon the success of the LA strategic function. Fundamentally we recognise that providing the backdrop against which local partners can effectively operate and perform – underpins an optimally functioning housing market, which in turn underpins optimally functioning communities.

We remain committed to further developing our strategic housing role in the context of this need to oversee housing markets.

- **At the local level** we will do this via the continued development and strengthening of our retained housing function post transfer of council homes in 2008.
- **At the regional level** we will do this through our ongoing lead role in the SEW Regional Housing Forum, our part in the Wales Spatial Plan and our inclusion within the Heads of the Valleys Programme.
- **At the national level** we will continue to play a prominent role alongside the Chartered Institute of Housing in Wales and Welsh Local Government Association in informing the development of national housing, planning and wellbeing policy and thereby ensuring the ‘wider’ role of Housing is promoted and reinforced.

National Housing Strategy

A review of the National Housing Strategy (2001) ‘Better Homes for People in Wales’, was undertaken in 2004 and Torfaen was one of three LAs represented on the review panel. The review placed a firm emphasis on the overarching strategic housing function and the importance of the LHS framework in setting out priorities to assist achievement of national aims. Key themes and priorities addressed in the National Housing Strategy will be replicated throughout our Strategy, albeit in the context of how and why they are important to Torfaen.
However as we await a revised and more up to date National Strategy, it is important to reflect on developments occurring since 2001 and the ways in which Housing now forms part of the broader land use planning framework (Planning Policy Wales 2002), the economic development context (Wales a Vibrant Country 2005), the health and wellbeing (Health of the Nation 2003) and Communities agendas (Wales: A Better Country 2003). Unifying all of this and forming a further prominent influence is Making the Connections (2004).

Against the backdrop of the forthcoming UK-wide Comprehensive Spending Review and a body of work aimed at making a wider case for increased investment in housing – it follows that our LHS will adopt the same principle. This is not about detracting from our raison d’etre: Housing. It is simply about demonstrating a richer interpretation of what we do and what Housing in Wales today actually means.

The Regional Dimension

Housing markets transcend geographical and administrative boundaries. Torfaen’s continued lead role in the SE Wales Regional Housing Forum (SEWRHF) has helped develop a new way of understanding housing markets and heralded a new dawn for local authority collaboration, now so important in the context of Beyond Boundaries.

In 2005 the Forum commissioned research into the regional housing market. The findings have been used to support further detailed local level work and to inform broader initiatives such as the Wales Spatial Plan. Essentially, the study found that SE Wales is characterised by 5 main housing markets: the rural Monmouthshire, M4 Corridor, North M4, Mid Valleys and Heads of the Valleys Housing Markets. Contrary to the traditional policy unit structure of SE Wales comprising 10 local authorities organised from South to North, the 5 identified housing markets cut across this picture east to west.

Given the dynamic nature of housing markets it is possible for a LA area to have operating within it more than one housing market type. In Torfaen there are 3 varying housing market types: the M4 corridor market embodying most of Cwmbran and parts of South Pontypool; the mid valleys housing market containing most of Pontypool and part of Mid Torfaen and the Heads of the Valleys market representing the majority of North Torfaen.

This approach to understanding housing markets has helped highlight the need for integrated policy making and the growing links between regional housing and land use issues. Moreover, our belief that similar interventions will work in similar housing market types, has paved the way for the future establishment of shared services. This is critical given the chief finding of the study suggests 18,500 affordable homes are required in SE Wales by 2010.

The next phase for SEWRHF is to use this information to create a practically based ‘Regional Housing Market Model’. Furthermore, we continue to work with the Welsh Assembly to secure two regional Housing Enabler posts for SE Wales to assist delivery of affordable housing targets. The context of regional working has underpinned the development of our LHS at every stage. Our
belief is that it is impossible to properly understand local issues without understanding the wider backdrop against which they have first emerged.

Local Community Priorities

The work of the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum has elevated the status of Housing in Torfaen. Housing now features as one of the top 5 priorities within Torfaen CBC’s Corporate Plan 2006: To improve the quality, variety, affordability and supply of housing and to reduce the level of homelessness.

Torfaen’s Community Strategy produced following a lengthy and inclusive period of public engagement in 2006 aims to ‘create opportunities that enable people to make decisions that will improve quality of life’. The Strategy provides an overview of current housing issues and reports back on matters raised through the community engagement process. Issues surrounding rising house prices and affordability are highlighted along with quality of housing and the ability of older people in particular to maintain their standard of housing. The explicit priority within the Strategy is for everyone to have access to a decent home, whether renting or buying, at a price they can afford and in a community in which they wish to live, yet at the same time, house prices keeping pace with national average increases.

The key benefits associated with achieving this core objective by 2015 are:

- People are able to find housing in the communities of their choice
- Numbers of homeless people are reduced
- People are happier because they can afford housing in a community of their choice
- Communities are more sustainable because they have diverse populations
- People are healthier and have a better quality of life because their homes are in good condition.

In relation to implementation of the Community Strategy, a number of Quality of Indicators has been produced for each output area. For housing these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of homelessness applications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted definition of genuinely affordable housing – house price/earning affordability ratios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of housing completions/ designated as ‘affordable homes’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of unfit homes (per 1000 dwellings) – all tenures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partners

Across Boundaries

The diagram below sets out the relationship between the different partnerships, in which Torfaen is currently involved and how this informs and shapes local level strategic housing working. Implicit within this broad framework, which includes 10 key partnerships across various interest and
professional groups and straddles national, regional and the local context, is Making the Connections.

The relationship between the various partnerships highlights the different levels at which interaction and engagement takes place: from the national to the local level. However, this does not imply a top down approach. Our local level partnership – the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum plays as big a role in the upwards feeding of ideas, initiatives and overall direction to national & regional groups, as do the national and regional groups in influencing local policies and issues. Whilst inclusion within and linkages with 10 main partnerships might at first sound onerous, our membership of the SE Wales Regional Housing Forum means that representation responsibilities are shared between members. Currently, the process in place works well; information is shared, ideas are exchanged and cross-professional and cross-boundary challenges and opportunities are shared.
Across Services

At the local level the diagram below further illustrates the linkages within Torfaen in relation to Housing and in particular between Housing (Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum) and other local and sub-locally based alliances.

Set in the context of Plan Rationalisation and the overarching prominence of the Torfaen Community Strategy, Housing has a central place within the local framework as a first tier partnership and this position is to remain, post Stock Transfer and post full implementation of the Local Government Plan Rationalisation.

The Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum has been in operation for nearly four years and was established in 2003 in the run-up to the production of the 2004 Local Housing Strategy. It has over 50 members representing some 40+ different agencies & individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Sector</th>
<th>Private Sector</th>
<th>Voluntary Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen LHB</td>
<td>Home Builders’ Federation</td>
<td>Torfaen Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen Partnership</td>
<td>Council of Mortgage Lenders – Nationwide BS</td>
<td>Torfaen Voluntary Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Young Persons’ Partnership</td>
<td>Private Landlords Forum representative</td>
<td>Torfaen Womens’ Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen Public Health</td>
<td>Local estate agents – Roberts &amp; Co</td>
<td>Torfaen Young Persons’ Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen Planning</td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Housing</td>
<td>Torfaen Tenant Compact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen Regeneration</td>
<td>Persimmon Homes</td>
<td>Torfaen Friends of the Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Valleys Programme</td>
<td>Bellway Homes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen Social Care</td>
<td>Taylor Woodrow Homes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENUUS – RSL consortia</td>
<td>Lovell Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bron Afon Community Housing</td>
<td>Redrow Homes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Evidence Days’

The Strategic Housing Forum meets on a quarterly basis and once a year holds an inclusive ‘Evidence Days’ event to consider key intelligence that underpins the formulation of future strategic themes and priorities. Evidence is presented by keynote or guest speakers on prominent Local Housing Strategy themes:- the local and regional housing markets, land use and planning, RSL sector, private sector, public sector, regeneration, equalities, health and wellbeing, homelessness and supporting people and communities. Following all presentations of evidence, delegates participate in discussion groups to identify emerging priorities for action. These are then worked up into core strategic priorities. Feedback from the event has consistently been positive and the concept has also been adopted by neighbouring authorities as a mechanism through which inclusive and meaningful strategic engagement
can take place. The resultant report from the 2006/07 has formed the basis of our Strategy. A full copy of the report is appended to this document.

Aside from forming an important part of the wider Torfaen strategic partnership framework, the Strategic Housing Forum also provides a strong sense of overall strategic direction for the full range of housing sub-strategic partnerships and alliances:

- Torfaen/GENuS Joint Strategic & Operational Groups
- Private Landlords Forum
- Torfaen Tenant Compact Group
- Supporting People Partnership
- Homelessness Strategy Group
- Other theme/project specific task and finish groups

**Other Interfaces and Influences** – see diagram below

Making the Connections (2004) – cross boundary & cross service collaboration


Better Homes for People in Wales (2001) – Wales’s first national housing strategy

Wales a Vibrant Economy (2005): Increasing economic potential of Wales


SE Wales Regional Housing Market Assessment (2005) – 18,500 affordable homes required over 5 year period

SE Wales Spatial Plan Interim Statement (2007) - framework for driving prosperity & regeneration in SE Wales

Community Strategy 2006 – Torfaen Partnership

Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Strategy & Partnership

Local Housing Strategy & Strategic Housing Forum

Children & Young Persons Plan & Partnership

Local Development Plan 1991-2006

SPOP & SP Planning Group

BME Housing Strategy

Private Sector Renewal Strategy & Forum

Homelessness Strategy & Forum

GENuS Procurement Plan & Strategic Group
3. OUR HOUSING MARKET AND LAND USE CONTEXT
Understanding Our Local Housing System

Working Principles

Our ability to effectively enact the LA strategic housing role is steeped in our ability to understand the housing market in which we seek to intervene. Establishing the dynamics and trends at work within the broader housing system is thus, essential in terms of providing the context in which partners and delivery agents can successfully operate and deliver. With guidance on how to undertake Housing Market Assessments (HMAs) changing to reflect the need to take a more holistic approach to understanding housing requirements, the message that strategic LAs should be overseers of housing markets (i.e. ALL housing) is rightly reinforced.

With this need to take a broad approach to understanding the needs and requirements of all cross sections of our communities, the linkages between the Housing and Planning functions in Torfaen grow increasingly close. The planning system is a key housing enabling tool not just because it facilitates the delivery of affordable housing, but because it provides an essential overview of land use and supply for ALL housing. As a result, whilst the HMA plays a fundamental role in underpinning the LHS, it plays a further key role in informing the Local Development Plan. The recently commissioned Housing Market Assessment has therefore been led and owned by both the Housing and Planning functions within Torfaen.

One of the most striking features of housing markets is that they do not respect local authority administrative boundaries. Housing markets are fluid and dynamic phenomena and with unprecedented house price increases hitting hard the SE Wales area over the last 5 years – it is now clearer than ever that people do not base housing choices on LA areas. In order to properly understand the trends and issues at the local level, a working principle has been the clear need to first understand the wider backdrop giving rise to local issues and trends. As a result, our assessment of the housing market has been undertaken in partnership with Newport City and Monmouthshire County Councils.

The Local/Sub-regional Housing Market

Housing Market Areas are defined as being the geographical area in which a substantial majority of the employed population both live and work and where those moving house without changing employment choose to stay. In the context of local migration and travel to work patterns, the Torfaen-Newport-Monmouthshire sub-region satisfies the definition of a Housing Market Area. However within this broad area, a number of smaller housing market sub-areas also exist and are in operation. Within the broad Housing Market Area, 7 sub-market areas can be identified, 3 of which characterise Torfaen: North Torfaen Housing Market, Pontypool Housing Market and the Cwmbran Housing Market.
Figure 2 - The 7 Housing Market areas
Housing Need

The Local Development plan will address housing numbers for the county borough on the basis of information from SEWPG and the local housing assessment which is contained within this chapter. Therefore the information below is subject to ratification via the LDP process inclusive of SEA/ AA and SA.

An important element of housing requirements is housing need – households without their own housing or living in homes which are unsuitable, who are unlikely to meet their needs in the housing market without some form of assistance. For the Torfaen-Newport-Monmouthshire HMA a total of 19,145 households were assessed as living in unsuitable housing. ‘Unsuitability’ problems are defined as: tenancy/mortgage under notice, accommodation too expensive, over-crowding, sharing facilities, children in high rise flats, home too difficult to maintain, support needs, condition of dwelling or amenity problems, separation from partner and neighbour problems/harassment. As set out below, both in overall and individual sub-market terms, Torfaen has the highest proportion of households in unsuitable housing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub- Market Area</th>
<th>No of households in unsuitable housing</th>
<th>% of households in unsuitable housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Torfaen</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontypool</td>
<td>2,049</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cwmbran</td>
<td>3,189</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abergavenny</td>
<td>1,522</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>1,652</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>7,952</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepstow &amp; Caldicot</td>
<td>1,761</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19,145</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Households however may not need to move to resolve identified problems as in-situ solutions may be appropriate such as repairs, extensions to dwellings or a household member leaving. In addition, a proportion of the households will be able to buy or rent an appropriate dwelling at (or above) threshold market prices. After discounting households whose needs do not require alternative housing provision in the sub-region or can afford housing in the private sector, only 2,521 of the identified 19,145 remain (13.2%).

Overall Requirements: Planning for Housing in the Sub-region

In the context of inward and outward household flows, it is apparent that up to a net 5,489 additional dwellings are required over the 5 year period to sustain the existing supply/demand balance in the sub-region.

On the basis of current SE Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) figures, the sub-region of Torfaen, Newport & Monmouthshire has been provisionally allocated a total of 24,840 additional dwellings (subject to final production of LDPs) to be delivered 2003-2021. Of this allocation, 2525 units
were delivered in the period 2003-06 leaving a target of 22,315 to be delivered over the remaining 15 years.

**SEWSPG Allocations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Allocation</th>
<th>Newport</th>
<th>Monmouthshire</th>
<th>Torfaen</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET ADDITIONAL DWELLINGS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total allocation 2003-2021</td>
<td>12,100</td>
<td>6,140</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>24,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery 2003-06</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>1,015</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Target 2006-2021</td>
<td>10,890</td>
<td>5,125</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>22,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual rate of provision required to meet residual target</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>1,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned 5 year dwelling provision</td>
<td>3,630</td>
<td>1,708</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>7,438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By matching housing need and demand (gross requirements) against supply – the total housing requirement can be broken down by housing type as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Type</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Affordable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 YEAR REQUIREMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross housing requirement</td>
<td>37,872</td>
<td>3,846</td>
<td>17,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing supply</td>
<td>33,154</td>
<td>3,053</td>
<td>15,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Housing Requirement</td>
<td>4,718</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>1,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of affordable housing required in the sub-region is **37% equating to some 2,720 dwellings**. Broken down by housing type – 11% of this is intermediate housing and 26% is social rented. The remaining 4,718 units are market housing, bringing the total net requirement to 7,438 units in line with the SEWSPG provisional allocation.
Torfaen Housing Requirement

When considering the 5 year total dwelling requirement by the three sub-market areas within Torfaen:

- Net Housing Requirement for Cwmbran = 1,099
- Net Housing Requirement for Pontypool = 866
- Net Housing Requirement for N Torfaen = 313
- **Total Housing Requirement Torfaen = 2278**

Again, broken down by housing type or ‘mix’ in each of these housing sub-market areas, the requirement is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Year Requirement</th>
<th>Net Housing Requirement</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Affordable – Intermediate</th>
<th>Affordable - Social</th>
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Housing Requirements of Gypsies and Travellers

The housing issues pertaining to the above warranted particular attention within the sub-regional market assessment, partly due to the scarcity of current data. The 2001 Census did not record gypsies and travellers as a separate ethnic group and relatively few qualitative studies exist.

A multi-methodological approach was taken to assessing the housing issues of gypsies and travellers across Torfaen, Newport and Monmouthshire and also Blaenau Gwent. The starting point was the caravan count undertaken by WAG in 2006 which showed some 56 caravans are ‘privately rented’ within Torfaen. This compares with 20 caravans (socially rented) in BG, 16 in Newport (unauthorised) and none in Monmouthshire. In order to build on this data, 43 interviews were carried out as part of the assessment, with respondents identifying themselves as gypsies or travellers now living in bricks and mortar and, with a further 7 respondents on private sites within Torfaen. Of the total 50 interviews across the 4 LA areas – 22 were undertaken in Torfaen.

**Key Findings for Sub-region**

- Gypsy and traveller households were as likely to be owner occupiers as the overall population of the area – attracted historically to Torfaen and BG as a result of lower house prices
- Rates of satisfaction with current dwellings were higher than that of the overall population of the four LA areas. Only 7.6% of gypsy and travellers wish to move to bricks and mortar accommodation
- 55.8% of gypsy and travellers households contained at least one member with a health problem compared with 36.8% of non gypsy and travellers households.


In total one group and one individual interview were undertaken on site at Shepherd’s Hill, Pontypool. Interviews were conducted in homes with participants spanning a range of ages. The site was described mostly as a peaceful one. On the whole, comments indicated the site was clean and well maintained. Mixed perceptions were in evidence regarding the shower blocks. The head of site is responsible for site maintenance and all felt this to be an amenable arrangement. Specifically,

- The need for more pitches
- Few transient gypsies use the site due to lack of room
- There are a number of key individuals who provide support such as the head of site and a local health visitor. No or little support is accessed from the Council as respondents reported ‘being happy left alone’
- All respondents have access to both a doctor and dentist
- Children were the subject of all discussions along with this an 18 year old girl participated in the survey. Gypsy and traveller children go to the same local school, however the concern was they do not integrate and this can impede learning. The site however, is well settled and children regularly attend school
- Regarding the future of children, it was apparent that the gypsy and travellers lifestyle is not imposed with one guardian looking for a bricks and mortar solution for her child
- Significant differences in opinions prevailed regarding moves to bricks and mortar accommodation. One respondent wished to move to happy everything under one roof – whilst others strongly did not.
- A general lack of awareness existed in relation to accessing services and advice from LAs.

The Housing Requirements of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Households

In order to better understand the needs of our BME households, a multi-methodological approach was adopted as part of the HMA. Quantitative data gave an overview of the changing BME population in the sub-region, whilst qualitative interviews provided a more detailed insight into broader issues.

The Household Survey gathered the most quantitative information, in conjunction with data extracted from the 2001 Census. The qualitative data was achieved via interviews with 10 people of the sub-regional BME population, recruited with the assistance of the SE Wales Race Equality Council. It was not anticipated that participants could be entirely representative of particular communities, but interviewees were from a variety of backgrounds: Black African, Chinese, Eritrean, Kurdish, Pakistani, Punjabi and Sudanese. It is important to note that for the sub-region there are limited numbers of people from some BME groups.
Key Findings for the Sub-region

- In relation to the population of the area as a whole, BME population is generally younger with far fewer people over retirement age
- Household structure illustrates that the BME population is more likely to be living alone, however a large proportion live in multi-adult households in either shared housing and inter-generational households
- Large degree of integration between the sub-regions BME and indigenous white population, in particular 54% of BME people living in couple households, live as mixed ethnicity couples
- New in-migration to the area is mainly based on an increasing refugee population and increasing numbers of Eastern European migrants
- Educational attainment is lower within Bangladeshi households in the sub-region 55% with no formal qualifications, contrasted with 32% of the White British population
  - 40% of Indian and Other Ethnic Groups have over 40% of their population with a degree or above
- Economic inactivity rates highest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations (over 50% of the working population)
  - BME population generally under-represented at professional grades, but 69% of Indian workers categorised as ‘professional’
- In general, home ownership rates are lower and private renting higher for BME groups
- Over 5% of BME households unsatisfied with current homes due to over-crowding, poor quality, homelessness, language, lack of information and discrimination
- Perception amongst BME households that little housing support and information is available to them
- BME children likely to grow up more westernised and have less time to care for elders who may need to access BME friendly supported housing

Torfaen

Of the 90,949 people living in Torfaen, 89,005 people are of White British origin and 1,944 are of BME origin. Further information from the quantitative research and qualitative interviews shows:

- Majority of Torfaen’s BME population is White Other (643 people), followed by White Irish (449) and Chinese (143) and Indian (115)
- The proportion of the population born outside of the UK and the proportion from BME households are almost identical indicating a less established BME population than neighbouring Newport
- The proportion of households which are ethnically mixed is higher than the ethnic minority share of the population, indicating a high degree of integration between the BME and white populations
- Of 268 cases of accepted homelessness in Torfaen (Q3 2005- Q2 2006), 12 (4.5%) were of BME origin
- Perceived gap in housing information and support services for BME people in Torfaen
Key Strategic and Policy Implications

In relation to **Housing Unsuitability**, the following priorities stand out:

- Achievement of Welsh Housing Quality Standard for ALL social homes by 2012
- Development of more innovative and far reaching ways of tackling unfitness in the private sector: e.g. expansion of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, equity loans schemes, rehabilitation of empty properties and landlord accreditation and licensing schemes
- Exploration of the nature of hidden or concealed households and homelessness links
- Alignment between delivery of housing services and provision of appropriate housing related support, in particular for BME people
- Continuation of programme of community regeneration schemes to tackle issues such as children in high rise flats and broader social problems such as housing related anti-social behaviour

In relation to **Housing Supply & Mix**, the following priorities stand out:

- Inclusion of new targets for delivery of 2278 new homes over 5 year period in all major strategic and policy frameworks, namely the Local Development Plan, Regeneration Strategy and Community Plan
- Implementation of a robust enabling framework to support required 85% rate of change – additional capacity with future Retained Strategic Housing Service
- Development (in partnership with Planning) of Supplementary Planning Guidance aimed at informing the design, layout size and mix of all new dwellings
- Development in particular, of specific design guidance for new development falling within the Blaenavon World Heritage site.
- Establishment of an approach to housing investment management that ensures a balance between the rate of new build provision and conversions/rehabilitation of current stock.
- Enhancement and potential extension of the private rented sector in Torfaen through landlord incentive schemes and increasing the profile of key workers in the area seeking to privately rent
- Establishment of more permanent pitches for Gypsy and Traveller households and identification of a transient site
- Incorporating provision for BME elders into future plans for older persons’ housing

In relation to **Affordable Housing**, the following priorities stand out:

- Adoption of definition of affordable housing as set out in TAN 2 and inclusion within all major frameworks, namely the LDP
- Adoption of 37% affordable housing target through development of Supplementary Planning Guidance
- Application of affordable housing targets in conjunction with use of the Development Appraisal Toolkit
• Progression of other opportunities and options to deliver affordable housing, where 37% target cannot be achieved. This may include:
  o Delivery of affordable homes via RSL sector
  o Considering the need for 100% affordable housing sites and rural exceptions
  o Promoting need to consider disposal of public sector owned land to facilitate provision of affordable homes
• Development of a full range or menu of housing products and services in line with local requirements, expectations and aspirations
• Review current blanket 70:30 equity share split for properties featuring within the Help2Own scheme
• Promotion of a ‘tenure blind’ approach or ‘neutral tenure’ principles to all new affordable housing developments in Torfaen to promote mix and balanced communities.

In relation to working **Across Services**, the following priorities stand out:

• **Planning**: Joint approach needed to considerations of land use, supply, availability and the approach to delivering affordable housing via 106
• **Economic Regeneration**: Potential for increased joint working to optimise regeneration benefits and boost economic prosperity
• **Transport**: Impact of new homes upon both current and planned future transport infrastructure
• **Community Safety**: Opportunities to design out potential for crime
• **Education**: Key linkages to be made across scale of housing growth and the scope and scale of future learning provision
• **Health and Wellbeing**: Potential to harness the benefits of more good quality affordable homes on the health and wellbeing of local people
• **Communities**: Opportunities for balanced and thriving housing markets to be precursors to balanced and thriving communities.

In relation to working **Across Boundaries**, the following priorities stand out:

• Opportunity to demonstrate the real benefits of Making the Connections and working in a genuinely cross-border way
• Opportunity to develop a platform from which to launch future shared service provision

**Our Land-Use Planning Framework**

**Working Principles**

The land use planning system is increasingly recognised as a key enabling tool. The planning system supports the strategic housing role through ensuring a 5 year supply of land for new housing (TAN 1 Joint Housing Land Availability Study 2006) and in the delivery of affordable homes (TAN 2 Planning for Housing 2006). In accordance with the HMA data, the context for calculating future housing growth is future household growth. During 2003-2021 more than 7,000 new households will form in Torfaen. In terms of translating this projected
statistic to housing growth – the figures tally. For the first five year tranche of the remaining 15 year period, 2,278 homes are needed in Torfaen and 37% of this will need to be affordable. The planning system not only plays a central role in providing a clear framework for the provision of open market dwellings to meet the future housing requirement, but will also deliver the majority of new affordable homes.

Joining-Up Our LHS and LDP

Planning policies and decisions have a significant role to play in the development of the LHS. Planning Policy Wales (2002) states that in the formulation of LDPs “it is important that the relevant LHS is given full consideration so that planning policies are compatible with LHS objectives”. Arguably, with the implementation of Local Government Plan Rationalisation in 2008 and the inclusion of the LHS within the Community Strategy, this inherent link across professions grows in importance.

In Torfaen our approach to Planning for Housing is well established. Planning officers are key partners to the Strategic Housing Forum and also part funders and joint commissioners of our HMA. At a very practical level Planning has helped promote a consistent approach to S 106 negotiations that fully utilises the 3 Dragons Development Appraisal Toolkit and ensures Housing and other relevant partners (RSLs) are involved in negotiations.

In the development of the LDP, Housing has been a central partner, included and engaged in the

- LDP ‘Options’ Process
- Call for Candidate Sites
- LDP Sustainability Appraisal
- Urban Potential Study, and
- Torfaen Joint Housing Land Availability Study

The Housing Evidence Days event also provided a useful focus on what was termed an “iterative” relationship between the LHS and emerging LDP.

Beyond the local level and in recognising the clear spatial dimension to both Planning and Housing, contributions have been made (via SEWRHF) to both the SE Wales Spatial Plan Strategy and the SE Wales Strategic Planning Group. As mentioned above, work on the apportionment of WAG’s 2003 SE Wales household and population projections are directly influencing the LHS and the level and location (by housing market area) of housing growth in the emerging ‘Torfaen LDP – Strategic Options and Preferred Strategy’ and will influence affordable housing policy in the ‘Deposit Torfaen LDP’ in 2008. Similarly, issues of provision for gypsies and travellers, empty property, poor housing condition and renewable energy have been raised and will be considered in the LDP both at strategy and policy level.

Adopted Development Plan Policies

The ‘Development Plan’ allows for 3,600 new dwellings over the period 1991-2006; which under WAG guidance in TAN 1 ‘Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS)’ equates to a requirement for 1,200 new dwellings every 5 years beyond the ‘Development Plan’ period. The latest JHLAS (2006) shows Torfaen has between a 4.6-6.2 years housing land supply.

The settlement strategy in the Torfaen Local Plan, in an effort to encourage house building, allows for an over allocation of housing sites in recognition of the levels of non-implementation and the need to encourage regeneration: 64% in the North of Torfaen (Pontypool and Blaenavon) and 36% in the South (Cwmbran). Also, based upon market demand and past building rates new housing was previously concentrated in the South (87%). In addition to further promote development in the North; the settlements have a flexible urban boundary beyond which housing sites are considered, subject to acceptance criteria. The Local Plan also has a liberal windfall housing site policy. As a result, approximately 3,200 new dwellings were built in the plan period, noting that many of the site allocations were never built or were delayed beyond the plan period. Indeed, house building numbers were only maintained through non-allocated windfall developments.

The ‘Development Plan’ has no affordable housing target, but both plans have need based negotiation policies for large sites (threshold is 10+ dwellings) in accordance with WAG guidance and the recognition that plans have a 15 year timescale and that Housing Market Assessments are carried out every 3-5 years. It is normally after this time that affordable housing requirements are re-adjusted via Supplementary Planning Guidance. The Gwent Structure Plan contains an affordable housing exceptions policy (H6).

**Emerging Torfaen Local Development Plan Policies**

The Council has a revised ‘Torfaen Local Development Plan Delivery Agreement’ (The DA) which was approved by the WAG on 10 May 2007. The DA consists of a ‘Community Involvement Scheme’ setting out partners to be consulted, methods of consultation and a ‘Timetable’ setting out all stages of plan preparation.

<table>
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Currently, the LDP is at an early stage of development and has no affordable housing policies for development control purposes. In the interim, current ‘Development Plan’ policies, WAG guidance (Planning Policy Wales and TAN 2) and the 2001 Housing Needs Assessment are used to inform delivery of affordable housing.

However, progress has been made, as Housing issues have been recognised in the LDP Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) as well as the identification of affordable housing indicators and the following objectives:

“24 – To improve the affordability of housing

25 – To improve the variety and quality of housing;”

Similarly, the following LDP Vision and housing objective have been agreed after the production of a Housing briefing paper and stakeholder workshops:

LDP Vision: “By 2021, through collaborative working, the development strategy for the Torfaen LDP will deliver planned, sustainable growth reflecting the specific role and function of settlements. It will provide a distinctive, vibrant and prosperous area where people have the skills, knowledge and opportunities to achieve a better quality of life in safe, healthy and thriving communities with accessible local facilities. It will promote the sustainable regeneration of town centres ensuring they are a focus for social, commercial and community life, whilst also protecting and enhancing Torfaen’s unique natural heritage and cultural and historic identity”.

LDP Objective 16: “To ensure the allocation of an appropriate quantity and variety of housing sites to deliver high quality choice in sustainable locations, well served by essential facilities and accessible by a range of transport modes”.

The next stage will be the production of the LDP Strategic Options and Preferred Strategy, for public consultation in the autumn 2007. This document will identify the proposed overall strategy and level of housing growth, its spatial distribution and strategic housing sites. Also, it should identify an increased need for affordable housing and provide a strategy and policy for addressing it.
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

Following the imminent adoption of the sub-regional HMA, an Affordable Housing SPG is programmed to be jointly produced by Torfaen’s housing and planning teams by the end of the financial year. A Section 106 Agreement SPG is also being produced this financial year which will further include a section on affordable housing. Both of these SPGs will make use of the 3 Dragons Development Appraisal Toolkit (DAT) adopted by the majority of LAs in SE Wales. It should also be noted that the emphasis of the new planning system in Wales is to put more detail into SPG rather than LDPs and not to repeat national policy in LDPs.
4. IDENTIFYING OUR PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES
The need to deliver affordable housing in Torfaen is one which, as already demonstrated, is steeped in the inherent links between the strategic housing and land use planning functions. Chapter 3 sets out the backdrop against which the need for affordable housing in Torfaen can be both evidenced and delivered. In this context our joint Housing-Planning adopted definition of affordable housing has been informed in accordance with TAN 2 and is:

“...Housing where there are secure mechanisms in place to ensure that it is accessible to those who cannot afford market housing, both on first occupation and for subsequent occupiers......Affordable housing includes social rented and intermediate housing. Social housing is that provided by LAs and RSLs. Intermediate housing is that where prices or rents are above those of social rent but below market housing prices or rents”.

This section will set out our key options, opportunities and objectives for the provision of affordable homes, by firstly considering the community housing sector and secondly, the intermediate housing market.

Social or Community Housing?

Working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

The work of the RSL sector in Torfaen and the wider sub-region has undergone considerable change in recent years. One notable aspect of this change is questioning the continued relevance of the term ’social housing’. Local partner RSLs in Torfaen no longer simply provide social housing. In accordance with strategic priorities set by the LA, RSLs provide a range of community housing, regeneration and support services and benefits aimed at making a contribution to overall quality of life in our area.

Our LA-RSL Partnership

In response to widespread calls for a new way of working aimed at a more efficient and strategic approach to investment partnerships, planning and delivery, the GENuS RSL consortium formed in 2005. GENuS comprises Melin Homes, the Seren Group and Newport Housing Trust and works across 6 LA areas: Torfaen, Newport, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Powys. The partnership has a portfolio of 8000+ properties and an annual housing investment programme (new build and existing stock) of some £27m. The implementation of Investment Partnering principles and the launch of GENuS has already made a major impact in Torfaen. Not only has increased investment been secured from a variety of sources to provide new homes, included in which is a commitment to the rehabilitation of existing empty properties, but the more efficient and collaborative approach has helped secure significant economies of scale, local jobs and the engagement of local supply chains.
The GENuS consortium is a key local partner. Not only is it engaged as a critical delivery agent, it is strongly involved in the process of understanding the housing market; contributing financially and knowledgeably to the identification of objectives and priorities for future action. This process of engagement is a two way street. The amount of input TCBC has had into shaping, informing and building GENuS and ensuring that it complements and effectively supports the strategic LA is symbolic of a partnership that has a shared understanding, ethos and goals.

The framework for interaction between the LA and GENuS partnership is set out diagrammatically below

![Diagram of interaction framework]

Providing Homes for Our Customers

Our starting point for interaction with the RSL sector in Torfaen is that people seeking housing through RSLs, or any other housing provider, are all of our customers, whether our role is one of enabling or providing. Currently there are more than 10,000+ applicants registered for housing with providers in Torfaen (inclusive of the Council’s Housing Register). Whilst this information is included within the Housing Market Assessment outturn figures – and is not indicative of net need - it does provide another layer of information regarding local aspirations. Homes are currently allocated on the basis of a choice based lettings system across each of the individual organisations. These systems although similar, operate independently and whilst providing a mechanism for the letting of rented homes, do not include properties for low cost home ownership or other housing products.

Work undertaken by the Council in partnership with GENuS and colleagues in Private Sector Housing has established that significant gains could be realised for both customers and organisations, via an approach based upon holistic housing options (Housing Options Service). That is, the creation of a Common Housing Register which not only seeks to integrate current administrative approaches, but also the range of products (such as social housing, shared equity and tenure neutral housing) available to the customer. This would be
further supplemented by the establishment of a tenure-wide housing advice service that links strongly with the provision of housing related support and other relevant services provided by the Council and its partners (for e.g. services for young people, housing benefit and services for specific needs such as disability). Such a one stop approach will have a focus on prevention as opposed to process and will enable key linkages to be made between housing quality, quantity, homelessness and support services to vulnerable people.

A dedicated Housing Options approach will not only achieve greater efficiency and collaboration but will help to emphasise the need for the development of new housing that is genuinely ‘tenure neutral’ and serves a broader community need as opposed to solely a social one.

Providing Opportunities for Our Communities

The role played by GENuS within Torfaen communities and wider is a progressively regeneration-based one. Community development initiatives, community links and enterprise and the creation of housing-related employment are all part and parcel of the GENuS offer. GENuS’ Procurement Strategy aims to optimise the economic benefits of developing new homes by working with local suppliers, engaging Small/Medium Enterprises and working with relevant local training and support organisations to equip local people with the skills to improve employment prospects. This commitment to capacity building also extends to reinforcing the principles of sustainable development. Sustainable procurement, tackling fuel poverty through improved energy efficiency and equipping units with features needed to ensure homes are fit for lifetimes are all key elements of the strategy.

The community-wide role of GENuS is also evident in the private sector. The operation of the Torfaen Care and Repair service from Melin Homes makes an immeasurable contribution to ensuring homes in the private sector occupied by older and vulnerable people are maintained and modernised.

The interaction between GENuS and TCBC and overall framework for engagement is set out within the existing Community Housing Agreement. This key framework enables RSLs to access and work with not just the Council’s Housing service, but all the sections relevant to promoting GENuS’ broader community role.

Meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

An important plank of affordable housing investment is the clear and in many cases, urgent need to invest in existing social housing stock. The WAG target to ensure all housing meets the WHQS by 2012 draws ever closer and in Torfaen, the issue is of particular relevance given the higher proportions of ‘unsuitable’ housing as evidenced through the Housing Market Assessment.

Firstly, in keeping with the theme of housing investment within the RSL sector, the RSLs that own the vast
majority (95 %+) of the social housing stock in Torfaen are Melin Homes and the Seren Group (GENuS). The majority of stock owned by GENuS currently meets WHQS, and where homes currently do not, programmes of work are either underway or about to get underway to ensure decency targets are met. The remaining 5% of stock is owned by the Hendre Group, Linc Cymru and United Welsh Housing Association and all homes have undergone or are undergoing, the necessary programmes of work to meet WHQS.

Secondly, in relation to the LA owned stock of some 8000 dwellings, Torfaen County Borough Council balloted its tenants in March 2007 with a view to transferring homes to Bron Afon Community Housing. Of the 68% of tenants voting, 60% voted in favour of the transfer proposals. The estimated investment need in bringing Torfaen's stock up to WHQS by 2012 is estimated to be some £187m. In terms of maintaining the standard over a 30 year period, the potential level of investment for Torfaen's housing stock alone is in the order of £500m.

In highlighting the comparative scale of this level of investment, Bron Afon will have a larger capital programme than the Local Authority as a whole. It will become the biggest community enterprise in the County Borough and will subsequently be a major partner in the regeneration agenda.

The Added Value

The social, economic and environmental gains secured through, in Torfaen's case, stock transfer have been calculated as significant. Bron Afon Community Housing is a community mutual organisation and therefore explicit in its aims are regeneration, local jobs and a commitment to training and capacity building. In addition, it has powers to support community businesses and make a contribution to not just the communities it directly serves, but all Torfaen neighbourhoods through boosting wider regeneration potential and keeping the broader economic benefits of transfer – firmly local. The plan is to deliver the programme of works to meet WHQS and generate wider investment opportunities through an expanded workforce and by working in association with a variety of smaller local contractors. Collaboration is a key aim of Bron Afon, especially where it can achieve such regeneration and cost efficiency aims.

Implicit within the process of transfer of homes to Bron Afon and subsequent works is the need to balance core objectives. For example, keeping costs low as possible, yet, maximizing the value of keeping money invested within local communities (particularly targeting tenants who are economically inactive) and also securing sustainability and housing that is fuel efficient. In responding to these aims and seeking to maximize benefits through collaboration 6 further SE Wales local authorities are looking at the option of stock transfer in 2007-08 and already four have agreed to consider a Common Procurement Framework. This could include the potential for common contracts. In terms of working with existing RSL development consortia, opportunities for future collaboration are significant given the bedding in of Investment Partnering.
Affordable Homes After Transfer

Twin tracked with the LSVT process is ongoing work on the retained strategic housing function. Since this clear separation of the LA landlord and strategic roles places greater emphasis on strategic leadership, the proposal within TCBC is for a reinforced and expanded service. A case has been made for the retained housing function to remain together in one block, in a centrally placed location function or directorate and with a strengthened team structure and increased resources to match. The case has been made to support this approach which includes evidence from social and economic assessments, in order to demonstrate the way in which Housing can assist delivery of wider corporate and community objectives.

Community Housing for All

The community role of the Torfaen RSL sector and the entrance of Bron Afon Community Housing, both serve to reinforce the message that a wider perspective on ‘social’ housing is needed. Explicit within this is the clear requirement to focus on harder to reach groups on whom historically, little information has been collated. The case of BME groups is one that has been highlighted by the WAG as meriting specific focus.

Community Housing for BME People

A significant proportion of time was awarded to exploring housing for BME communities in the recent Housing Market Assessment (Chapter 3). The Assessment has shown that future public consultation exercises must seek to specifically target BME housing communities and ensure that a) evidence is used to inform the type, size, location and mix of new housing and related support services, and b) relevant households are focussed upon in order to involve them in the design and preparatory aspects of new development. Alongside the provision of clear advice and advocacy services – as part of the Housing Options Service - community housing will be fully accessible to all cross-sections of our communities. At this time in Torfaen, the gypsy and traveller engagement issue is a key one, especially in considering future housing options. Via working closely with our Corporate Equalities Team, experts within GENuS and local voluntary organisations, we remain committed to targeting the necessary resources, time and energy into ensuring that BME housing requirements are understood met and rigorously monitored.

Intermediate Housing

The commentary above advocates a blurring of the lines between housing tenures and a new focus on ‘community housing’. As a result, responding to the needs of the intermediate housing market has already been considered in the context of the wider community housing role of the RSL sector. This section will therefore explore more broadly, the intermediate housing market.

Understanding and Meeting Intermediate Requirements
The intermediate housing market features strongly within our strategic and policy definitions of affordable housing. Intermediate housing can be broadly explained as housing for people who have some ability to pay, but who cannot afford prevailing housing market costs. Whilst this is generally symptomatic of a transition within the housing market from exercising housing demand (ability to pay) to housing need (requirement for subsidy); the key point about the intermediate housing market is that it falls somewhere between the two categorisations: cannot afford an open market home, but can afford more than social renting. Our definition of intermediate housing in Torfaen is therefore homes for sale on equity share principles (assisted or low cost home ownership) and also homes for rent at more than social housing, but less than market values (sub market rented).

Getting our Intermediate Mix Right

In relation to understanding our local requirement for intermediate housing, Chapter 3 sets out the need for intermediate housing in Torfaen. The housing market assessment recommends an overall requirement for 37% affordable housing, broken down into 11% intermediate and 26% social rented. Whilst this recommendation is acceptable, the proportion of social housing required is nonetheless large, especially when considering Torfaen already has a comparatively large social rented sector (26% of the total market). More affordable housing is clearly required in Torfaen, but must be delivered in a mixed and sustainable way.

A further issue in this context is providing the right balance of intermediate housing types. Whilst the market assessment makes no specific reference to the split between low cost home ownership and sub-market rented, it does refer to the fact that the private rented sector presence in Torfaen is comparatively low. By implication, revitalising the private rented sector and focussing on sub-market rented provision is a clear priority. However, at the same time the success of Torfaen’s Help2Own scheme suggests a clear and continuing need for low cost home ownership products.

Neutral Tenure

One way of overcoming some of the issues raised above relates to the potential to work with the WAG and adopt a ‘neutral tenure’ policy for aspects of new affordable house building. Instead of specifying tenure at the outset of development, on completion dwellings might be offered to qualifying applicants on a flexible basis. Applicants can, in accordance with their own financial circumstances, choose either to buy a stake in the home (via low cost home ownership) and potentially stair case up to full ownership as appropriate, or; rent the home on a social rented basis with the potential to buy a stake later on. Such a model would work most effectively against the backdrop of a Common Housing Register on which applicants could register for a range of housing products.

With Social Housing Grant (SHG) sponsored schemes, neutral tenure can clearly work. The baseline assumption is that every property will be rented
and subsidy allocated on that basis. If and when a share in a property is sold – the surplus subsidy is returned to WAG. At this time it would appear that S 106 schemes offer less flexibility as affordable housing costs often need to be factored in from the outset. There is potential for it to work on the basis that all homes are for social rent, but this could be more costly and potentially used as a rationale for reducing the total numbers of affordable homes on site.

Direction from WAG regarding neutral tenure is eagerly awaited since it is highly likely to form a key plank of our approach to affordable housing. Neutral tenure we believe offers greater flexibilities and benefits than both the Rights to Buy & Acquire and affords the opportunity to maintain affordability in perpetuity where deemed appropriate. It is hoped that new principles and procedures for neutral tenure might also provide some basis for work with the private sector.

Help2Own in Torfaen

Notwithstanding a future aspiration for neutral tenure homes, the current mechanism through which low cost home ownership is administered in Torfaen is our Help2Own scheme. Low cost home ownership in Torfaen is delivered currently through the following routes: SHG funded Do It Yourself Homebuy and new build Homebuy units funded via Section 106.

Our Help2Own scheme has been in operation since October 2005. The scheme workings were developed over a period of 12 months prior to the 2005 launch by GENuS partners, CML colleagues and TCBC Legal and Planning officers. The eligibility criteria is robust and tested has been the recent subject of an internal audit inspection. TCBC administers the H20 Register and refers applicants on a date order basis to GENuS partners as and when either new build or DIY opportunities become available. The scheme typically works on the principles of 70:30 equity share and as people vacate H20 homes either the subsidy or the property gets ‘recycled’ in order to be available on the same terms for the next applicant ("affordability in perpetuity"). Current social housing tenants receive priority weighting within the scheme as do key workers, as defined by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Currently more than 400 households are registered for Help2Own. To date, more than 65 applicants have been assisted into home ownership. With more new build opportunities emerging through 106 and the ongoing rehabilitation of existing empty homes to bolster DIY options, the Help2Own scheme has a continuing role to play. In the interim to further direction on neutral tenure policies, the feasibility of adding a new arm to the Help2Own scheme, around sub-market renting will also presently be considered by LA and GENuS partners.
Working with the Private Sector

Over the next 15 year or LDP period, the private sector will be the chief mechanism through which, new affordable housing is delivered in Torfaen. At a strategic planning level, the private sector will work with the LA via our Strategic Housing Forum to assist ongoing assessments of the housing market, to identify land and development opportunities and to contribute towards policy development on planning obligations and the framework for delivery of affordable homes. At a practical output level, developers will work alongside the LA, RSLs and other partners such as lenders to deliver the products required. In the main, these are likely to be low cost home ownership and social rented housing (or neutral tenure) on 106 sites and commuted sums in lieu of on site provision, to enable interventions in existing private housing stock. Low cost home ownership dwellings will be channelled and made available to applicants via the Help2Own scheme.

All of this activity will be expected to be undertaken in accordance with adopted definitions of affordable housing, affordable housing SPG and to 'fit' with the equity share principles of our Help2Own scheme. For example our definition of affordable housing does not include ‘low cost market dwellings’ and therefore units that are of a smaller size and therefore a lower market value and that lose the initial discount on re-sale, will not be acceptable.

Regional Housing Enabler

In reflecting the need to tackle housing market needs and issues across boundaries, the work of the SE Wales Regional Housing Forum has evidenced the need for 2 Regional Housing Enablers in SE Wales. A commitment to funding the two posts (to be matched by the LAs) has been secured from WAG. SEWRHF is moving forward with proposals to appoint individuals and it is likely that Torfaen will secure direct benefit from a Heads of the Valleys Regional Housing Enabler, to assist delivery of many of the specific targets set out within our Strategy.

Strategic Housing Objectives and Target Outcomes

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed target outcomes specifying timescales, resources and specific organisational responsibilities are contained within the Housing Operational Plan.

It is important to note that the objectives set out below are interchangeable with other objectives & priorities set out in further themed sections of this Strategy. Once again this demonstrates the inextricable links between housing quality, supply, homelessness and vulnerable people.

It is of further importance to note that it is only possible for this Strategy to contain an overview of each housing theme and subject area. The objectives however have been selected by the Strategic Housing Forum which has had the benefit of more complete and comprehensive presentations of housing market evidence & information. The objectives listed at the end of each
chapter therefore will not and cannot always appear to relate to the preceding commentary.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

(Affordable) Housing Investment & Products
- To adopt a comprehensive approach to Affordable Housing Investment Planning, within which Social Housing Grant is just one financial delivery mechanism, alongside:
  - S 106
  - Disposal of LA land at undervalue
  - HoV & Convergence Funding
  - Neighbourhood Renewal Funds
  - Public-Private Partnerships
- To extend & expand products aimed at the Intermediate Housing Market. In particular, future development of the Help2Own scheme (whether through ‘neutral tenure’ or not) & introduction of Intermediate Rented Products via GENuS partners
- To increase social rented provision, but to add flexibility, choice and sustainability to the product, by doing so through the adoption of ‘neutral tenure’ principles. This will help tackle the ‘stigma’ attached to social housing.
- To develop and broaden the existing range of housing products, advice and choices – across all tenures - through the development of a comprehensive Housing Options Service
- To ensure appropriate products and options are developed that better respond to the needs of older people and help reduce under-occupation
- To mirror the good work in the public sector by promoting the need to work together to raise the profile of, and tackle unfitness in the private sector
  - In particular to increase the numbers of empty properties brought back into housing use
- To further develop TCBC’s approach to disposal of land at less than best consideration to deliver higher quantities of affordable housing
- To where appropriate, deliver sites for 100% affordable housing or on a rural exceptions basis
- To commit to and deliver genuinely mixed tenure and mixed use environments in the interests of balanced and sustainable communities
- To work with GENuS to explore options for expanding mortgage rescue services

(Affordable) Housing Evidence & Principles
- To strategically link (both in organisational & structural ways) housing supply and homelessness & develop roles and projects aimed at ensuring synergy between the two
- To demonstrate a long-term commitment to cross-boundary and regional working via the SE Wales Regional Housing Forum, in order to share best practice & resources, create efficiencies & set the context for shared service provision
- To commit to maintaining an up-to-date evidence base through continued use of Home Track/Real Demand
To strengthen the profile of the Strategic Housing Function to ensure mechanisms are in place (post transfer) to increase supply & deliver affordable housing

To monitor and capture the ‘added value’ of increasing housing supply & affordable housing via Social & Economic Impact Assessments

To work with GENuS colleagues in using new RSL developments and schemes to promote the importance of the strategic housing role

To harness long-term relationships between private house builders, the LA and RSLs - beyond S 106 dealings

To commit to the wider sustainable development and regeneration agenda through the active identification of opportunities for local labour, apprenticeships, collaborative procurement and environmental improvements

(Affordable) Housing through the Planning System

To utilise the Housing evidence base (Housing Market Assessment) in informing housing land requirements
  o To work with Planning colleagues (via the Joint Housing Land Availability Study) to ensure a genuine 5 year supply of housing land

To utilise the Housing evidence base (HMA) in order to influence the size, type, design tenure and affordability of all housing delivered through the Planning System

To ensure the Housing evidence base is used to develop robust Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance

To work, via SEWRHF to ensure SEWSPG understands and become closely involved in the process of Housing Market Assessments – in order for housing-planning regional working to be more closely co-ordinated

To ensure the LDP links housing policy and projections with education provision, transport and infrastructure requirements and economic development opportunities.

To work with Planning to establish annual monitoring targets for housing completions

To ensure the affordable housing policy is imposed (in conjunction with the Development Appraisal Toolkit) on all sites irrespective of ownership

To work with colleagues corporately to establish a clear list of requirements for S 106

To work with Planning and HoV in developing appropriate and sustainable housing design guidance for Blaenavon World Heritage Site

To encourage new development on brownfield sites in the interests of sustainable development
The private sector dominates Torfaen’s housing market. The ‘contribution’ of the sector in Torfaen both in terms of private housing providers and enablers – the LA, house builders, lenders, estate agents and private landlords and in terms of private housing consumers – home owners and renters, is thus a hugely significant one. The context for future growth within the private sector in Torfaen is set out in Chapter 3. However in terms of painting a picture of the existing private sector housing stock, more than 12% of homes are currently unfit. 23% of homes are pre-1919 and of this number (the majority of which comprises terraced owner-occupied and private rented dwellings), unfitness levels are some of the highest in Wales (Welsh House Condition Survey 1998).

The effects of poor housing on health and personal wellbeing are well documented within Torfaen’s Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Strategy. The need for more new private homes is clearly set out in the emerging Local Development Plan. The role of this chapter of the LHS however is to bring the two elements together and ensure new provision is balanced with eradicating unfitness and improving homes in the existing private sector.

Our Partnerships with the Private Sector

Our partnership arrangements with the private sector are established ones. The Home Builder’s Federation are key partners to the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum and this membership is supplemented by individual relationships with a number of both local and national volume house builders. These relationships are not confined to specific site or scheme discussions, but are relationships that we draw upon to inform policy and strategic development on an ongoing basis. The Council of Mortgage Lenders is also a member of the Forum and in particular lending partners such as the Nationwide and Principality Building Societies have become key contributors and played focal roles in the Evidence Days event. A representative of local estate agents (Roberts & Co) also attends the Forum and has provided key housing market intelligence to inform understandings of the housing system. The Torfaen Private Landlords Forum also has a member linked to the Forum.

Arguably the most important ‘private’ members of the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum are 2 independent housing consumers that attend all meetings and contribute from the perspective of the ‘customer’. This helps reality check proposals and ensures a wider view is forthcoming in planning and monitoring interventions.

In respect however of the ‘existing’ private sector – the central theme of this chapter, the following arrangements are also important to note:
Private Sector Landlord Forum

The Landlord Forum has been in operation for some years and meetings are held on either a bi-annual or quarterly basis (dependent upon work programmes), in various locations across Torfaen to encourage attendance. Invites to every meeting are sent to all known private sector landlords in Torfaen in order to provide every stakeholder with the opportunity to attend, network and engage with the Council. The Forum continues to be well attended and provides TCBC with a mechanism through which all important statutory and other information can be explained and disseminated. The Forum is a key component in our move towards encouraging increased self regulation in the private sector as opposed to top down enforcement action.

Landlord Accreditation Scheme

An all-Wales joint initiative is in the pipeline for a Landlord Accreditation Scheme for Wales. The scheme will provide training for landlords to ensure they act responsibly and in accordance with all relevant legislation and provide tenants with safe and good quality housing.

The scheme is again intended to increase the level of self regulation within the private rented sector and help to improve standards in a sector, in which traditionally, poorer quality housing prevails.

Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy

Almost 75% of Torfaen’s population live in the private sector either in owner occupied or private rented homes. Home owners are responsible for the maintenance, modernisation and repair of their properties. However, in many cases, some are simply unable as a result of affordability or other issues, to do so. Not only does our private sector have a high percentage of unfit households, it also has a high percentage of older and disabled persons’ households. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy sets out proposals for planning and intervening in the sector to improve the standard of housing.

Inevitably, limited resources mean that priorities have to be established that are both suitable and sustainable. Our priorities are therefore based on the following core themes:

- Reducing the level of unfit properties
- Reducing the numbers of empty properties
- Targeting assistance at the most vulnerable households
- Providing a transparent and equitable enforcement policy
- Assisting the regeneration process
- Developing partnership efforts
- Developing other forms of assistance to private home owners e.g. loans information and advice services
- Complementing existing policies of the Council and partners, and;
- Working towards a non grant dependent culture
Resource Support for Renewal Initiatives

The main focus for grant aid provided in Torfaen is older and vulnerable households living in unfit homes. Home owners are encouraged to take responsibility for the maintenance and repair of their homes and future considerations strongly feature the provision of a dedicated loans service (see below). In conjunction with Torfaen Care and Repair, comprehensive maintenance manuals have been produced to guide homeowners in the upkeep of their properties and in the selection of reputable contractors.

Torfaen has for many years pursued a policy of moving away from individual financial assistance for homeowners to a more holistic area based strategic renewal approach. To date TCBC has declared 3 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (RAs) covering the areas Blaenavon, Abersychan and Pontypool. These areas have typically been characterised by high concentrations of unfit property and where available resources and other social issues have constrained the ability of owners to carry out repairs and improvements.

In the South of Torfaen, Cwmbran New Town is now over 50 years old and showing signs of disrepair and lack of maintenance. Since many of the homes were built via non-traditional building methods, repair and maintenance is often difficult, costly and beyond the affordability of many owners. To expand renewal area’s activity to Cwmbran is thus, a key priority and shows that private sector community regeneration must form as central an objective as public sector-based community regeneration.

Within NRAs two main types of housing grant assistance is available to home owners. These are known as ‘group repair’ and ‘enveloping’ grants. This type of assistance creates a greater impact and a more cost effective approach to tackling poor housing and environments in designated RAs.

Since 1999 Torfaen has successfully secured over £15m to support its renewal activities as well as attracting private finance and other forms of funding in the NRAs.

To prepare for future work and progression in this area, at this time TCBC is in the process of undertaking a comprehensive Private Sector Stock Condition Survey. This will also assist the objective of updating targets and better informing key aims in order our overall approach to the private sector continues to be fit for purpose.

Regeneration and Renewal

In optimising the benefits however of more targeted action in Torfaen’s private sector; the Housing Renewal process alone cannot transform the face of private housing and the wider environments in which homes are located. The view of the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum is that renewal areas and activity have to link strongly with wider regeneration initiatives in order to achieve maximum and sustained impact. Connecting renewal areas and projects to wider regeneration initiatives will provide the kind of stimulus needed to improve homes and communities on the scale required. One example of this
is the current Heads of the Valleys funded project to rehabilitate empty properties in the RA of Blaenavon. Joining-up in this way can achieve economies of scale, greater impact for the area and communities and in essence ensure more bangs for the buck. It is our strong intention to continue such programmes longer-term via additional funding sources such as the Social Housing Grant Programme.

**Housing, Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)**

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 sets out the new HHSRS together with the new HHSRS (Wales) Regulations 2006, which both came into force in June 2006. The system reflects a new approach to the evaluation of potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. It replaces the former inspection method contained in the Housing Act 1985, the ‘fitness standard’, which required an assessment of dwellings suitability for human habitation.

Section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 further requires the LA to review housing conditions in their area, with a view to determining actions to tackle hazards and dangers identified through the HHSRS and/or providing financial assistance for home repairs and improvements. Torfaen’s Housing Enforcement and Renewal teams link to provide information to the public and respond to direct requests, as well surveying homes within the 3 renewal areas to ensure a comprehensive approach is taken to assessing private house conditions. This provides an essential evidence base in relation to the award of financial assistance.

Enforcement is clearly a key element of the new system and a policy has been developed to ensure appropriate action can be taken in appropriate circumstances. Based on changes introduced by the Housing Act 2004, further revision of Torfaen’s Housing Renewal Policies are being considered to include the provision of grant aid or loans to eligible persons (subject to funding availability) to eliminate serious (or category 1) hazards from a property.

In respect of training and building up a skills base around the HHSRS, appropriate officers have undergone the necessary coaching and development to implement powers in correct ways. It is envisaged that in the post stock transfer environment, more formal linkages will be made between the retained Private Sector and Strategic-Enabling functions to develop a more holistic and comprehensive approach to intervening in all aspects of our Private Sector Housing Market.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing**

The Housing Act 2004 radically overhauls the way in which the LA regulates standards in the private rented sector. It introduces compulsory licensing for HMOs of 3 or more stories and with 5 or more occupiers.

As set out in the previous commentary on affordable housing, our private rented sector presence within Torfaen is extremely small. As a result, the
objective in relation to HMO licensing has to be twofold: both encouraging landlords to ensure dwellings are of a standard to protect the health and safety of tenants, whilst at the same time maximising and increasing the availability of private rented accommodation locally.

The availability of HMO dwellings to achieving improved affordable housing provision is key and to this end, a number of sessions have been held with private landlords throughout Torfaen, aimed at providing information, support and advice to ensure landlords are both equipped and able to respond. Currently Torfaen has just 30 HMOs and it is anticipated that only 5 of these will require a license. However, in terms of future licensing arrangements and the anticipated growth of our private rented sector, a HMO Licensing and Regulation Policy is currently being prepared.

In relation to selective licensing, TCBC does not have a Selective Licensing Policy. Again, in relation to planned future expansion in the private rented sector, consideration will be given to the scope for selected licensing in NRAs.

Empty Properties
Torfaen’s original ‘Empty Homes Strategy’ was amended in 2005 to an Empty Property Strategy to incorporate empty commercial and former ‘land mark’ buildings. The increased powers provided by Housing Act 2004 has prompted a process of ongoing review of the Strategy led by the Strategic Housing Forum, since rehabilitation of empty buildings is seen as central to efforts to regenerate communities.

A sub-group of the Strategic Housing Forum is currently working to devise a coherent and workable action plan to tackle the issue of the 300+ long-term vacant properties in Torfaen. The merits of Empty Dwelling Management Orders, Enforced Sale and Compulsory Purchase powers are all under consideration. However at this time success has been sustained via an approach that involves RSL partners writing to absentee landlords, offering to purchase properties with a view to bringing them back into use to help offset the need for affordable housing. Heads of the Valleys funding has been secured for this project and 5 empty buildings have been acquired thus far. It is intended that this project will be a rolling one and that in time, this can form an integral feature of our Social Housing Grant submission programme.

Our intention is for the sub-group to devise an ‘Empty Property Toolkit’ to set out a range of options and opportunities. This will build on the data collated through our empty property database and allow all partners to play a full role in establishing suitable and sustainable uses for empty properties in Torfaen.

Torfaen Care & Repair
Torfaen Care & Repair operates from Melin Homes and exists to help older, disabled and vulnerable people to repair and improve their homes thereby enabling them to live at home in increased comfort, safety and security. The Housing Renewal service works alongside Torfaen Care & Repair providing them with technical support when required and collaborating on a range of
projects to deliver improvements in housing quality. Care and Repair is also supported by the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum, in particular in relation to raising the profile of their work both within and outside of the Council.

Mobile Homes

Torfaen has one licensed site for mobile homes at the Woodlands, Pontypool. The site is privately owned and is licensed for permanent residence. Currently there are 37 pitches and some 58 residents. The site operates well and is regularly inspected and assessed to ensure standards are enforced and a quality environment exists for residents.

Loans and Equity Release

The Welsh Assembly Government has supported the initiation of the S Wales Loans Consortium, comprising 7 LAs, one of which is Torfaen. The Consortium has made great strides in promoting understandings of the ways in which loan assistance may play a role in future housing renewal policies, and in particular, how equity share type loans could be developed by LAs to meet specific requirements.

The Consortium has undertaken extensive research on equity loan products and concluded that in the short term it would be of most benefit for LAs to utilise the services of a third party provider for the administration of loans under their respective housing renewal policies. The advantages of this way of working are:

- Expertise in the field reducing potential maladministration risks
- Expertise in regulations surrounding financial assistance so protecting both the client and LA
- Expertise and skills in the organisation’s staff reducing the need for training existing staff or, recruiting new.

The third party provider chosen by the Consortium to offer a ‘loans’ service is established ART Homes Limited. ART is a not-for-profit organisation based in Birmingham with over 7 years operational experience in working with LAs in the provision of homes to low income home owners who are unable to secure affordable loans from commercial lenders to repair, maintain or adapt their homes.

Property Appreciation Loans (PALs)

As a consequence of work undertaken by the Consortium, TCBC is now in a position to where a loan product known as a PAL can be made available as part of its current renewal policy. A PAL is an equity release loan to assist vulnerable homeowners in the repair, maintenance and adaptation of their homes.

As part of an initial 2 year pilot Torfaen CBC will offer PALs as a ‘top up’ to Disabled Facilities Grants, where the cost of mandatory works are in excess of the £30,000 statutory maximum limit. TCBC will determine the works to be
included within the loans and in what circumstances they can be provided and will also assist the customer through the process, albeit via ART Homes as the loan provider. The maximum loan to be provided and the equity disregard, together with provisions for exceptional circumstances will be decided individually by each member of the SW Loans Consortium.

Following review and evaluation of the pilot project, Torfaen will consider use of ‘loan assistance’ more widely in its housing renewal strategy and policies. This may include loan assistance both inside and outside of designated NRAs. The message however, that must accompany the use of such packages both now and potentially longer-term is, loans are not a replacement for grant assistance.

**Disabled Adaptations & Disabled Persons’ Housing Service**

Currently the Council is in the process of reviewing its arrangements for providing both minor and major adaptations and is working towards the establishment of a fully integrated system to deliver adaptations, through a Disabled Persons’ Housing Service. For owner occupiers and tenants with a permanent or significant disability, a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available. These grants are means tested, except in cases where the disabled person is a child.

Council tenants and other social tenants can also access adaptations through their landlord. These are not means tested and do not require contributions towards the cost of the adaptation.

TCBC currently provides in excess of £1,000,000 per annum to support the provision of DFGs and ‘top-up’ grants. In addition, a further £800,000 is available to support minor and major adaptations in the Council Housing stock. In the future and in accordance with the above, a key priority for TCBC is to offer Property Appreciation Loans to top-up DFGs in cases where the cost of adaptation exceeds the maximum grant limit.

**Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes**

The strategic housing objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed target outcomes, specifying timescales, resources & organisational responsibilities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan.
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: PRIVATE SECTOR

- To promote and reinforce mantra that living in the private sector does not detract from the right to live in a good quality home
- To implement and monitor the success of Equity Loans Schemes such as Property Appreciation Loans in improving private homes, with a view to further expanding the scheme in the next 2 years
- To establish a distinct sub-group of the Strategic Housing Forum on the Private Sector to raise the profile of unfitness issues and establish policies for better ways of working
- To compile and collate on an ongoing basis a robust evidence base to support success of NRAs. To use this information to support applications for extending projects and garnering support for a further NRA in Cwmbran
- To commit to joining-up housing regeneration schemes & neighbourhood renewal initiatives to ‘pump prime’ funding and optimise wider regenerative potential
- To join up the work of the Housing Strategy and Housing Renewal teams and to jointly plan and monitor cross-tenure housing projects
- To better understand and support the private sector given it will deliver the majority of new and affordable homes needed in Torfaen over the next 15 years. To ensure long-term relationships are harnessed between the RSL and private developers, outside of S 106 dealings
- To harness the wider regeneration potential of the private sector, in particular opportunities for social clauses, skills training, apprenticeships, collaborative procurement and local labour. To establish the ways in which this could link with the work of the public and RSL sectors
- To develop a comprehensive Housing Options Service that integrates the important role of the private sector, both in terms of housing products, advice, support and information
- To support and identify future funding options in accordance with the establishment of a Disabled Persons’ Housing Service
- To ensure the development of a robust policy framework surrounding private sector housing initiatives: Landlord Accreditation Scheme, HMO Licensing & Regulation Policy & Selective Licensing Policy
- To make use of HHSRS to ensure that residential premises within identified communities support wider regeneration initiatives
- To ensure the wide dissemination of the findings from the Private Sector House Condition Survey and ensure all future interventions are evidence based and appropriate
All elements of housing activity that is the design, construction, management and maintenance of homes, offer significant opportunity to be at the forefront of sustainable development. Sustainable development is about creating a better quality of life for ALL residents now, and importantly, in the future. The social, economic and environmental impact of housing activity needs to be sustainable for a number of reasons, namely because it makes good sense for the homes built and managed in Torfaen, the community we serve, partnerships with others and business viability.

This chapter will set out clear principles and objectives for the targeting of housing investment in ways that promote sustainable development, specifically around reducing carbon emissions, improving energy performance, enhancing environments and creating viable and vibrant mixed communities.

Housing and Sustainable Development in Torfaen

Climate change and the need for sustainable development are issues of global concern but are affected by the work of local organisations. In Torfaen the recognition that the characteristics of our social and built environments are vital to the achievement of sustainability objectives is instilling a real ownership to sustainable development principles. Housing in Torfaen makes an important contribution to sustainability because:

- It consumes large amounts of resource in its construction, maintenance and use
- It is a fixed asset with a long life, and
- It is fundamental to quality of life and has implications beyond housing affecting transport, health, employment and the wider community.

Our understanding and awareness of the relationship between Housing and sustainability in Torfaen is a two way one. Incorporating principles of sustainability into housing development, maintenance and refurbishment will not only make a contribution to the achievement of general sustainability aims, but will also provide important advances in the quality, durability and cost-effectiveness of our housing.

In our strategic housing role we acknowledge the need for a culture change that places sustainability at the heart of what we do. This has to include developers or providers of housing (RSLs and home builders), land use planners and tenants and owners. Sustainable principles have to be embedded in all stages of the process from design through construction to long term use and eventual disposal (or possible ‘recycling’). Awareness raising plays a large part in this and we firmly see our newly formed partnership with the Building Research Establishment as helping to achieve this.
Local Authorities and Sustainable Development

In relation to the Council’s landlord role, in a pre-transfer environment the Council directly manages more than 8,000 homes the majority of which await works to achieve WHQS. Existing social stock therefore not only consumes large quantities of energy in its use, but will also consume vast amounts of energy in relation to future modernisation. Consequently the LSVT investment and works process has a real opportunity to support sustainable development. For example via the products used in the refurbishment of homes, via support for local suppliers and sustainable procurement and via local labour contracts and other relevant social clauses.

In relation to the Council’s permanent strategic housing role, there is a central part to play in establishing cross-sectoral partnerships to ‘join-up’ action. This will form a key goal of the future work of the Strategic Housing Forum. In relation to our work with Melin Homes BRE through the Heads of the Valleys Programme, we aim to show that with strategic commitment, careful design, construction and use – affordable good quality housing can reduce environmental impact at little or no extra cost. There are also social benefits in reducing maintenance, energy and water costs for residents around fuel poverty. Melin and BRE are currently working together to bring back into sustainable use – 5 empty homes as part of a pilot project in Blaenavon. This project responds to various aspects of the sustainability agenda and maximises strategic return for the Council via tackling the social and economic issue of empty properties.

Whilst national targets to reduce carbon emissions to 0 in new homes by 2011 herald a real commitment to sustainable development – more work is needed to establish how this will be achieved. Cost will be an issue and with more than 7,000 new homes required in Torfaen to 2021, our message has to be that sustainable design and construction should not be at significant cost and should certainly not be a barrier to delivering affordable housing.

The existing private sector stock clearly poses the biggest sustainability challenge. Torfaen suffers a disproportionately high level of unfitness within the private stock and coupled with high proportions of older and vulnerable people within the sector – the challenge intensifies. With the findings of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey due imminently, embedding the principles of sustainable development into any future planning, investment decisions and interventions in the sector will be of critical importance.

Environmentally Sustainable Housing

The above mentioned pilot project in conjunction with BRE is expected to inform future methods of sustainable provision in both public and private sectors. In addition a further project within Torfaen has also recently been funded through the HoV Programme for housing and environmental improvements at Griffiths Court, Forgeside. This project has seen the ‘retro-fit’ of 60 existing RSL homes with renewable energy solar panelling and improvements to the wider environment aimed at reconfiguring layout to promote accessibility, open space and the quality of the area as a whole.
Working with the HoVP a future aspiration is to embed the principles & use of renewable energy into the build and rehabilitation of homes. In areas of North Torfaen with some of the poorest and oldest housing stock, this will be of particular significance. The World Heritage Site in Blaenavon specifically requires an approach that strongly links heritage requirements and conservation to more physical environmental sustainability.

At this time, GENuS is in the process of identifying a site for build via the Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) programme. In relation to meeting the immediate demands for additional good quality affordable housing, we see this approach as offering significant future opportunity. In terms of the private sector housing market the concept of Eco Homes Excellence is also something we are committed to exploring. In this context, the role of the Planning system is a fundamental one. From a strategic housing standpoint we would encourage (where appropriate) building at higher densities, re-use of brownfield sites and the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Our commitment to sustainable development in Torfaen is not one which views the need for housing to conform to sustainable development principles as an additional pressure or inconvenience. Our view is that from a commercial perspective sustainable development benefits housing because the most cost effective and viable way to develop and maintain a high quality housing stock is to adopt a sustainable approach.

**Local Frameworks and Sustainable Development**

Through inclusion as a key priority within this document it is intended that the principles of sustainability and sustainable development will feed directly into the wider frameworks within which the LHS ‘belongs’ – namely the Community Strategy. Furthermore, it is intended that the message is further filtered down to the local housing sub-strategic plans that take a lead from the LHS, such as the Supporting People Operational Plan, the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy and the GENuS Business Plan.

We recognise the opportune role of the LHS in highlighting and reinforcing the importance of sustainable development. Through the work of the Torfaen Strategic Housing Forum and the implementation of this strategy, alongside key partner document the LDP, the understanding of, and appetite for sustainable development will increase.

**Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes**

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan.
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- To take responsibility for promoting and reinforcing the importance of sustainable development considerations both in terms of new housing development and existing housing
- To understand the operation, remit and implications of the Strategic Environmental Assessment framework for, and on, housing
- To develop a policy position (through Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance) that good quality affordable housing goes hand in hand with sustainable housing
- To link sustainable housing development to regeneration via promoting the principles of sustainable procurement, supporting social clauses, encouraging economies of scale and achieving local labour opportunities
- To include sustainable development principles at the heart of aims to tackle fuel poverty
- To monitor and disseminate the impact of the GENuS-BRE pilot refurbishment project in Blaenavon (as sponsored by HoVP) to consider the potential for wider roll out
- To support the HoVP in promoting the opportunity to deliver housing incorporating renewable energy
- To consider the potential to incorporate sustainable development principles in all NRA and private sector refurbishment activity in order to understand the costs and implications of ‘retro-fitting’ existing housing
- To support, in conjunction with TCBC Planning, the HoV initiative to develop Sustainable Design Guidance for the sub-region regarding all new build housing
In its strategic community leadership role Torfaen CBC has an obligation and objective to manage the use and procurement of energy effectively and efficiently. The ‘Energy Policy’ therefore demonstrates a commitment to contributing to national policies to reduce carbon emissions and help counteract the effects of climate change. The policy recognises the central role of Housing in the context of meeting these objectives. Housing providers and enablers alike must work together to meet the WAG target to reduce carbon emissions to zero in all new homes by 2011 and to work towards the UK-wide target of halving carbon emissions in existing buildings by 2050. The information provided thus far in our Strategy, illustrating the need for more homes and in particular, more affordable quality homes – demonstrates the huge challenge posed by such targets to the housing sector.

Policy

Torfaen’s ‘Energy Policy’ comprises a clear declaration of commitment to the principles of efficient energy management and sustainable design throughout TCBC’s property portfolio (including public buildings), tenant’s homes, private homes and the partners with which we work to provide buildings, dwellings and general environmental improvements.

As a result key objectives are -

- Internally focussed - managing carbon emissions for which the LA is responsible. This includes ensuring energy efficiency in the design, construction, procurement and maintenance of LA homes
- Externally focussed – working with partners to develop and implement an energy efficient approach & in particular to ensure partner housing providers adhere to the principles of effective energy management in construction and maintenance of homes, and;
- Community focussed – working with the community to raise the standard of energy efficiency in public and private housing. Eliminating fuel poverty and ensuring all households are able to heat their homes to a comfortable level by 2010. Ensuring all social housing meets Welsh Housing Quality Standards by 2012 and where practical, energy improvements in all homes contributing to the Home Energy Conservation Act.

Implementation & Incentives

The Energy Policy has a clear implementation strategy which includes proposals for funding, procurement, transport and target and performance monitoring. In respect of internal incentives, the clear advantage of adopting the policy is cost savings and efficiencies which can be fed back into service delivery. Moreover with Council sponsored projects, a scheme or proposal is more likely to receive approval and funding if adherence to the policy is
demonstrated. Specific funding opportunities are also highlighted as explicit incentives. However, with the need to consider renewable energy sources and the adoption of specific government targets, it would appear to be the case that incentives are no longer required as ‘not doing’ sustainability and energy efficiency is no longer an option.

With regards to working with the RSL and private sector, clearly, the prioritisation process for new schemes must pay regard to energy efficiency and we would encourage the WAG to also include this as a specific category in the project proposal forms for Social Housing Grant funding. In relation to private sector schemes, it has been demonstrated that observing energy efficient principles does not have to cost. Finally a clear inducement to all housing providers must be the benefits to the upkeep and maintenance of homes and the eradication of fuel poverty.

Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC PRIORITIES &amp; OBJECTIVES: ENERGY EFFICIENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To support the principles underpinning ‘0 carbon’ national objectives in new build homes and commit to working with local RSL and house builder partners to demonstrate what can feasibly be achieved in Torfaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To tap into wider corporate and organisational frameworks aimed at raising standards of energy efficiency in order to consider the possibility for economies of scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To commit to delivery of Torfaen’s Energy Policy &amp; to develop an understanding of partner association’s policies for long-term monitoring purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To promote the principles of energy efficiency in all works programmes aimed at meeting Welsh Housing Quality Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore and investigate funding options for the incorporation of energy efficiency in all aspects of our work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore the principles of Eco Homes Excellence and the longer-term relationship with affordable housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore the principles of ‘Bed Zed’ housing and applicability to Torfaen County Borough Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To engage the WAG in relation to inclusion of sustainable development/energy efficiency requirements for future SHG bidding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Promoting the right of vulnerable people to live in good quality, safe and affordable accommodation in environments that enable them to realise their full potential, is a key component of a LHS that works for everyone. We recognise that it is important to take a broad view of vulnerability and that vulnerability is not always permanent. Our approach has to be one therefore that joins-up the activities of local agencies and services that are important not just in terms of overcoming vulnerability, but moreover in ensuring the effects are sustained. In this respect exit from support services for vulnerable people are as important as entry to, and as such our approach to responding to the needs of vulnerable people has to be a long-term one.

**Homelessness**

Both Central and WAG’s overriding aims are to tackle social exclusion. Homelessness is undeniably the most serious manifestation of social exclusion. Tackling homelessness therefore goes to the heart of government’s agenda. Access to a decent and affordable home is the foundation to social and economic wellbeing and the ability of people to make a contribution to the communities with which they are linked.

In Torfaen we acknowledge that all of the issues considered within this Strategy are inherently interlinked. Poor quality housing leads to an undersupply of homes, which in turn creates homelessness, which then results in vulnerable people. As a result, one of our 5 main Corporate Plan objectives embodies the need to “improve the quality, supply, affordability and variety of housing and to tackle homelessness”. In responding to this important objective the Council has a range of statutory tools at its disposal which relate to homelessness prevention, provision of housing advice and the assessment for, and provision of, temporary and permanent housing.

Preventing and tackling homelessness requires a wider corporate approach since homelessness is not simply about the provision of a home. The LA and its partners have a broader role to play across a number of services and professions such as, social care, the LHB, probation service and mental health organisations. Considerations of the potential role of vulnerable people in terms of skills development and the wider regeneration agenda will also become increasingly important. We consider that Hales House – a supported living housing project for young people, will provide a good basis from which to progress.

The National Homelessness Strategy for Wales 2006-08 sets out key principles and priorities to guide local actions. Core objectives are centred on prevention of homelessness, user focussed services, sound strategic planning and joined-up working. This approach provides the flexibility to respond to the distinct needs of individual households. The Wales Audit Office report (2007)
supports this approach and makes the wider links with supply, affordability and private sector housing.

**Review of Homelessness Strategies**

Our adopted Homelessness Strategy (2003-08) has as its central aim the need to ensure a co-ordinated response to people in housing need with an emphasis on prevention. Specific objectives of the strategy are to:

- To prevent homelessness occurring in the first instance wherever possible
- To reduce repeat homelessness
- To co-ordinate provision of housing and related services for homeless and potentially homeless people
- To increase the level of support provided to ensure they can maintain housing
- To build on and reinforce existing partnerships between statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies to maximise resources available to meet need, eliminate duplication, develop preventative services and work towards best practice.

Torfaen’s homelessness service has recently been subject to a ‘critical friend’ review that also considered the council’s existing housing lettings scheme. The review produced a number of key findings that focuses the future:

- Positive corporate commitment to the issue through the adoption of affordable homes and homelessness within the Corporate Plan
- Although the service is ‘managing’, it is not progressing and therefore structural and resource changes are required to reflect the need for a holistic approach to homelessness prevention linked to housing options
- Front line customer services should be improved and focussed through a single access point providing appropriate services and access to housing and advice

On the back of this, Torfaen is adopting a new and more comprehensive approach through the development of a Housing Options Service that will:

- deliver quality and timely homelessness assessments and reviews
- ensure a single point of contact for housing in Torfaen via a Common Housing Register
- develop and widen choice based lettings across the LA area
- establish a ‘one stop’ approach for housing access and advice
- develop better private sector housing provision
- procure and manage all types of temporary housing

**The Profile of Homelessness**

Through the progression of a number of initiatives, the number of accepted homelessness cases (2005/06-2006/07) has decreased in Torfaen. This has mainly been achieved through homelessness prevention activities, case
management and the ‘Llamau approach’ to enabling young vulnerable people to return to the family home.

In 2005/6 the Council received 806 applications, over 50% of which were from single person households. A further 36% were from single households with children. The profile followed the same overall pattern and trends in 2006/07 – although the overall number of presentations reduced. Of the 404 homelessness applications received, single person households remain the largest category presenting to Torfaen. This continuing trend is indicative of the wider issue around housing undersupply in Torfaen and in particular the dearth of smaller 1 or 2 bed homes.

The general profile of homelessness in Torfaen remains high in relative proportion to its size. Homelessness acceptances at 9.7 per thousand are still almost 3 per thousand ahead of the Welsh average of 6.9 per thousand.

**Main Causes**

The main causes of homelessness are highlighted below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2005/06</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION</strong></td>
<td><strong>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental dispute</td>
<td>Parental dispute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/relative dispute</td>
<td>Friend/relative dispute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of rented home</td>
<td>Loss of rented home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship breakdown</td>
<td>Relationship breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship breakdown (violent)</td>
<td>Relationship breakdown (violent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Released from hospital/prison/institution</td>
<td>Released from hospital/prison/institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment/Violence</td>
<td>Harassment/Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent Arrear Public</td>
<td>Rent Arrear Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage Arrears</td>
<td>Mortgage Arrears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>806</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The loss of accommodation due to a breakdown in the relationship with parents remains the highest cause of homelessness in Torfaen. The second largest cause of homelessness is loss of housing due to violent relationship breakdown. There is no outward reason why this is and further analysis is needed to better inform our future approach.

In relation to responding to this profile of homelessness, Torfaen has strategically moved in halting the direct placement of ex-offenders in bed and breakfast establishments to minimise the risk to both the community and individual. Notwithstanding this, the overall approach to homelessness management is currently not as planned and proactive as it could be. We recognise that the service needs to move to a preventative-led approach, incorporating holistic housing options and cross-tenure advice.
Prevent not Process

The Council has recognised that homelessness prevention, housing access and quality advice are critical services for our area. Whilst the preventative agenda has moved forward in Torfaen, the critical friend review shows it remains ill prepared to drive forward change on the scale required. Existing provision in this area has included a WAG match funded temporary Homeless Prevention Officer and the use of the Llamau mediation service. Both schemes have yielded success and helped stem the flow of homelessness amongst young single people. In 2006 over a 6 month period the Homelessness Prevention Officer dealt with 64 enquiries that resulted in 58 instances of potential homelessness being averted.

The Llamau Family Mediation service began in December 2005 and up until the end of March 2006 prevented 22 young people from becoming homeless, amounting to a 69% success rate. Since the start of 2006/07 another 74 out of 116 young people remained at, or returned to, home. This represents inestimable cost and social benefits.

Funding for both activities are time limited to October 2007. In order to build upon the clear success of such schemes the Council will be receiving cost-benefit analysis reports to consider mainstreaming services in the future.

National Agenda

Steps are clearly underway in Torfaen to adhere to and comply with national objectives for homelessness. However the homelessness service within Torfaen at this time does fall short in terms of responding to all activity set out within the National Homelessness Strategy. Improving and mainstreaming the services we currently operate will enable us to deliver more fully on national objectives. The ‘critical friend’ review has been a crucial turning point and with LSVT looming, the time to plan for and implement change, has arrived.

Homelessness and allocations services are improving on the whole; however, there are concerns as to whether the service can adapt to meet increasing demands and expectations. Addressing resource constraints will be a fundamental issue especially since our response involves the establishment of a Housing Options Service. A key service objective for 2007 is the undertaking of a total service restructure and development of a fit for purpose cross-tenure Housing Options Service.

Corporate Implementation

Torfaen has prioritised housing and homelessness as a central issue. The explicit objective concerning housing is one of only 6 around which the Torfaen Corporate Plan is organised. Regular progress reports are received by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and homelessness is regularly considered at the Housing Performance Review Session chaired by the Executive Member for Performance Management.
With the increased corporate profile of homelessness and housing more generally, better links are being forged across services and agencies. A notable example is the inclusion of a dedicated part time homelessness worker within the Torfaen Young People’s Support Service. Good working arrangements exist with Probation and Prison Link Cymru; however future dialogue with Health is required around the issue of bed blocking.

**Support & Advice**

Future service provision in Torfaen is firmly embedded within an approach that integrates homelessness prevention, housing access and provision of quality advice, enabled through an inclusive and wide-ranging Housing Options Service. This will achieve a more proactive and preventative approach, closer links with the private sector, more flexible use of Homeless Prevention Fund, development of Service Level Agreements & improved protocols with key agencies, creation of bond and landlord incentives to meet the needs of homeless households and improved access to floating support to reduce repeat homelessness.

**Strategic Options**

Torfaen is developing its services to meet national and local expectations. The critical friend review identified gaps in existing provision which will enable the Council to re-focus its priorities and respond to changes needed within the service. The main focus will be homelessness provision and increasing access to the housing market offering alternatives to the customer that are both accessible and affordable.

Huge strides have been made on the temporary accommodation front in reducing B&B placements, increasing the supply of non-secure leased properties and the delivery of 20 bed supported living project, Hales House.

Expanding and reinforcing our current approach is therefore recognised as the best way of moving forwards and providing a service that it truly effective and fit for purpose.

**Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups**

The strategic approach to assessing the housing requirements of BME groups is set out in detail in Chapter 3. The term BME for the purposes of our Housing Market Assessment and the SE Wales BME Housing Strategy is one which refers to all minority ethnic communities – whether visible minorities or not. In adopting this inclusive and broad approach it follows that our commitment is to promote equal opportunities for all ethnic groups and to recognise the diversity of local housing communities and enable the provision of relevant and quality services that reflect and celebrate these differences.

Chapter 3 establishes the number of BME households currently living in Torfaen (less than 2% of the total population). Whilst this proportion is clearly low, it does not detract from the importance of understanding & meeting the housing requirements of both current and future BME households in our area.
Approach and Services

Our approach to responding to the housing requirements of BME communities has for the last 3 years been set out in the SEW BME Housing Strategy. However with a new HMA and new LHS, we have a clear opportunity to refresh and sharpen our vision for housing and BME people. Whilst more information exists at the sub-regional level it is intended that our future approach to planning and delivering provision for BME households will be taken forward as a sub-region, in collaboration with Newport, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Councils. We recognise that BME housing issues are complex and intertwined with wider wellbeing, regeneration and economic concerns and as a result, are best addressed on a broader sub-regional basis.

Our strategic commitment is to develop clear directives and targets for both enablers and providers of housing to tackle discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of the findings of the HMA. Our approach to monitoring and measuring this will form a specific section of our Operational Plan which will be shared & co-ordinated with those produced by neighbouring LAs to ensure we pursue a robust and joined-up approach to addressing what are, broadly similar issues. This approach will also extend to cross-boundary interventions required for gypsy and traveller provision such as provision of transient sites – also important for developing LDP policy.

Since the production of the SE Wales Strategy it would appear that the major issues affecting BME people in Torfaen will be, at least initially, more to do with advice, information and support services. This has to be a central consideration in the development of a Housing Options Service and must also be supported via the development of supported housing services. Our actions will therefore be centred on:

- Housing linking with wider socio-economic opportunities
- Targeted housing options, information and advice
- Specifically developed support services
- Ongoing understandings of need to respond to future change
- Harnessing better links with BME advocate organisations

Race Equality

Torfaen CBC and partner RSLs all have adopted Race Equality Schemes and policies for tackling racial harassment. Details of policies and schemes are accessible and available to the public and are reviewed and monitored in accordance with corporate procedures. Our role is to influence and inform such schemes and policies and to work with housing providers and consumers alike to ensure incidents and reported are acted upon, victims can access support and advice, perpetrators are dealt with and unwitting racism is recognised and tackled in all its forms.
Gypsies & Travellers

The focussed approach to assessing & understanding the housing requirements of gypsies and travellers is set out in Chapter 3. Moreover the findings and issues that clearly need to be addressed and considered are also conveyed and will be central components of our wider approach to meeting housing requirements in Torfaen. Through adopting the WAG definition of gypsies and travellers and in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, our understanding of housing requirements is based upon both detailed quantitative (bi-annual gypsy count) and qualitative data (extensive ‘face to face’ interviews).

Working corporately as key members of Torfaen’s Gypsy & Traveller’s Group, we are afforded a close working relationship with other services that work alongside the gypsy and traveller community. Our understandings therefore whilst principally based on the housing requirements of the group, are further steeped in wider economic, social, educational and environmental factors.

In particular, the clearly articulated need for more pitches is not just important in terms of fulfilling un-met ‘local’ need for housing, it is also central to the social stability and sustainability of Torfaen’s gypsy and traveller community. The requirement for more information on housing related support and advice services is again crucial from a housing need and options point of view, but also vital from a broader economic and affordability viewpoint. In relation to children and meeting future, and therefore potentially changing, needs of the community – development of broader housing options must go ahead in full consultation with our gypsy and traveller community.

Transient Sites & the Local Development Plan

The Local Development Plan framework requires local authorities to identify and make available a transient site for gypsy and travellers passing through or wishing to temporarily locate in the LA area. In building upon the findings of the cross-boundary Housing Market Assessment and thus, taking into account the situations in Newport, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent, discussions are progressing as to the joint identification of a suitable site. It is anticipated that a further piece of research will be commissioned in the near future to underpin future LDP policy.

Asylum Seekers & Refugees

The last 4 annual counts for asylum and refugee in Torfaen have yielded a nil return. However in view of the findings of the sub-regional Housing Market Assessment and the inclusion of designated cluster area, Newport, it is eminently possible that Torfaen will begin to feel to the effects of wider dispersal. In responding to this potential future need, the emergence of a comprehensive Housing Options Service will clearly need to take into account the impact of cross-boundary housing issues, such as the impact and needs of asylum seekers and refugees.
Beyond the HMA process it will also be of real importance to continue working alongside Newport City Council in anticipating the scale of the likely future impact and developing joint interventions to meet demand.

**Migrant Workers**

Again, as above Torfaen is yet to feel the impact of the migrant worker population. However as set out in the sub-regional Housing Market Assessment, the impact of an increase in in-migration from areas of Eastern Europe is significant in Newport. Consequently it will be important to remain aware of this issue and potential future displacement, in particular in relation to the development of the Housing Options Service and to again sustain working links with Newport to monitor the longer-term impact.

**Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes**

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: VULNERABLE PEOPLE

- To prioritise higher levels of co-ordination between Housing Strategy and strategic homelessness functions in order to increase supply of housing in ways that directly impact upon homelessness.
- To develop specific shorter measures in response to homelessness pressures – in particular expansion of private sector leasing scheme & rehabilitation of empty homes for homelessness temporary housing.
- To undertake all necessary ground work and preparation to develop a single persons’ housing project in Cwmbran/South Torfaen.
- To further develop (in conjunction with establishment of Housing Options Service) a broader range of housing products and choices for vulnerable young people – SAFE Project, scheme for young people with challenging behaviour, ‘training flats’ move on accommodation and support etc.
- To integrate the provision of cross-tenure housing advice with a comprehensive Housing Options Service that would also oversee advice and temporary accommodation services for homelessness
  - To progress the Common Housing Register in partnership with GENuS as a means of driving this forward and creating a framework for collaboration.
  - To progress the potential expansion of mortgage rescue products in conjunction with GENuS.
- To undertake on annual basis a Rough Sleeper Survey.
- To build on the findings of the Housing Market Assessment by further exploring (from a statutory homelessness perspective) the nature and extent of hidden or concealed households in Torfaen.
- To develop an approach to tackling homelessness aimed at preventing as opposed to processing, homelessness.
- To develop a cost-benefit analysis that sets out the benefits and savings to the Council of current projects such as the Llamau mediation scheme, in order to support ongoing provision.
- To collate and gather more qualitative information on homelessness and the needs of homeless people.
- To continue work started in local schools by holding more awareness raising sessions and communicating to young people the issues associated with housing need.
- To develop the intermediate rented sector as a viable housing option for young single homeless people and homeless families in Torfaen.
- To ensure, through partnership arrangements (e.g. Homeless Strategy Group and Supporting People Planning Groups) a more co-ordinated approach to joining-up homelessness and support.
- To work closely with neighbouring authorities in assessing and responding to both current latent and future needs amongst BME households, gypsies and travellers and groups such as migrant workers
  - To ensure such future needs are built into and reflected in the development of a tenure-wide Housing Options Service.
Whereas the term ‘Housing’ might be considered to be deceptive in terms of conjuring up a true description of the varied and true role of modern-day home providers, no such misconception surrounds ‘Supporting People’. It does exactly what it says: it is a scheme that provides essential housing related support to vulnerable people. Supporting People (SP) in Torfaen therefore has a firm ‘housing’ emphasis. We strongly see the need to support specific households to maintain their homes and broader quality of life as a key social issue, but one all the same that has its fundamental backdrop in the operation of housing markets. An under-supply of homes directly results in problems of affordability and this in turn impacts upon homelessness, which very often leads to increased levels of vulnerable people. Our approach is therefore one which sees the Supporting People function playing a central role within the effective enactment of our long-term strategic housing function.

**Strategic Approach**

The SP programme combines the planning, financing and monitoring of supported housing and housing related support services. Housing related support is delivered through a number of schemes managed by different providers across all tenures, including; the Council, RSLs, voluntary and charitable organisations and privately run schemes.

Our goal is, through strong strategic planning and partnerships, to strengthen understandings of the housing and support needs of vulnerable people – both locally and regionally. This will help shape the future direction of support services and help to ensure the services users receive are good quality, relevant and effective. The programme is administered through joint commissioning arrangements across Housing, Health, Social Care and probation.

SP services make a wider contribution to achieving local and national policy objectives, in particular linked to community safety, health and social care, reducing homelessness, financial pressures on other public services and social inclusion. Our aim is to ensure the services commissioned are configured and delivered to best meet needs and priorities in the most efficient and sustainable ways possible.

Our vision and key aims for SP in Torfaen are:

- To maintain a partnership approach, bring together Housing, Social Care, Probation & Health as joint commissioners, to improve the quality, quantity and range of housing support services in a co-ordinated way – in conjunction with other service providers and users.
- To deliver housing related support to vulnerable people to enable them to maximise their independence. Our belief is that good quality, integrated housing support can help prevent homelessness and tenancy breakdown; assist reduction of crime and social exclusion and reduce unnecessary admissions to hospital, prison of institutional care.
• Deliver high quality and strategically planned housing related support services which are needs-led, cost effective, and reliable and which compliment existing care and other specialist support services.

Key Programme Aims:

1. To have a sound and well informed understanding of the need of vulnerable people and local/regional provision
2. To establish clear priorities for the longer-term development of services, a fair and transparent commissioning framework and effective use of resources
3. To develop robust and measurable Quality & Performance monitoring and review standards
4. To ensure inclusive and effective ways of engaging, involving and communicating with customers and partners
5. To ensure the SP contributes and adds value to other local strategies and plans.

The Supporting People Operational Plan (SPOP) is our strategic planning tool and is submitted annually to WAG. The framework prioritises the need for new expenditure - bidding document for SP Revenue Grant (SPRG) and the method for strategically evidencing the revenue resource requirements for SP Grant (SPG).

Key Themes from the SPOP

Our SP Programme commissions supported housing and housing related support services for over 17 vulnerable client groups. It recognises that people can have interchangeable and linked support needs that induce vulnerability and may not fall into one lone client group.

The SPOP analyses the evidenced need of all these client groups that are eligible for SP services. Key themes and findings from the SPOP highlight the gaps in current service provision and are therefore highly pertinent to this overarching housing strategy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Groups</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women fleeing domestic violence</td>
<td>High service demand – low service provision &amp; no services available to men fleeing domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with learning difficulties</td>
<td>Current low provision results in out of county placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with mental health problems (lined also to substance misuse ‘dual diagnosis’)</td>
<td>Increasing demand. Some floating support services available, but still high proportions of out of county placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People suffering alcohol/drug dependency</td>
<td>Limited current provision to support growing levels of substance misuse. SPOP prioritises a sub-regional ‘dual diagnosis’ supported living project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME households requiring</td>
<td>Evidenced demand – no services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Related Support</td>
<td>Currently in Operation in Torfaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with a physical disability and/or sensory impairment</td>
<td>Gap exists within current service provision for floating support service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, single homeless people &amp; young people leaving care and Hales House needing ‘move on’ support</td>
<td>Gap exists for provision of this nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-offenders needing housing related support</td>
<td>Limited supply currently – requires joint working across professions and boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless or potentially young homeless people requiring support -</td>
<td>New provision at Hales House but more services needed for young people accessing, setting up and sustaining homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with chronic illnesses including AIDS and HIV</td>
<td>Some provision exists through Community Alarm and sheltered services – but requires expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable single parents</td>
<td>Scope for development of dedicated supported housing and floating support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older People and frail elderly</td>
<td>Requirement for more support services for sheltered and extra care housing and SMART technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cross-Boundary Issues

Torfaen shares close links with neighbouring LAs Newport, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire (former ‘Gwent’). These LAs are key players in relation to sub-regional partnership and commissioning frameworks. The SP Regional Officers Group involves SP officers across the former ‘Gwent’ area meeting regularly to develop and implement joint planning and commissioning. The aim implicit within this is to enable more effective, viable and quality SP services on a more flexible and shared basis. SPROG has enabled SP teams to develop and adopt a single unified process for reviewing and monitoring SP funded services and contributes to the gathering of a cross-boundary evidence base. To date 2 projects have been jointly developed:

- 10 unit Trothwy Arms project providing floating support to 10 high risk (of harm) prison leavers at any one time, across ‘Gwent’
- SP Development Officer for ‘Gwent’

In relation to future development, the group has prioritised:

- 6-8 unit ‘dual diagnosis’ shared temporary supported housing for persons with substance misuse and mental health issues
- 6-8 unit shared temporary supported housing for persons aged 16-18 with substance misuse issues

Joint planning and implementation with neighbouring authorities is critical to ensuring supported housing and housing related support provision is developed in a way that shares good practices, optimises resources and
fundamentally, recognises that the need for supported housing can be tackled more effectively and efficiently, across boundaries.

**Linking Capital & Revenue**

Capital decisions have revenue consequences. Our SPOP identifies projects requiring capital development on the basis of a revenue-led approach to service planning. Through the SP planning process, priority project proposals requiring capital are fed through to the Housing Enabling section for consideration and inclusion within the Social Housing Grant programme.

Jointly, 2 projects bringing together both capital and revenue are currently being progressed, they are:

- George Lansbury extra care scheme – in development phase (06-08)
- ‘Gwent’-wide dual diagnosis (mental health & substance misuse) – in planning & preparation phases

Important regard is given to the availability of capital funding when prioritising SP project proposals and in the future there is a clear opportunity to consider wider capital funding opportunities to facilitate supported housing development.

**The SPOP & Homelessness Strategy**

The SPOP fundamentally links to the aims set out in our local Homelessness Strategy and as a result, occupies a central place within this wider Housing Strategy. It serves to

- Identify the key issues affecting homeless people
- Combine the full range of policies which tackle these issues
- Identify gaps in information, services & policies
- Produce a clear set of detailed targets
- Consider how progress will be evaluated and monitored

On assessing gaps in current service provision, the SPOP has consistently prioritised the development of a new supported living project for young (16-24) homeless people. This came to fruition in March 2007 when the 20 bed Hales House became operational.

The SPOP fundamentally adheres to and supports the core aim of the Homelessness Strategy to, ‘prevent young people becoming homeless through the provision of appropriate intervention, information and support’ and to further ‘enable homeless people to access housing and support’.

**Strategic Planning**

The SP programme links with a host of other policy drives both on a local and national level. The SPOP underpins, informs and helps deliver aims within:

- The Local Homelessness and Housing Strategy
- Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Strategy
SP in Torfaen is a good example of how public service commissioning works across borders and professions in ways that maximise opportunities for service users to live independently and enjoy a good quality of life.

The SP Planning Group has widespread representation and is recognised locally as a partnership that delivers action.

**Older Persons’ Provision**

Providing, re-configuring and better aligning services for older person is a key component of our housing-related support framework for vulnerable people. With increased life expectancy and increasing numbers of older people living alone within all tenures in Torfaen, often in housing that no longer meets their specific needs – delivering sustainable solutions for this important client group must assume a pivotal place within our LHS.

Joint Working – Housing Support, Health & Social Care

The SPOP shares key linkages with a range of ‘umbrella’ statutory plans, informing and assisting delivery of the Older Persons’ and Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies, in particular.

The emphasis of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy is on re-aligning services to focus on prevention and early intervention, bringing health, social care and related services together in a more holistic way. The contribution of housing and housing related support in this context is one which is widely recognised. To enable reduction of necessary burdens on health and social care acute services – preventative and community based services must be provided to people in their own homes.

Supporting People in Torfaen thus shares strong links with the health sector and social care. Involvement in Torfaen Local Health Board’s Primary Care Strategy and working as a key partner to the Re-configuration of Housing, Health and Social Care provision in North Torfaen, has seen the relationship strengthen and sharpen. A dedicated officer is also now in post to co-ordinate the relationships and interfaces and to develop and implement projects that achieve clear benefits for housing, social care and health alike. In relation to the Reconfiguration project specifically, there is a clear prospect through joint working, for services to be arranged and delivered in a needs-led way. Moreover services can be planned and co-ordinated in more seamless ways and thus contribute to realising the Clinical Futures vision.
A further example of targeted joint working is the development of Torfaen’s first extra care scheme at George Lansbury Home in Croesyceiliog. Whilst provision of this type on the back of the closure of some of Torfaen’s residential care home features strongly in our future plans, George Lansbury as our first joint venture clearly demonstrates the ways in which collaborative working can help deliver services to older people in much more contemporary and appropriate ways.

The Future

In relation to areas requiring joint working of this nature, it is clear from the HMA that the effects of an ageing population, in particular one that comprises mainly older single person households, poses real issues regarding best use of housing stock. Focus groups undertaken as part of the assessment process highlighted the concerns of some older people who feel they live in homes far too large for them and homes that require resource far beyond what they can afford in monetary and maintenance terms. In the social sector, a policy to tackle this issue has to be explored as a priority, whilst in the private sector, a number of the initiatives and proposals set out in the Private Sector chapter, require targeted implementation. In addition boosting the variety and supply of new housing has to move forward in ways that take into account older persons’ requirements, e.g. lifetime homes.

Whilst there is potential for conflict between the objectives to enable older people to remain at home and tackling under-occupation, our approach in Torfaen has to be based upon ensuring the planning and delivery of a range of options and products that offer older people genuine choice and maximum flexibility. The future role of the Community Alarm Service therefore is an instrumental one, both in terms of equipping new & existing homes with technological features (SMART technology) that provide relevant safeguards whilst supporting independence. The Community Alarm Service therefore requires a degree of future focus as to how it can effectively expand its service base – and also it’s clear cross boundary role.

Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: SUPPORTING PEOPLE

- To work with partner agencies and services to collate and gather compelling evidence of need to support future supported provision in Torfaen, via the Supporting People Operational Plan
- To ensure the approach taken to supported housing provision in Torfaen continues to be Housing-led on account of the links between housing requirements and related support needs
- To ensure the approach to new or reconfigured service planning solidifies the important links between capital and revenue investment, in order that priorities can be delivered in sustainable ways and with a large degree of certainty
- To work closely at both a strategic and operational level with the Homelessness Service and the future Housing Options Service to ensure support needs are met in ways which best meet an individual’s specific needs
- To deliver advice and information as part of a wider Housing Options Service
- To identify ways in which future support provision can best meet the evidenced needs of the Gypsy and Traveller and wider BME community
- To continue to work across administrative boundaries via the Supporting People Regional Officers Group (SPROG) to develop efficient and effective supported housing provision
- To build on social benefit research in demonstrating the ways in which supported housing helps deliver on the wider health, wellbeing and quality of life agenda
- To emphasise the cross-tenure importance of supported housing provision – e.g. not just a ‘social service’
- To harness links with the Local Health Board and Social Care division in developing joint approaches to delivering and re-configuring services for older people in Torfaen
  - To receive regular reports from the dedicated Housing, Health and Social Care Project Officer, detailing up-to-date evidence and identifying areas for future action
- To work with colleagues across all relevant services, namely the Local Health Boards and Trusts in helping to deliver the Clinical Futures agenda
- To assist delivery of the Re-configuration of Older Persons’ Services in North Torfaen, in accordance with Excellence Age Accommodation principles for older people
- To enable old people to access housing and support services aligned to their current and future needs
- To develop the wider benefits of the Community Alarm Service in establishing innovative approaches to assistive technology and tele-services
Managing Our Housing Communities

Our approach to the management of homes in Torfaen is one which recognises the fundamental and intrinsic links between homes and communities. A single tenure ‘estate’ or area no longer exists within Torfaen as a result of the exercising of the Rights to Buy and Acquire and the inevitable amalgamation of different housing market areas and wards. Communities are indelibly mixed and diverse. Phenomena such as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is therefore not tenure specific; the letting of homes is about balancing the needs of the individual housing applicant with those of the wider community and harnessing cohesion and sustainability is not of single, but cross-tenure importance. Just as the point was made in Chapter 4 that community housing is potentially a much more fitting and relevant term for ‘social housing’, our approach to housing management across all social landlords in Torfaen, is one which further embodies a commitment to the wider communities in which homes are located.

The management of homes and neighbourhoods in Torfaen plays a central role in balancing the effective use of social housing; maximising the ‘fit’ between supply of homes and the demand for them. Neighbourhood management strategies have an important part to play in optimising the supply of homes and occupation rates, considering and accommodating individuals’ support needs and contributing to the overall sustainability of communities.

This chapter considers the future of neighbourhood management in Torfaen in the context of imminent transfer to Bron Afon Community Housing and the key interface with other RSL partners. Furthermore other important policy developments also have to be taken into account, namely the recent review of social housing in England by Professor John Hills on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Community housing and the management of neighbourhoods will clearly play a key future role as Wales faces significant social and economic challenges.

Maintenance of Our Homes

The management and maintenance of homes go hand in hand and form the two central components of the neighbourhood management service. The maintenance and repair of the social rented stock underpins the health, wellbeing and quality of life of those people living in the sector. The fitness and modernisation of homes is further central to the aesthetic value and appeal of communities: physically poor or sub-standard housing can blight an area and severely limit opportunities for economic and regenerative transformation. Maintaining homes to a decent standard contributes to the supply of quality affordable housing and is therefore a critical element of optimally functioning housing markets.

Torfaen CBC’s approach to meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard prior to 2012 is set out in the LHS component plan – the Housing Revenue Account
Business Plan. Essentially the approach adopted in Torfaen as set out in Chapter 4, involves transfer of the council’s housing stock to a newly formed community housing mutual – Bron Afon Community Housing. Tenants voted in favour of proposals set out in the Offer Document in March 2007 and transfer is expected to take place in the first quarter of 2008.

Bron Afon CH will be the vehicle through which more than 8,000 current council homes, receive investment and thus, modernisation works to reach modern day fitness standards.

The remainder of the social housing stock in Torfaen will also be subject to meeting the requirements of Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2012. Progress with both current and ongoing planned works is underway and is set out in further detail in Chapter 4. The need to ensure all social housing in Torfaen meets WHQS by 2012 goes to the heart of our commitment to ensuring all households have the opportunity to live in good quality affordable homes. With both the need and potential for higher quantities of new build affordable housing in Torfaen more pronounced than ever, ensuring the existing housing stock offers a high quality option – is vital.

The opportunities for localised and sustainable procurement across the board are clearly significant. Both the approaches adopted by Bron Afon and GENuS in relation to the procurement of works, materials, labour and other contracts, offer potential for collaboration and co-ordination. Whilst Bron Afon at this stage is fledgling and more exploration is required around the potential for joint working with GENuS – both around the immediate need to meet WHQS and the future need to develop new homes – the opportunities are recognised and will form an important part of the process over the next few months.

Ends and Means?

The DCLG Review of Social Housing ‘Ends and Means?’ (2007), although principally aimed at England, yields important implications for social housing in Wales & other parts of the UK. The review has found that social housing does have a major role to play in the context of the future social and economic harmony of the UK, however highlights a number of issues that need addressing and changing, in order to make this so. The Review suggests a more innovative use of the asset base, questions the continued relevance of a ‘tenure for life’, advocates joining-up the need for housing with the worklessness problem and supports the principles of mixed tenure communities. It further recommends that in tackling the ‘stigma’ attached to social housing, providers need to move away from more traditional housing management methods, to more holistic and interventionist methods of community or neighbourhood management.

Whilst the Review has its basis in the English context, many of the findings have applicability to Wales, in particular those that relate to lettings and the broader community cohesion issue.
Strategic Approaches to Lettings

As referenced throughout this Strategy, a targeted approach to lettings aimed at integrating a broader mix of housing products and options in Torfaen is keenly felt to offer the most sustainable way forward. In relation to social housing in particular, there is a clear need to ensure synergy between the needs of applicants and those of the surrounding community and also, a compelling requirement to make best use of available housing.

Our approach as a Council looks forward to the future with Bron Afon CH and further seeks to work with RSL partners around:

- Delivering a ‘choice based’ system of letting, via the Council’s Homefinder scheme and using this as the basis for proposed future work with RSL partners to develop a Common Lettings Policy
  - Within this specifically, recognising the potential for the developing a co-ordinated approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour, joint exclusions and suspensions policies etc
- Bringing all housing options and providers together in the form of a joint lettings process via the establishment of a Common Housing Register
- Participating in the HOMES mobility scheme as a means of recognising the important contribution social housing can make to the increased need for flexible labour markets
- Understanding and supporting the broader strategic housing role of the local authority in terms of enabling new affordable housing products through planning obligations, SHG funded schemes and other sources
- Recognising the need to prioritise the choices and aspirations of existing tenants involved in comprehensive redevelopment and regeneration schemes
- Involving and informing tenants and other housing consumers in developing future approaches to the letting and management of their homes and other initiatives in the communities in which they live
  - Within this specifically developing local action plans aimed at targeting resources and initiatives in order to work with communities in addressing issues and delivering key outcomes
- Working in partnership with the RSL sector as a whole to maximise opportunities for collaboration and consistency and to ensure quality neighbourhood management, community development and regeneration services and opportunities are delivered
- Strengthening partnerships with the Council, namely Community Safety and Environmental Services to deliver holistic neighbourhood management services to tenants and residents

Community Cohesion

The letting of homes and the management of neighbourhoods are just one important overall factor in the context of creating wider community cohesion. Homes do not exist in isolation – they may be fixed in terms of location, but
the wider services and amenities available in those locations play a critical factor in influencing personal choice and the ability of communities to cohere and become vibrant and viable.

The letting, management and maintaining of homes makes a significant contribution to community cohesion and the ability of people to feel part of a community. In the interests of promoting community sustainability and solidity, again, in both looking to the future with Bron Afon CH and the way in which we work with other partner RSLs, our aims are to:

- Co-ordinate responses to dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, both through collaborative working across the RSL sector and through strengthened working relationships with Community Safety and the Community Safety Partnership
- Ensure the ethos of neighbourhood and community management extends to participation and engagement frameworks in order that every tenant and resident is able to take part and have a say
- Review links with the Supporting People and Homelessness Teams to ensure tenants and customers of social landlords are aware of all the mechanisms through which emergency housing and housing related support and advice can be accessed
- Establish clear links with the Council’s Regeneration Directorate to ensure objectives around community cohesion and sustainability are at the heart of wider rejuvenation initiatives.
- Commit to the ongoing maintenance and updating of the Community Housing Agreement Framework, to ensure all of the above objectives can be clearly set out, monitored, reviewed and implemented.

**Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes**

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: MANAGING OUR COMMUNITIES

- To support a shift in approach from the more traditional concept of ‘housing management’ to a broader one based upon community or neighbourhood management
- To monitor the impact of housing management policies in making best use of the existing stock and ensuring demand is met in sustainable and appropriate ways
- To tackle housing under-occupation and work with Housing Strategy to create a range of ‘move on’ products and initiatives to enable people to access more suitable accommodation
- To ensure the maintenance of repair of homes is undertaken in ways that maximise the aesthetic appeal of housing and environments and thereby make a contribution to community regeneration
- To put in place clear mechanisms (via the Housing Operational Plan) to monitor progress in relation to meeting WHQS across all organisations
- To ensure the wider social and economic benefits of WHQS remain local and to receive information on how this has been achieved and wider community impact
- To sign up to the principles of sustainable modernisation and rehabilitation of homes in order to address fuel poverty
- To procure works and services in sustainable ways through use of social clauses supporting local suppliers, providers and workforce
- To assess the potential for collaborative procurement across the local RSL sector and continue to establish links with the GENuS consortium, sharing information and exploring the potential for future partnerships
- To set out proposals for addressing local and regional skills gap shortage (see Regenerating our Communities)
- To, in accordance with the Housing Options Service, establish a strategic approach to lettings via a Common Housing Register and working across all local RSLs to develop a Common Lettings Approach
- To involve and engage members of the community (tenants and residents alike) in neighbourhood management issues and wider community inclusion initiatives.
  - To adopt the principle that engagement by RSLs should extend beyond those customer directly served, to the wider community
- To review and revise the Community Housing Agreement framework to ensure it is fit for future purpose
Housing is increasingly seen as a driver for area-based and community focussed regeneration. Housing has an important dual role in this context as it is needed to sustain and support the effects of regeneration, but also helps create regeneration opportunities in the first place via the construction, configuration and rehabilitation of homes and communities. With our long-term investment in both existing and new communities – housing-led regeneration is implicit, if not explicit, in everything we do.

Investment in housing not only drives the wider regeneration agenda in terms of job creation and economic benefits, community development and improving overall prosperity – it also helps create mixed use and mixed tenure neighbourhoods. This in turn contributes to the creation of balanced and sustainable communities: the essential backdrop to successful regeneration.

The Heads of the Valleys Programme’s sponsorship of ‘housing-led’ regeneration has already made an impact in areas of North Torfaen. The commitment to funding projects aimed at meeting WHQS, the sustainable conversion of empty private sector buildings, producing housing design guidance and new build projects is illustrative of Housing’s role in the wider agenda.

Whilst the LHS as a whole is broadly illustrative of housing’s regenerative role, this chapter sets out the real opportunities and options for housing-led regeneration in Torfaen.

Housing-Led Regeneration

The housing sector is increasingly responsible for regeneration activity in Torfaen. The impact of rising house prices has effectively rescued low demand areas within Mid and North Torfaen and more people are heading north as need for housing becomes increasingly displaced as a result of affordability. Empty former commercial properties are being exploited for residential gain, a programme of empty homes conversions is underway and in terms of private sector new build – sites are coming forward in the North, indicating both developer confidence and the desire of households to live in these parts.

The Council and all partner RSLs have further committed to meeting the WHQS by 2012. With the imminent transfer of council homes to Bron Afon Community Housing and work underway, if not complete to achieve WHQS in the remaining social housing stock – the aesthetic look, quality and appear of homes and the wider environment, will be significantly improved.

Notwithstanding the huge regenerative impact of quality homes and environments, investment in housing clearly has a much broader and longer-term effect.
Supply-Led Regeneration

This Strategy illustrates that to 2021 potentially more than 7,000 new homes maybe needed in Torfaen. Whilst the exact number will be determined through the LDP process it is apparent that the timely agreed figure will be significantly larger than that accommodated by the local plan. This will provide homes for people needing them in our area and simultaneously improve the look and feel of communities, new private sector and affordable house building will have much wider and longer effects.

The local economic and employment impact of 7,000 new homes will be considerable. Not only will 7,000 additional homes need to be supported by essential infrastructure requirements such as transport links, new homes will impact upon the need for adequate learning and educational provision, good leisure and recreational facilities, a quality retail offer and training and employment opportunities. Rising to the challenge of building new homes means wider infrastructure and amenity considerations have to be paramount. Ensuring targets for affordable homes are met is also of fundamental importance to sustaining the effects and benefits of regeneration. Local people must be able to remain in their communities in order that regeneration is successful and makes areas more desirable places in which to live and work.

Arguably, one of the most significant benefits of delivering 7,000 new homes will clearly be in the form of both direct and indirect employment opportunities. The opportunities for local jobs in the construction sector, to engage local supply chains and establish localised sustainable procurement policies and practices are significant. The big challenges are however to ensure local people are equipped with the right skills to enable them to take part. This places a clear emphasis on the need for schools, training and other learning establishments to engage in the agenda and play an important co-ordinating role in developing young people in more non-vocational ways. Furthermore, the potential for young vulnerable people and young disengaged people to participate, develop new skills and secure employment is also considerable. Young, disenfranchised people are sometimes be perceived as a ‘problem’ within communities. However, bringing young people to the party and enabling them to form part of the skills shortage solution will make a wider and more sustained social impact. We are committed to working closely with House Builders, RSLs, Regeneration colleagues and advocate organisations for young people to ensure this is a central consideration.

Finally, 7,000 new homes will generate additional injections of private finance into Torfaen, via the 106 route which can be used to fund infrastructure and amenity requirements. Additional council tax revenues will also be generated every year for the entire lifetime of new properties and these can be ploughed back into public service provision. Our case in this respect will be to see some of this additional revenue ring-fenced for housing purposes in order that the wider benefits outlined in this section, can continue to be replicated over the longer-term.
Quality-Led Regeneration

Meeting WHQS in the social housing sector and improving the quality of private sector housing stock, will also generate massive regeneration opportunities for Torfaen.

Meeting the WHQS in council housing stock alone is expected to secure somewhere in the region of £187m of investment by 2012. Whilst this level of investment will be critical in bringing about improvements to homes – the added value generated is also critical in regeneration and economic prosperity terms. Locally based procurement, local labour and local suppliers are central components of the stock transfer offer and in Torfaen the commitment is to transforming homes and communities through both the modernisation of the housing stock and the creation of significant economic opportunities. Improving the housing stock is recognised as being one part of sustainable community regeneration – the wider benefits are as important to secure in achieving thriving and viable communities.

In relation to the private sector housing stock, work carried out to date, specifically that related to Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, has enhanced the appearance and value of some of Torfaen’s oldest and poorest homes. Buildings have been brought back into mixed housing-commercial use, derelict landmark buildings like the Clarence Hotel in Pontypool have been converted and assisted into modern day assets, enveloping schemes in areas of Pontypool and Abersychan have restored rows of terraced housing to their former glory and in Blaenavon, whole streets have been rejuvenated in a way that befits a World Heritage site.

However, due to levels of unfitness in Torfaen’s private sector, limited resources and the absence of any defined standard (like WHQS) – investment in private sector homes as a major driver of regeneration has as yet, not been fully explored. Whilst employment opportunities have been created and local suppliers engaged – the size of works has not on the same scale as those in the public sector. A clear objective therefore has to be around linking NRA activity with community based regeneration to achieve scale and thus, create jobs, training and wider regeneration opportunities.

Communities First

There are two Communities First areas in Torfaen, the united estates of Penygarn, St Cadocs and Trevethin in Pontypool and Thornhill in Cwmbran. Communities First aims to develop an integrated approach to community regeneration that minimises duplication of effort, maximises effectiveness and enables a concerted effort to address the complex problems that exist in our more deprived areas.

Torfaen’s Community Vision Framework is unequivocal about the important role of housing in our Communities First areas. The stated objective is that “...housing is of an acceptable standard and is repaired and maintained with
reasonable responsiveness to need”. Whilst this is clearly important to the development of community cohesion – it is of further relevant to note the way in which delivery of good quality, affordable housing in these areas will also contribute to achievement of wider stated economic, education, environmental, wellbeing and security aims.

Community Safety

The impact of ASB and crime and disorder on communities frequently jeopardises the viability of areas. From a housing-led regeneration perspective there is a clear recognition that community safety is a vital component in generating confidence amongst businesses and the private sector to invest in the future of an area. From a wider social viewpoint – crime has to be addressed if communities are to become viable and vibrant and sustain the benefits of regeneration.

There are many ways in which housing can contribute to safer communities. In relation to new homes (affordable and market) and the creation of new communities, the principles of ‘secure by design’ are ones we fully support. Designing out crime and minimising the opportunity for ASB offers communities the opportunity for a secure environment, safe areas in which children can play, quality communal space and green areas, which enhance the built form.

In relation to existing housing, the role of social housing providers is an important one in understanding both the causes and effects of neighbour nuisance and housing related ASB and furthermore in developing approaches to tackle them. Linking in to the work of the Torfaen Community Safety Partnership will continue to be critical in a post transfer environment. Furthermore building partnerships with the Youth Offending Team and seeking to include young people in the housing regeneration agenda will also become an important component of the future.

Housing-Led Regeneration: Getting it Right

The above commentary sets out the real opportunity for Housing to take a lead role in driving forward the Regeneration of Torfaen. Housing-led regeneration is so important to get right because the economic, social and environmental rewards are significant, long-term and self-perpetuating.

This LHS sets out a new and up-to-date framework for Housing that goes right to the heart of regeneration and sustainable communities. However, in order to ensure this moves forward in a co-ordinated and strategic way, we feel that achieving the following will be central to getting right, housing-led regeneration:

- Clearer structural and partnership linkages between Housing Strategy and Regeneration within Torfaen.
- Continuing support the Heads of the Valleys programme in recognising the regeneration potential of Housing
• Closer working with organisations such as the Building Research Establishment to ensure housing-led regeneration is sustainable in terms of design, build and procurement
• Engaging vulnerable people and in particular disengaged young people in housing-regeneration projects and initiatives, better linking with schools, learning and training establishments to improve the skills base and spread and sustain prosperity
• Joining-up regeneration and renewal in order to optimise added value and ensure all spheres of housing activity contribute to regeneration aims
• Supporting Bron Afon CH in achieving the WHQS and having as part of the Retained Strategic Housing Function a ‘Relationship Manager’ to oversee the new association
• Working with the private sector to develop social clauses and the opportunity for joint procurement initiatives across both the public and private sectors.

**Strategic Housing Objectives & Target Outcomes**

The Strategic Housing Objectives selected by the Strategic Housing Forum are set out below. Detailed targets outcomes specifying timescales, resources & specifying organisational priorities are set out in the Housing Operational Plan
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES: COMMUNITY REGENERATION –

- To demonstrate and reinforce the new and more relevant place of Housing within the wider community and economic regeneration context
  - To achieve this through making a wider case for housing and exemplifying the ways in which it delivers on non-housing aims
- To ensure housing remains as one of the top priorities within both the Torfaen Corporate and Community Plans
- To utilise the Social & Economic Impact Assessment tools in demonstrating the contribution Housing makes to wider regeneration aims
- To establish more robust links with colleagues within TCBC Regeneration to ensure housing is recognised as having a key role to play in delivering sustainable regeneration
- To encourage increased supply of housing as a means of creating jobs, improving environments and increasing overall economic prosperity
- To commit to balancing increases in new supply with an approach that brings existing empty homes back into use and thereby increasing the aesthetic appeal of communities
- To prioritise the delivery of affordable housing as means of ensuring people are able to remain in their communities and thereby support and sustain the effects of regeneration
- To encourage new housing development in North Torfaen in order to target regeneration initiatives in less prosperous communities
- To work closely with Bron Afon CH and GENuS in maximising the regeneration benefits of meeting WHQS and keeping all gains local
- To establish stronger links with Education Strategists in ensuring synergy between future learning provision and new homes
- To specifically target young people in helping to close the skills gap shortage and enable them to gain employment and training
- To maximise the contribution of work in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas to the environmental, social and economic sustainability of places
- To demonstrate the ways in which investment in Housing can create safer and more secure communities
- To work with colleagues supporting Communities First areas in developing understandings of the way in which Housing can support community development