



## **Malvern Hills District Council**

### **Housing Strategy 2002-2007**

### **The Housing Review 2002/03**

**The Addendum to the Housing Strategy 2002/2007  
produced in July 2002**

**The Housing Review 2002/2003**

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## **Housing Review 2002/03**

### **Introduction**

During 2001, Malvern Hills District Council comprehensively reviewed the housing needs and policies for the district, and following wide and detailed consultation, produced a housing strategy for the forward five years. The Housing Strategy 2002-2007 is a corporate document, formally approved by Council as the framework against which the Local Authority positions itself strategically and operationally in order to best meet the housing needs of the Community.

The housing world is an 'ever changing scene', and for a local authority with housing responsibility, the evolving national, regional and local influences must be recognised and acted upon, so that decisions that affect current and future housing needs are relevant and exploit new opportunities. In considering the annual review of the Strategy, and after discussions with senior officials from the Government Office for the West Midlands, The Council decided this year to issue an addendum, 'The Housing Review 2002/03.' This complements the existing strategy document, which has been updated, by responding in detail to the changes and challenges that have arisen since last year.

**The Housing Review 2002/03** will focus on four key areas:

The new policy initiatives that are being set by Government,

The regional influences that impact on the district and the Council's role in building and developing cross border partnership working.

The internal influences that help shape the Housing Strategy and the delivery of the housing service

Finally, and most importantly in the local context, the results of the recently completed Housing Needs Assessment Project, which will influence the planning policies relating to 'affordable housing' in the emerging Malvern Hills Local Plan.

Councillor Reg Farmer  
Leader of the Council and  
Planning Portfolio Holder

Councillor Graham Myatt  
Housing Portfolio Holder

### **Note**

*All performance information in The Housing Strategy 2002-2007 document has been updated to reflect the outturn position relating to 2001/2002, and forward targets have also been revised.*

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# The Housing Review 2002/2003

## Part One

### 1.1 Government Housing Policy

Over the last 12 months the Government has issued a number of major housing policy initiatives which impact on the Council's Housing Service. Part One aims to provide summaries of these initiatives, followed by comments that are relevant to the Council's Housing Strategy.

### 1.2 Government Spending Review

This part provides a summary of the key housing issues referred to in the Secretary of State's Statement on Sustainable Communities, Housing and Planning which followed the Government's spending review announcement made in July 2002. Three of these issues have key relevance to the Council's Housing Strategy.

#### 1.2.1 Spending

The spending review announced an increase in overall funding for housing from £4.8bn in 2002/2003 to £5.9bn in 2005/2006.

#### 1.2.2 Affordable Housing

Subject to further detailed consideration about how to use the additional resources available, additional homes for key workers and new social housing for the homeless and families in bed and breakfast will be provided.

The Government will look for ways to extend the existing affordable housing programme through greater partnership with employers and public and private landlords.

#### 1.2.3 Housing Conditions

Additional resources will be made available for the modernisation of social housing.

Those policies that contribute to achieving the 'decent homes' target will be subject to a 'value for money and effectiveness review'.

Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation will be introduced when parliamentary time allows. A new objective is being set to improve 'non-decent homes' occupied by vulnerable households.

A single housing inspectorate, building on the work of the Audit Commission and the Housing Inspectorate, will be established.

Strong regional bodies will be established, in line with the proposals for regional governance, to bring housing investment into a single regional pot linked with planning, infrastructure and regional growth strategies.

#### Comment

The Council welcomes the increased spending on housing nationally and will continue to seek to attract increased funds from the region for meeting housing needs in the district. The major housing difficulty in the Malvern Hills area is the issue of affordability. Although the largest proportion of the national resources will be targeted at addressing affordability problems in London and the South-East, the Council will continue to work with Housing Association partners to maximise funding from the Housing Corporation to promote home ownership initiatives for first time purchasers. Wider reference to this key area of the Council's Housing Strategy is set in section 1.3 below.

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### 1.3 Affordable Housing

For many years, the Council has adopted a proactive housing enabling role in the delivery of affordable housing. The work with the Housing Corporation and partner Housing Associations and other providers has ensured that new housing opportunities have been secured, subject to the resources available at the time.

Historically the priority in Housing Strategy terms, has been the provision of rented housing. This priority will continue, as there is a significant demand from households where personal financial and social circumstances preclude home ownership.

However, an important element of the Council's Housing Strategy has been the work the promotion of home ownership initiatives. There has been recognition that with some assistance, certain households, usually considered unable to purchase can access home ownership. In recent years, in conjunction with Housing Association partners, three home ownership schemes have helped people onto the important first step of the ladder to full home ownership :-

**1.3.1 Traditional Shared Ownership** – New build housing schemes available to households able to obtain a mortgage/loan for a minimum 25% stake in the value of the property. The remainder is owned by a Housing Association, and rented on a pro rata basis to the part owner. In urban situations, the part owner has a statutory right to 'staircase' to full ownership by purchasing further tranches at the current market value. In rural situations, part owners may only purchase upto 80% of the equity of the property. If they wish to move, the property must be offered to the Housing Association, who, if willing to repurchase, will pay market value for the part owner's equity, thereby ensuring that the property remains available as a low cost purchase option for people with a local connection.

**1.3.2 Homebuy** - Applicants obtain a 75% mortgage of a property they would like to buy, subject to certain criteria. The Housing Association purchase the remaining 25%, and this remains as a charge on the property, until either the property is sold, or the part owner is in a position to buy the remaining part. No rent is payable on the 25%, as the part owner is responsible for all repairs and maintenance.

**1.3.3 Do It Yourself Shared Ownership (DIYSO)** – A similar scheme to traditional shared ownership, but this does not rely on purpose built new accommodation. Applicants identify properties of their own choice in the private market, subject to certain cost limits, and in a joint purchase arrangement, the Housing Association and the applicant acquire the home. The limit of the applicant's share relates to the amount they are able to secure by mortgage/loan.

DIYSO was originally promoted by the Housing Corporation as a low cost home initiative, and Social Housing Grant (SHG) was made available to Housing Associations to assist with the acquisition costs of the selected properties. In recent years, the Corporation has focussed its resources on New Build Shared Ownership and the Homebuy scheme, whilst allowing Local Authorities to operate the same schemes and DIYSO.

MHDC has devoted considerable Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to DIYSO and Homebuy schemes, and the results can be seen from the table below:-

	Scheme Year 1999/2000			Scheme Year 2000/2001			
	MHDC	WEST MIDS	MHDC % of WEST MIDS	MHDC	WEST MIDS	MHDC % of WEST MIDS	
LA DIYSO	10	22	46%	LA DIYSO	6	19	32%
LA HOMEBUY	0	0	0	LA HOMEBUY	3	3	100%
	Scheme Year 2001/ 2002						
	MHDC	WEST MIDS	MHDC % of WEST MIDS				
LA DIYSO	12	20	60%				
LA HOMEBUY	2	2	100%				

The LASHG expenditure for 2001/2002 for the 12 DIYSO successful applications was £253,900 This amounted to an average of £21,158 per house purchase. Total acquisition costs of 12 properties was £1,014,350 at an average purchase price for a two-bedroom house of £74,150 and £75,730 for a three-bedroom house.

The recent Community Strategy consultation exercise demonstrated that the issue of lack of affordable housing in the District is a major concern. The results bear out the findings in the Council's Housing Strategy which show that an increasing number of potential first time purchasers, are unable to secure mortgages without the benefit of a substantial deposit. The only alternative is to seek cheaper accommodation in neighbouring areas.

In reshaping the LASHG programme for **2002/2003**, the Council agreed that a greater emphasis should be put on the promotion of the DIYSO scheme. A budget of **£700,000** has been made available and an additional **£50,000** for a LASHG Homebuy scheme. The success of the scheme will depend on sufficient properties becoming available for sale within the local market and a ready number of eligible applicants. The potential number of householders helped, based on the results of 2001/2002, is estimated to be about 35. In addition, the Housing Corporation has also granted allocations for this year of £84,203 for 3 new build shared ownership dwellings at Leigh Sinton; £160,150 for 7 new houses at Newnham Bridge; and £81,000 for 3 Homebuy applications.

In total the LA and Housing Corporation programmes amount to £1,075,353 for home ownership initiatives.

In terms of promoting and operating the DIYSO scheme, Elgar Housing Association have a dedicated team who undertake the work. For the Council, there is the associated administration which involves formal approval for each application, and the 'online' input of detailed information and payment of SHG, through the new Housing Corporation computerised Information Management System. The funding source for LASHG is the Council's accrued capital receipts, which are replaced on an 'in and out' basis immediately by the Housing Corporation. Once the accrued capital receipt has been used for SHG, it cannot be re-utilised again for SHG purposes.

#### Comment

The Council is confident that low cost homeownership initiatives have real benefit in terms of enabling first time purchaser households to access home ownership. The Community Strategy consultation has identified that affordable housing in the district is a key requirement. See section 3.1

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## 1.4 Homelessness Act 2002

The Homeless Act received Royal Assent on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2002. The main provisions of the Act came into force by Order on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2002.

The Homelessness Act represents a major change in the way local authorities deal with homelessness. The purpose of the Act is to move away from crisis response to individual need, to a more preventive, strategic and multi agency service

Under the Act the Council has a duty to carry out a homeless review of the district and develop and publish a homeless strategy based on that review.

The first strategy must be published by July 31<sup>st</sup> 2003, and thereafter a new strategy will be developed at least every 5 years. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, the Council will decide how the strategy's objectives will be met through partnership working, e.g. Social Services, R.S.L's, voluntary organisations, etc. Before adopting the strategy the Council will fully consult with these organisations, and other appropriate bodies.

The Homeless Review will detail the level of homelessness in the District (current and future demand) and the current position in regard to:

The prevention of homelessness in the district

Securing sufficient accommodation for people who are or who may become homeless

Ensuring the provision of support for people who are homeless and also need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The Act extends the 'homeless priority need categories'. The following are now classed as being in priority need:

All unintentionally homeless 16 and 17 year olds

Those persons who have left an institutionalised or care background e.g. care leavers, those leaving prison and also ex-servicemen (if a priority need can be established) or

Those people who are fleeing harassment or domestic violence

#### Comment

The Council already recognises as being potentially vulnerable all young people leaving care, as well as all those applicants fleeing from acts of actual and threatened violence.

The major implication of the changes in the priority categories will be the increased need for single persons accommodation. There is an evident shortage of this type of accommodation in the district, even though Elgar Housing Association have recently been given capital and revenue approval by the Housing Corporation to convert a house at the Brookside Homeless Hostel in Malvern, into 4 self contained units for emergency access accommodation for single homeless people. The increased demand for secure long term accommodation will need to be addressed by future R.S.L new build schemes. There is also the recognition that certain individuals within the new priority need categories will require support in new tenancies, to ensure tenure sustainability. This is a particular area of assistance that is recognised in the Supporting People funding shadow strategy.

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### **1.5 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996**

A major element of the Council's Housing Strategy, is to ensure that the housing stock of all sectors is maintained and improved to the highest achievable standards. An important part of the Strategy is energy conservation and the consequent need for the Council to demonstrate commitment to the reduction of 'fuel poverty' and CO2 emissions.

The Council is justly proud of its label as 'an above average housing authority', because it has recognised the importance of Private Sector Renewal. It is with programmes of grant expenditure that the Council can give direct help to the elderly and disabled, and to the most disadvantaged households.

The approved MHDC budget for 2001/2002 was for £341,756. The total of spent and committed resources as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2002, amounted to £322,610.46, representing 94% of target. This was an excellent result, as the Grants programme is demand led, and grant approvals have a 12-month duration.

Significant details from the 2001/2002 programme include:

43 Disabled Facilities Grants completed

304 Insulation grants awarded

135 Alarms and Keysafe grants awarded

48 grants awarded for home security improvements, and repair of dangerous electrics and defective central heating boiler repairs

A new charging policy for certain elements of grant applications was successfully introduced.

During 2002/2003A budget of £265,000 has been made available for continuing the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) programme. DFGs are the only mandatory grant and attract a 60% Government grant. In net terms, MHDC resourcing of this programme equates to £102,600.

A budget of £90,000 will continue the Private Sector Grants programme with an emphasis, as 2001/2002, on Home Repairs Assistance Grants for community safety measures.. The Council may consider extending this programme in October 2002, when the Council's overall Capital Programme is reviewed at the half-year stage.

The Government is to amend the system of giving grants to renovate and repair homes by removing many of the detailed provisions that govern the way local housing authorities carry out housing renewal. A broad power will be given to authorities to provide financial and other assistance for home repair and improvement, which would be subject to only limited constraints. It is suggested that the reforms would give greater flexibility and discretion in delivering housing renewal to address local needs.

**The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002** came into force on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2002. Draft guidance has been issued for consultation purposes. As drafted the new powers can only be used once a local authority has published a strategy on how it intends to use them. The strategy will have to be published before March of 2003.

Comment

The Council has agreed that for 2002/2003 the present thrust of the policy relating to private sector renewal should be continued. However it is intended to undertake a major review of the Council's policy by October this year, in accordance with the Regulatory Reform Order, so that implementation of any new initiatives can be effected from April 2003 and be incorporated in the Capital Programme.

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## **1.6 Consultation Paper- Allocation of Accommodation-Code of Guidance For Local Authorities including reference to Choice Based Lettings**

The draft guidance on allocation of accommodation under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 has been published in a consultation paper: ***Allocation of Accommodation - Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities***. The draft guidance also reflects the changes to Part 6 affected by the Homelessness Act 2002.

### **1.6.1 Allocations - General**

Allocation of housing must be seen as part of an authority's district-wide housing strategy, which includes:

(a) a lettings plan; (b) arrangements with RSLs and other housing providers; and, (c) the provision of advice and assistance. Authorities should balance the needs of existing tenants and new applicants. Applications for transfers (save for "mutual exchange" transfers) now fall within Part 6 and should be treated in the same way as other applications.

The use of joint tenancies is encouraged where household members have long-term commitments to the home (e.g. partners - including same sex partners - and unpaid live-in carers). On the death of a tenant, an authority should consider granting a new tenancy to a household member without rights of succession but who has been living with the tenant for a year or looking after the tenant or the tenant's dependants.

### **1.6.2 Eligibility**

Extensive guidance is given on how authorities should decide whether applicants are ineligible because of unacceptable behaviour. Authorities should:

- a) Consider whether there has been unacceptable behaviour which would justify a possession order, taking into account the requirement of "reasonableness";

- b) Satisfy themselves that the behaviour was sufficiently bad to render the applicant an unsuitable tenant; authorities need to be satisfied that any possession order would not have been suspended;
- c) Consider the issue as at the time of the application; past unacceptable behaviour may no longer justify a finding of ineligibility where applicants have subsequently improved their behaviour.

### 1.6.3 Allocation scheme

Allocation schemes should provide choice for applicants wherever possible, while continuing to meet housing need. Authorities should consider simplified systems of prioritisation in place of complex points-systems.

Authorities are reminded of the statutory requirement to ensure that "reasonable preference" is given to certain categories of people with a housing need (e.g. the homeless, those living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and those with medical or welfare needs). Schemes should ensure that greater priority is given to applicants who fall within more than one category of need. The draft code recommends that homeless persons who are victims of domestic violence, racial harassment, or homophobia, and those with urgent medical needs should be given additional preference.

Allocation schemes should be flexible enough to incorporate other considerations. In particular, authorities should allocate accommodation to persons of a particular description, whether or not they fall within a reasonable preference category. This is aimed at the provision of accommodation to key-workers, e.g. teachers, nurses and police officers. The draft code also recognises that authorities may have to go outside statutory preference in order to fill hard-to-let stock.

Housing authorities are reminded of the need to consult with social services when considering certain allocations, e.g. children in need. This consultation requirement is emphasised in the context of the Government's objective under the *Teenage Pregnancy Strategy* to ensure that all lone parents aged 16 or 17 who are unable to live with their parents or partner are provided with accommodation and support.

### 1.6.4 Allocation scheme management

Authorities are reminded of their duty to consult RSLs with whom they have nomination arrangements before adopting or altering schemes. Whilst recognising that not all alterations in schemes should require consultation, the draft code recommends that where a major policy change is being considered, authorities should consult social services departments, health authorities, the Supporting People team, Connexions Partnerships and other recognised referral bodies.

Authorities are also reminded of their statutory obligations: (a) to provide a summary of their schemes on request free of charge; (b) to ensure that advice and information is available on how to apply for accommodation; and, (c) to provide information to enable applicants to assess how their application is likely to be treated, whether they fall within reasonable preference categories and how long it is likely to be before accommodation becomes available.

#### Comments

Comments are sought on all aspects of the draft guidance by August 27, 2002. The Council will be looking carefully at the proposals and responding accordingly. In anticipation of the ideas raised under 'Allocation Scheme', Council officers and Elgar Housing Association representatives (who provide agency services in respect of the Waiting List and nominations) have been meeting to discuss the possibility of introducing **Choice Based Lettings** within the district. The Housing Association is 'bringing to the table' the experience that is being gained from their involvement in the Government sponsored pilot scheme in Herefordshire. When all relevant details are available, reports will be submitted to the Council, Elgar's Board and partner Housing Associations on the feasibility and desirability of introducing a pilot or full scheme within the area. Of particular concern at this stage of the consideration process is the likely implementation costs associated with IT changes, new application forms etc. and the ongoing advertising costs and potential loss of rental income associated with all lettings.

## 1.7 Tackling Anti-social Behavior

In April this year a consultation paper 'Tackling Anti-Social Tenants' was issued by the former DTLR aimed at social landlords. The message was that the Government is keen to ensure that social landlords have the means to deal swiftly and effectively with the minority of nuisance tenants and their associates, whilst ensuring that the means are necessary and proportionate.

The paper focuses on themes of enforcement and eviction, and prevention and rehabilitation. It also gives encouragement to social landlords to use the powers they already possess, and provides a range of good practice guidance.

A Private Members Bill was recently 'talked out' recommending that a national register of offenders convicted of anti-social behaviour be established and that their housing benefit could be docked, by up to 40%.

Within the next section on Tenancies there is also reference to new proposals for dealing with anti-social behaviour.

A new specialist housing group to advise on Community Cohesion has been set up by the Home Office, and amongst other related matters the Minister for this Government office has stated that housing agencies

'Need to ensure that racist and anti-social behaviour is tackled promptly and effectively. They need to be clear and transparent about the decisions they make so that discrimination, exclusion or racism are never allowed to exist'.

### Comment

Anti-social behaviour that emanates from a neighbour's property or immediate surroundings, is particularly distressing because of the proper expectation of 'quiet enjoyment' of a person's home.

The Council has always recognised that tackling anti-social behaviour is a key priority for the community and welcomes new initiatives that will help address such nuisance. Recently the Council approved the establishment of an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer funded through the Community Safety Partnership as a direct response to the growing concerns in the district. This post will be complemented by other initiatives listed below that are planned in accordance with the second Community Safety Strategy which was published earlier this year (Crime and Disorder Strategy in the Malvern Hills District 2002-2005).

- Appoint an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer
- Appoint a Neighbourhood Street Warden with particular responsibility for the Languard Ward
- Appoint a Community Development Worker with primary responsibility for the Languard and Chase areas
- Establish a comprehensive recording system to capture the full range of anti-social behaviour incidents by October 2002
- Create an information pack for victims of anti-social behaviour, offering support, advice and reassurance by December 2002
- Set up a South Worcestershire Drug Consortium to link and share information by October 2002
- Appoint a dedicated outreach drugs worker by October 2002
- Install and monitor on a 24/7 basis CCTV in Barnards Green, Malvern Link, Malvern Town Centre and Belle Vue car park.
- Improve Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

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[On to Tenancies](#)

## 1.8 Tenancies

The Law Commission recently published its consultation paper "Renting Homes:

Status and Security." The paper proposes a radical revision of security of tenure for tenants in both the public and the private sectors. With retrospective effect, the existing statutory schemes for security of tenure will be replaced by one new scheme which will govern any contract for a rent which confers the right to occupy a home. The scheme will apply to both tenancies and licences.

The emphasis is on the adoption of a consumer approach to housing law by making the tenancy agreement the key document setting out the landlord's and the tenant's rights and obligations. Landlords who fail to provide written agreements will be subject to sanctions.

Two types of tenancy are proposed:

Type I agreement: This will provide a high level of security of tenure and replaces secure and assured tenancies. Before seeking possession order, the landlord will have to serve a notice of his intention to do so. There will be no mandatory grounds for possession. The exercise of the court's discretion to make an order will be more explicitly structured by legislation.

Type II agreement: This is a short term agreement with minimal security of tenure which is modelled on the assured shorthold tenancy. If the tenancy is a fixed term, the landlord will be able to obtain possession before expiry of the term either on the mandatory ground of "serious rent arrears" or the discretionary grounds available against Type I tenants. Type II tenancies are intended to be the standard tenancy in the private sector but are also available for use by social landlords. In particular, all social landlords will be able to use Type II agreements as probationary tenancies for tenants in their first year.

The paper also proposes significant changes in relation to anti-social behaviour. A general duty will be imposed on social landlords to take action against anti-social behaviour. All social landlords will have the same powers to seek injunctions. If an injunction is breached, the court will have additional powers to deal with the tenant: (a) reduction of the tenant's status from a Type I to a Type II tenant; (b) ordering the tenant to be relocated (e.g. to supported accommodation); or, (c) granting a possession order.

Many other wide-ranging changes are proposed. Examples are: (a) the deeming of RSLs to be public authorities for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998; (b) a new, simple possession procedure where the tenant has abandoned the home; (c) the introduction of alternative dispute resolution in certain cases; and, (d) the abolition of the concept of the tolerated trespasser.

#### Comment

The Council welcomes these proposals, particularly in respect to the problem of anti-social behaviour. Council Environmental Health Officers are increasingly becoming involved in noise nuisance problems, usually emanating from single person flats, and landlords are investigating greater numbers of complaints from neighbours. In accepting the wider eligibility criteria under the new Homeless provisions, which particularly relate to single person households, it is envisaged that increased numbers of incidents of anti-social behaviour will result, unless Landlords and Local Authorities are given wider powers of intervention.

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*The Supporting People programme offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence. It will deliver high quality and strategically planned housing-related services which are cost effective and reliable, and complement existing care services.*

*The planning and development of services will be needs led. Supporting People is a working partnership of local government, service users and support agencies*

**1.9** In 1999 the Government announced that there would be a reform and restructuring of the support services provided by Housing Authorities, Registered Social Landlords, and other agencies, and that existing funding streams, including Housing Benefit support costs would be transferred to a single grant 'pot'. The aim of the new initiative, known as **Supporting People**, being to improve the quality and effectiveness of housing support services. To ensure full implementation of the scheme by April 2003,

the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister (formerly the DTLR), has been issuing a series of consultation papers and recommendations to all partner agencies since early 2001

In Worcestershire, it was recognised that there was a necessity for joint working at a strategic level. This was to prepare for transition to the new scheme, and to develop an understanding of current housing support services and to identify unmet and future needs.

Through the Worcestershire Partnership Steering Group, the Government funding available to the six District Councils and the County Council for implementing Supporting People, is pooled, and utilised by a dedicated county-wide Supporting People Strategy Group. The group consists of Chief Housing Officers from the District Councils, and senior representatives from Social Services, Probation and Primary Care Trusts.

During the early months of 2001, the Strategy Group appointed a Project Team, funded from the specific Government funding. The team is led by a Project Manager who reports to the Director of Social Services, and to the multi-agency Strategy Group. The team liaise with the agencies involved, the providers of the support services, and importantly during the 2002/2003 transition stage, local authority Housing Benefit Officers.

A specific requirement of Government has been the necessity for the Project Team to provide detailed quarterly progress reports on a 'Milestones Report'. It is pleasing to note that Worcestershire is recognised as one of the leading groups across the Country in being prepared for the 1<sup>st</sup>.April 2003 implementation date.

'Mapping' the supply of existing housing related support services across the County and developing a database of all organisations that have an interest in Supporting People, has been a major exercise for the Project Team, and work continues in this respect. Considerable time and resources are now being devoted to the IT requirements, and consultation work is underway with support service providers relating to charges, standards, and contract arrangements.

A draft ' Shadow Strategy' has recently been produced and following wide consultation, it will be recommended for adoption by the participating authorities in Supporting People later this year.

*The local vision for Supporting People in Worcestershire is that the programme will deliver the most appropriate and effective range of services for promoting greater independence for vulnerable people and challenging social exclusion.*

**Comment**

Malvern Hills District Council is committed to the principles of Supporting People, and working in partnership with other agencies across the County.

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## **1.10 Decent Homes**

The Housing Green Paper 'Quality and Choice: a Decent Home for All', published in April 2000, set out the Government's commitment to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010. The definition of a 'decent home' is one that meets all the following four criteria:

### **1.10.1 It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing**

The statutory standard is based on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

### **1.10.2 It is in a reasonable state of repair**

Dwellings failing will be those where either one or more key building components are old and need replacing (where key means external components, electrics and gas heating source), or two or more other building components are old and need replacing.

### **1.10.3 It has reasonably modern facilities and services**

Dwellings failing are those that lack three or more of the following

- a reasonable modern kitchen (20 years old or less)
- a kitchen with adequate space and layout
- a reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
- an appropriately located bathroom and WC
- adequate noise insulation (where external noise/neighbourhood noise is a problem)
- adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats

### **1.10.4 Provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort**

Dwellings failing are those where the occupants are unable to heat their homes to a reasonable level- currently defined as those who are 'fuel poor'

#### **Comment**

The Council has had detailed discussions with the Housing Associations in the district about the condition of their social housing stock and the Government target relating to 'decent homes'. It is pleasing to note that all Associations' report that the properties within their control , do meet the minimum standards, as set out above. In effect the 'decent homes' target for 2010, has been reached in the district.

Nevertheless, the Associations do appreciate that whilst minimum standards are in place, the preference in Housing Strategy terms is to seek to ensure that all properties in the district attain maximum standards. To achieve this aim the Council will provide assistance and advice to Housing Associations where appropriate, and support applications for capital funding from the Housing Corporation for necessary repairs and improvements, subject to value for money considerations. A particular thrust of the Council will be encouragement to the Associations in regard to 'thermal comfort' improvements, as this contributes to the Council's Home Energy Conservation Act responsibilities.

The Council also welcomes the recent announcement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, that a new objective is being set to reduce the proportion of private properties which are occupied by vulnerable people which do not reach the 'decent homes' standard. When details are known, the Council will respond positively, as this initiative is in very much in line with the Council's current Private Sector Renewal Grants Strategy, where Home Repair Assistance grants are targeted at repairs and improvements for elderly and vulnerable householders.

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## **1.11 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

Council housing services have uniquely amongst all District Council functions, been subject to an annual assessment process, undertaken by the Regional Government Office. The external assessment will in future be extended to all Council services, and an overall assessment will be applied to individual local authorities. This will be known as the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The CPA will include housing services and initial guidance has been issued by the Audit Commission on the factors that are likely to be considered in the housing assessment. They will include:

- the outcomes in regard to Best Value Inspections of housing services
- Government Office assessments
- performance information
- a well informed and viable housing strategy
- delivery of the strategy
- providing directly or indirectly an accessible, customer focussed service with clear standards, the existence of which is promoted and published.

#### Comment

The Council recognises the importance that Government has placed on the need for continuous improvement, and as set out in other parts of this document, the necessary performance policies and procedures are being put in place to respond positively to the CPA process. An important contribution to the assessment process is the Council's decision to undertake a Best Value Review of Revenues and Housing Benefits this year, and to carry out a similar Review of Housing Services in 2003/2004.

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## The Housing Review 2002/2003

### Part Two

#### 2.1 Regional Housing Statement

'This Region believes that high quality, well maintained and secure accommodation is a fundamental right of all citizens. The Region's housing providers therefore, shall work to a common aim, namely: to co-ordinate the provision of good quality housing, with a variety of tenures and cost levels, to house its people, support their opportunities for employment, leisure and Lifelong Learning, and preserve or restore their quality of environment to the benefit of the West Midlands as a whole.'

Proposed by the Regional Housing Partnership as the West  
Midlands Regional Vision for Housing

The West Midlands Regional Assembly has identified housing as a key activity in its work plan. It intends to "**Encourage and support the production of a Regional Housing Strategy**", to be taken forward via its regional policy forum for housing, the Regional Housing Partnership (RHP). The vision and strategy will:

- Assist in meeting national policy aims and objectives;
- Support other regional strategies (particularly economic strategy, planning guidance and neighbourhood renewal activities co-ordinated at regional level by the Government Office (GOWM));
- Provide a context for local authority housing strategies and sub-regional co-ordination of local strategy;
- Be informed by national, regional, local and sub-regional level information;
- Guide sub-regional implementation frameworks.
- Assist LAs and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to consider how their strategies and business plans might be shaped by the regional strategy to guide allocation of all relevant resources coming into the region;
- Encourage co-operation and collaboration by LAs where they face similar issues;
- Provide a focus for informed debate with central government with a view to informing national policy

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## 2.2 Developing Sub Regional Strategies

It is the view of the RHP that Representation / Ownership of a regional strategy and process should be through sub-regional groupings of local authorities and partners that share similar concerns. The Government Office, Housing Corporation and Regional Assembly in addition to local partners must also be able to sign up to any regional and therefore sub regional housing strategy. The process will also engage the Voluntary and Community Sector through the Voluntary and Community Housing Network at both Regional and Sub-regional levels.

One of the central tenets of the revision of Regional Planning Guidance concerns the urgent need to reverse the movement of people from the major urban areas. In housing terms this has led to the growth of areas deprived not only of jobs and training opportunities, but where the availability of decent good quality housing is in serious decline.

The sub-regional housing strategy, if it is to properly inform the Regional Housing Strategy for the benefit of the whole region must also consider the co-ordination with regional economic and planning strategies.

### The Sub-Regional Groupings

Birmingham & Black Country
Coventry / Solihull / Warwickshire
<b>West Mercia: Shropshire, including Telford &amp; Wrekin Herefordshire Worcestershire(including MalvernHills)</b>
Staffordshire, including Stoke-on-Trent

### Development of the Sub Regional Strategy for West Mercia

An inaugural meeting was held in Bridgnorth on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2001, which was addressed by Steve Gregory on behalf of the Regional Housing Partnership and Annie Bromwich (LGA) on the Regional Planning Guidance consultation. Invitations were issued to all local strategic housing authorities and a range of voluntary and other interested housing groups from a list supplied by the LGA.

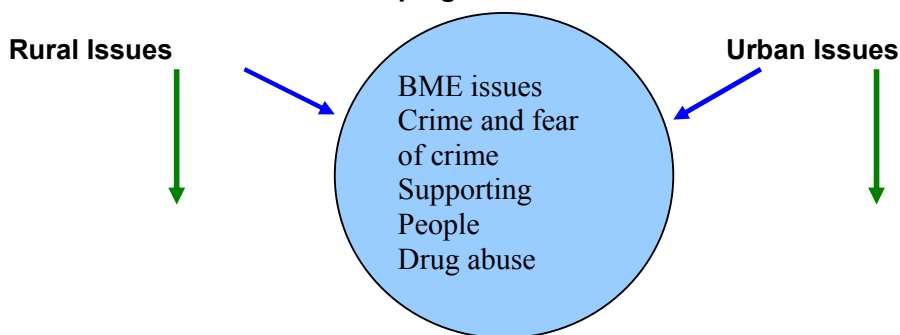
A small steering group of officers, representing a cross section of the sub – region’s strategic housing authorities was formed consisting of the following Members.

### Steering Group Members

Keith Parry	Malvern Hills DC
Mike Atherton	Telford and The Wrekin
John Hoogerwerf	Bridgnorth DC
Jane Leftwich	Herefordshire Council
Mike Walsh	Redditch BC

This group has met twice and has identified the following common issues in the figure below:

### Developing the common issues



Lack of Resources

Wider range of and service and resources

Over heating in the rural areas close to the conurbation and the effects of the migration caused to the larger towns

The steering group has agreed on the following course of action:

- To continue to develop the process through the two county housing officer groups
- To commission a consultant to advise on developing the sub-regional strategy, consultation processes and to carry out research into the individual strategies of the housing authorities.
- The Consultant then to prepare a rough working draft of the sub-regional strategy based on common issues and the essential differences and to work with the county officer groups to gain political support and approval.
- To develop a wider consultation process with all interested housing groups and organisations.
- Set up a time frame to deliver a first sub regional strategy in time to inform the Regional Housing Strategy in 2003.
- To work alongside The Housing Corporation in developing their sub – regional investment strategy.

An offer of assistance in researching data has been made by Severnside Housing Association. As agreed by the steering group the Lead Officer has recently met the proposed Consultant to develop the brief and to resolve contractual and timescale details. The proposal following this meeting is to be considered by other steering group members before being presented to the thirteen strategic housing authorities and then a wider consultation on the common themes and the drafting of the first sub-regional strategy.

#### Comment

The Council is pleased to be taking an active role in the development of the West Mercia Sub Regional Strategy. It is increasingly obvious that investment decisions by Government Departments and particularly the Housing Corporation, will be made against regional strategy priorities. It is important therefore that the housing needs of rural districts such as Malvern Hills are fully recognised, when urban conurbation pressures are evident.

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## 2.3 Housing Corporation Investment Policy

The Housing Corporation (HC) are considering targeting investment in the West Mercia sub region to:

### 2.3.1. Supported Housing

Within the sub region there are four Supporting People groupings (Telford, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire).

The HC. will consider making capital allocations to meet key supported housing needs as identified and prioritised within Supporting People strategies.

The HC. wish to play a role in the needs assessment and prioritisation, in the selection of RSL partners and in discussions on the scale of provision and location, either by participation in Supporting People groups or other relevant means.

The HC. will expect the revenue implications (if any) of projects to have been thoroughly assessed and included within Supporting People budgets. It will also expect the impact of any new provision on adjacent and nearby areas to have been assessed and demonstrated, and for adjacent groupings to have been informed of planned new provision, where appropriate.

The region will have capital and revenue funding in 2003/04, and capital in 2004/05 and beyond. The level of funding, regionally, will be publicised in due course.

### **2.3.2.General Needs Housing**

Investment for general needs housing will be targeted to:

- 2.3.2.1 rural housing
- 2.3.2.2 market towns
- 2.3.2.3 urban areas

#### **2.3.2.1 Rural Housing**

Additional housing in rural areas is a key regional and sub regional priority. Shortage is widespread, frequently caused by a loss of available rented housing, but is most pressing in high value areas (where home ownership may be beyond the reach of local people on low incomes) and areas under pressure from commuting and local growth.

The HC wishes to work with rural enablers, where appointed, and within the context of countywide or other sub regional strategies.

The HC wishes to pilot the joint selection of a limited number of RSL partners to help deliver a rolling programme of rural housing provision. If this can be achieved, the HC will be able to give greater certainty to future funding. It will also still consider individual proposals and assess these on their merits.

Overall priority will be given to projects that contribute to wider strategies, which may include the Marches Regeneration Zone or provision associated with planned growth in areas near the conurbation.

Specific use will be made by the HC of the Regional Rural Housing Strategy and this is to be launched during the summer of 2002.

The HC state the housing for sale may have specific relevance to meet rural needs, either as shared ownership (with restricted staircasing if necessary), Homebuy, or possibly in new forms.

#### **2.3.2.2 Market Towns**

Provision in selected market towns is a sub regional priority. Ten towns have been identified under the Countryside Agency's market town programme. The HC wishes to explore with relevant LAs and other stakeholders, the role of new provision in their towns and other associated activity. The impetus for market town activity will range from regeneration (particularly in the Marches Regeneration Zone) to growth.

#### **2.3.2.3 Urban Areas**

Investment in new and additional housing in urban areas will be considered. The sub regional priorities are helping to meet demands caused by demographic and economic growth. This is particularly present in

- M54 corridor including Telford and Shrewsbury
- M5 corridor including Worcester, Droitwich and **Malvern**.
- M42 corridor including Bromsgrove and Redditch.

The HC will work closely with LAs and other stakeholders in these areas to discuss and agree the scale of new provision required and the difference the HC can make. The preference will be to use the funds to help deliver larger housing opportunities and to work proactively with LAs to select RSL partners who can demonstrate the capacity and capability to undertake major schemes.

The HC will expect Low Cost Home Ownership to play a large part in any new provision, where appropriate and for the bidding RSL/LA to demonstrate that this has been taken into account.

Smaller or infill sites will only be considered by exception, in circumstances where a considerable impact can be made.

Investment in housing may have a role within local regeneration activity. This may be particularly relevant in the Marches Regeneration Zone.

The HC wishes to work closely with the Regeneration Zone, and affected LAs, to explore the contribution of housing to planned programmes of activity.

### **2.3.3. Other Issues**

#### **2.3.3.1 Resources**

HC Social Housing Grant (SHG) is only one resource available and the HC wish to ensure that funding proposals take account of all resources, including LA SHG.

#### **2.3.3.2 Asset Management**

There are no concentrations of RSL stock that are in significant disrepair or are hard to let. Nevertheless, the HC wish to discuss with RSLs their asset management strategies.

#### **2.3.3.3 Black and Minority Ethnic Communities (BME)**

Housing issues specific to BME communities are not large scale in the sub region. However the HC wish to explore with LA partners any issues that are related and in particular accommodation needs of travellers.

#### **Comment**

The Malvern Hills District Council has for many years enjoyed a close working relationship with the Housing Corporation Regional Office, and responded positively to the new initiatives and investment policies introduced by the Corporation. The focus on a sub regional investment strategy is seen as a further positive step, so that localised issues such as rural housing and affordability, can receive due consideration. The Council particularly notes the comments regarding the work with Rural Housing Enablers (RHE), as MHDC is the 'host' authority for the only RHE in the West Midlands. The Council would also recommend that Upton upon Severn and Tenbury Wells are included in the list of selected market towns.

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## The Housing Review 2002/2003

### Part Three

#### 3.1 The Community Strategy

The Council is making good progress in ensuring that a Community Strategy is produced. The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on the District Council to prepare a Community Strategy for the District with the aim of improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area in a way that is sustainable. This needs to be prepared and implemented by a Local Strategic Partnership. This was set up in August 2001 and is known as "Vision 21 – Malvern Hills Partnership".

It is vital that the people of the District are actively involved in the preparation of the Community Strategy. Earlier this year the partnership met with local businesses, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups and launched a district-wide consultation exercise known as "Vision 21 - Your chance to make a difference".

The Partnership issued a feedback document to all households during June 2002. Key priorities identified were public transport, community safety, protection of the countryside and of the character of towns and villages, jobs and **affordability of housing**. Shortly, in a further round of consultation, everyone will be invited to comment on the conclusions so far and on the long term vision and actions that will be proposed by the partnership. The Council is committed to playing its full part in this which is why it is willing to review its priorities in line with the Community Strategy.

During the coming year the Local Strategic Partnership will:

- Provide feedback to the community, to check our understanding of what the consultation processes have said.
- Undertake further consultation about the developing ideas and plans to tackle the priorities.
- Produce a final strategy setting out:-
  - The objectives of the Partnership's strategy
  - A clear action plan
  - Arrangements for monitoring its implementation
  - Mechanisms for measuring economic, social and environmental progress
  - A timetable for reviewing and revising the strategy
  - How we shall report progress to our local community

The **lack of affordable housing** in the district was one of the key issues raised by the Community Strategy consultation process. The reasons for this response were linked to the following broad areas:-

- House prices in the district were above average.
- An increasing number of new households were apparently finding it difficult, if not impossible, to access suitable housing in the district.
- Concern that young people were leaving the district to live in more affordable areas.
- The majority of people aspire to home ownership.
- Future sustainability of villages was being adversely affected, because of the lack of suitably priced housing available to younger households with local connections.
- Recent private new build housing had concentrated on larger more exclusive type property, sold at prices only accessible to prosperous inward migrants.
- The future demographic profile shows a markedly older population, unless this can be addressed by younger people staying in the district having access to affordable housing and secure employment.

**Note** The Head of Housing and Community Services is a member of the Council's working party of officers and councillors, and this representation has been important because of the strong links from the Community Planning process to the Council's Housing Strategy, engendered by the district wide consultation exercises.

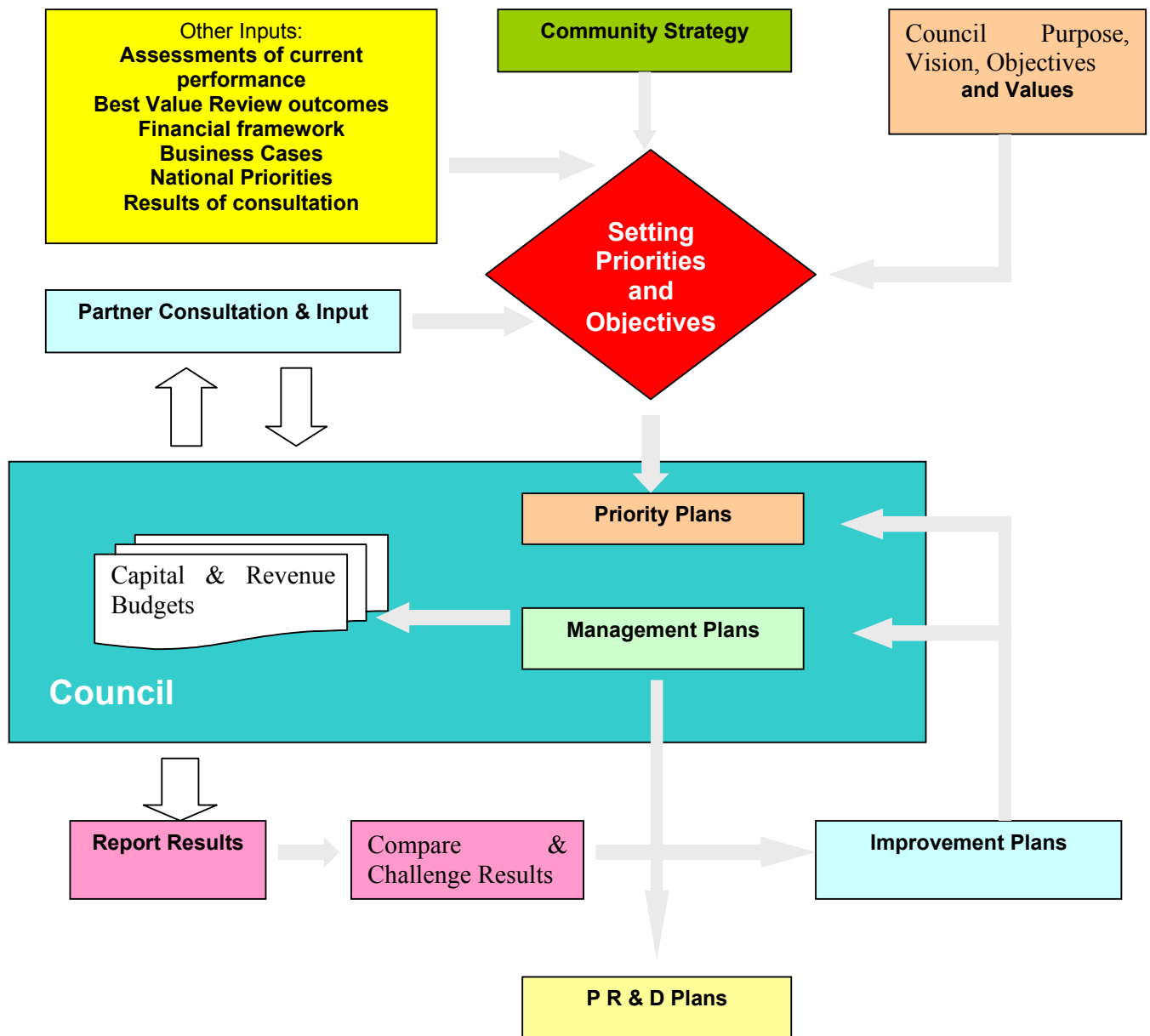
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### 3.2 Performance Management Framework

The Council has recognised the need to develop and implement a more coherent framework for its corporate planning and performance management. The final framework was approved by Council in June this year. It provides for a four year rolling Council Plan based on a small number of key Priority Plans which are delivered in turn by detailed Management Plans. This allows for regular and comprehensive monitoring of every plan and performance measure, followed by a review of each activity where performance is below expectations. The framework allows for continual performance review, and for remedial action where necessary to be taken to ensure that the Council meets its pledges to the citizens of the district.

The new framework provides for regular plan monitoring and a method for the Council to agree key priorities and objectives. New Priority Plans for 2003-2006 include the **Housing Strategy** .

**The arrangements for planning and performance management within the Council’s corporate governance procedures and annual cycle.**



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### 3.3 Electronic Government Strategy (E-Government)

The Council is developing an e-government strategy that is based upon improving customer services using technology in better ways. This will include implementing a local land and property gazetteer (LLPG) and integrating with the national version (NLPG) to provide better management of land and property and better information to the public. Geographic information systems will be used much more than they are now to provide for the exchange of spatial data internally and with partners.

We are working collaboratively with Worcestershire County Council and the other five districts in the county to create the "Worcestershire Hub", through which the partners will deliver their e-government strategies. This is being delivered through the Worcestershire Partnership and as part of the County Council's Public Service Agreement (PSA). One of the twelve key targets within the PSA is the creation of a county-wide integrated network of customer service centres providing joined-up customer services to all citizens. The Worcestershire Partnership has been awarded Pathfinder status under the government's strategic partnership programme and, as a consequence, has been awarded additional Local Government On-Line grant in 2002/03.

Plans are at an advanced stage to open a customer service centre in Great Malvern in April 2003 and smaller centres in Upton-upon-Severn and Tenbury Wells in April 2004. This will be a fully integrated service with, initially, Worcestershire County Council and subsequently with the local town and parish councils and the police and health services. It is planned to invite housing associations and other partners in this project. It is also envisaged that the Worcestershire Care Line service will be delivered through the Worcestershire Hub, although the discussions are at an early stage.

The Council's on-line web services will be significantly improved as part of the Worcestershire Hub 'portal', and this will include improvements to the current web-based systems for electronic payments and procurement.

This exciting and far-reaching development is being undertaken so that all of the Council's services (including housing services) will be handled through the Worcestershire Hub, whether through the service centre, over the telephone or over the Internet. The new service will use customer relationship management systems, and the Council will be reviewing all of its processes to ensure that all service requests, questions and feedback are handled as quickly as possible.

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### 3.3 Best Value

Best Value has been a feature of local government since 2000. As a regime which requires Councils to compare, challenge, compete and consult in appraising their activities, Best Value has taken some time to become established. Most employees and councillors have now had some experience of Best Value, but the principles and philosophy needs to be firmly embedded in all council activities and not simply when they are subject to a formal review. The Council has now completed four Best Value Reviews. The outcome of each of the reviews is an improvement plan that details actions that will be implemented over the five years following the end of a review.

In 2001 the Audit Commission carried out an *implementation inspection* of best value in the Council because it was not satisfied about the progress being made in this respect. A follow-up inspection by the Audit Commission during May 2002 indicated that the changes that have been put in place do address the reservations expressed and put the Council in a much stronger position to deliver Best Value. During 2002/3, the Council is:

Continuing to work at developing shared “ownership” of the Council’s Best Value Statement of Commitment amongst elected members and staff

Providing training in the knowledge, skills and techniques needed to apply the principles in both strategic and operational practice

Challenging performance and levels of service, during routine performance management and during the development of priority and management plans

Undertaking Best Value Reviews of the Revenues and Housing Benefit Service, and the Council’s Environmental Policies.

During 2003/2004 the Council will:

Undertake a Best Value Review of Housing Services and  
A Best Value Review of Planning Services

**Note** The Head of Housing and Community Services is pleased to be a member of the core team involved with the Best Value Review of Revenues and Housing Benefit, and is also the external challenger for the Wychavon District Council Best Value Review of Housing Services

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## The Housing Review 2002/2003

### Part Four Housing Needs Assessment

#### 4.1 Local Plan

The District Council is currently undertaking a review of district-wide local plan coverage and anticipates placing a draft local plan on formal first deposit early in 2003. To underpin and inform the development of Local Plan policies for the provision of affordable housing the Council has commissioned, amongst other studies, a district-wide housing needs assessment

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#### 4.2 Housing Needs Assessment

In October 2001 the Council commissioned Rupert Scott (Social Housing Consultant) to provide an up to date assessment of Housing Needs, in accordance with the DETR publication "Local Housing Needs Assessment: A Guide to Good Practice" (July 2000). The draft final report has now been completed and will be submitted to the Council for formal adoption in the coming months.

The report has been endorsed by an independent **Steering Group**. The group was set up for the express purpose of ensuring that external assessment was given to the methodology employed and the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data which had been collected and analysed. The representatives of the group were:

- District Councillors with portfolio responsibility for Housing and Planning
- MHDC Senior Officers with responsibility for both Housing and Planning
- Directors of Elgar Housing Association and Marches Housing Association
- A representative of the Community Council
- Representatives from the Social Services/Health authority and Primary Care Group
- A representative from local Estate Agents.

To assist in the collation and analysis of data a **Project Group** was formed comprising people with a range of expertise in dealing with housing need, supply, demand and monitoring. The members were:

- MHDC Officers from both Housing and Planning
- A representative from Elgar with responsibility for the waiting list
- A Director from Worcestershire Housing Association
- A representative from the County Council Research and Intelligence Unit
- The Rural Housing Enabler

##### 4.2.1 Methodology

As well as providing an up to date assessment of housing need, the 2002 Assessment is designed to provide a baseline from which assumptions can be made, and tested over time. Unlike the 1996 MHDC Housing Needs Survey, it does not rely primarily on asking households to describe, and predict, their housing requirements. Instead it uses this form of information to supplement objectively verified facts which are contained within the following

- The Council's Statutory Housing Register
- Returns submitted by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- Land Registry Records by Post Code Sectors within the District
- Malvern Hills District Council records of Land Supply and Building Completions
- Malvern Hills District Council Tax Records
- Malvern Hills District Council Housing Strategy
- Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2001-2

The assessment looks firstly at the stock profile, the costs and the supply in each section of the housing market: full owner occupation, shared ownership, private rent and social rent. It then reviews each element of housing need - registered and un-registered, backlog and emerging, urban and rural, general and special needs, so as to enable a detailed comparison to be made between need and supply which highlights the nature and extent of the shortfalls. Finally, it considers ways in which planning policies could contribute to meeting those shortfalls, the effect of alternative thresholds and proportions of affordable housing within new developments, and the way in which those policies can be implemented and kept up to date.

The analysis and forward projection of the data collected from these sources is presented in a way that allows for annual (or more frequent) updating as an administrative function which will demonstrate the extent to which the projections need to be adjusted.

The analysis is detailed to a level that allows for an objective and consistent assessment to be made of the amount of need, and the appropriate types of property to meet that need, for any part of the District. It thereby provides an important indicator of what type of housing should be provided, and where it should be provided, in order that local needs are taken into account. In this respect it informs the choice and implementation of Local Plan policies for housing provision, because of the consistency of assessment, its greatest value will be as a benchmark in which changes in need can be identified.

#### **4.2.2 The Role of the Housing Needs Assessment in Policy Development**

The Assessment is an essential baseline study for informing a range of Strategies and Policies. It forms the basis for policies in the Local Plan, which seek to ensure that new housing development addresses the needs of local residents. It also forms the basis for determining the policies and priorities which are set out in the annual Housing Strategy Statement. It can also help in the development of the Community Plan, through enabling priorities to be assessed in the light of an objective and factual assessment of issues which might otherwise be more reliant on anecdotal information and personal perceptions.

#### **4.2.3 The Role of the Local Plan in Meeting Housing Needs**

The Worcestershire County Structure Plan 1996-2011 refers to National and Regional Planning Guidance which advise that: Development plans should ensure that a mixture of house types and sites should be available to cater for the needs of all sections of the community.

Access to housing for those in greatest need is seen as of particular importance for close co-ordination between housing and planning policies.

Local Plans should make proposals for the provision of affordable housing, taking into account Government Policy, regional estimates of housing need and the results of any local studies. The Structure Plan also refers to the work of the West Midlands Local Government Association which concluded that there is a need for 44% of the total housing provision in Worcestershire between 1991 and 2011 to be affordable, and that between 1991 and 1996 the percentage achieved was 10%. (There are no indications that there has been a significant change in the percentage achieved in the period since 1996)

Policy D8 of the Structure Plan provides the requirement for Affordable Housing Policy in Local Plans:

*"District Planning Authorities should ensure that adequate provision is made for affordable housing on suitable sites, including suitable windfall sites, which come forward for housing development. The level of provision should be based upon District Councils' assessment of the affordable housing needs arising from local households, and from migrant households, who cannot afford to rent or buy houses generally available on the open market.*

*Based upon this assessment Local Plans will make provision for an amount of affordable housing which will be provided within the District during the plan period. The level, range and type of provision to be achieved on individual site to ensure the District requirement is met during the plan period should be agreed through negotiation with developers at the planning application stage. Local Plans should set indicative targets for the level of affordable housing to be provided on suitable individual sites to inform this process."*

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**4.2.4 The Definition of Affordable Housing**

The Structure Plan adopts the West Midlands Local Government Association Housing and Environment Committee's definition, published in 1999, which states that:

*"Affordable Housing is housing provided for rent or sale, at a price level which can be sustained by local people in housing need*

*Affordable housing can be categorised into two types:*

- a) Subsidised housing provided by an organisation allocating on the basis of need. While such dwellings will normally be made available for rent, they may also include subsidised home ownership, such as shared ownership, where an RSL or local authority retains a continuing interest. And*
- b) Low cost market housing, helping to meet the needs of first time buyers, single people, the elderly and other low income households that cannot afford to rent or buy houses generally available on the open market".*

Circular 6/98, which contains the most up to date Government advice on Planning and Affordable Housing, sets the framework for a more detailed definition:

*"The policy should define what the authority regards as affordable, but this should include both low cost market and subsidised housing, as both will have some role to play in providing for local needs. Definitions should be framed to endure for the life of the plan, for instance through references to the level of local incomes and their relationship to house prices or rents, rather than to a particular price or rent."*

**4.2.5 The Amount of Affordable Housing**

However great the need for affordable housing might be - i.e. how many prospective purchasers and tenants there are who cannot meet their needs at market rates - there is a limit to the proportion of new housing which can reasonably be expected to be provided at affordable levels. The Structure Plan refers to the Regional Planning Guidance acknowledgement that "the planning system alone cannot guarantee that all housing needs will be met." Nevertheless, as described in the **Housing Needs Assessment Report**, the supply from other sources has been diminishing, and the assessment has been unable to identify any other source which is likely to make any significant level of contribution towards meeting the **total estimated shortfall of 1,405 affordable dwellings for the Malvern Hills District over the 9 years of the plan period to 2011.**

One of the ways in which planning policy can contribute to meeting the need for affordable housing is through the **"Exceptions Policy"** which allows for small numbers of dwellings to be built, to meet identified local need, in rural locations where development would not otherwise be permitted. An assessment of the number and size of rural settlements in the District would suggest that a relatively small proportion of the total identified rural need could be met in this way over the 9 year period, (through say 2 sites p.a):

6 sites in the 10 large villages of 6-10 units - ave. 8 per site =	48
6 sites in the 10 medium villages of 4-8 units -ave. 6 per site =	36
6 sites in the 20 small villages of 2-6 units - ave. 4 per site =	24
<b>Total Scope for the "Exceptions Policy"</b>	<b>108 units</b>

Other measures, such as the bringing of empty dwellings, and spaces over shops, and other non-residential buildings into use for affordable housing may make a further contribution to meeting the shortfall (through say 10 dwellings p.a.):

<b>Total Scope for "Other Measures"</b>	<b>90 units</b>
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<b>Balance of Shortfall: 1,405 - 108 - 90 =</b>	<b><u>1,207 units</u></b>
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The provisional number of dwellings for which the Local Plan needs to allocate sites has been indicated in the Structure Plan as 628, on the basis that 1,128 would be contributed through windfalls (i.e sites which come forward for development without having been specifically identified as allocations). These numbers (which may be modified in the emerging Local Plan) would give a total new housing supply, to which affordable housing policies could be applied, of 1,756. After allowing for the potential for the "Exceptions Policy" and "Other Measures", the shortfall is 1,207, representing 69% of the 1756 dwellings.

The report suggests that it would not be possible for 69% of new housing to be affordable, and in order to set a target for the Local Plan, it is necessary to first decide on the maximum proportion that would be realistic and desirable within the context of balanced and sustainable communities and the need to achieve economically viable development. The report suggests that the following should be adopted as the maximum overall policy objectives, subject to such variation as might be required by reference to specific circumstances such as local need and site conditions:

Subsidised Social Rented	25-30%
Subsidised or Discounted Low cost home ownership	30-35%
Open market	35-45%

If these percentages could be applied to all of the 1,756 new dwellings referred to above, that would create the following numbers of affordable dwellings which would fall slightly short of the 1,297 requirement

Subsidised Social Rented	439 - 527
Subsidised or Discounted Low cost home ownership	527 - 615
Open market	615 – 790

However a large proportion of these new dwellings will be on small sites, which are below the threshold at which planning policies can require the inclusion of a proportion of affordable housing. For Malvern Town, 15 dwellings would be the lowest permitted threshold, and the report suggests that a threshold of 5 dwellings should be set for the rest of the district, where the Council is able to set its own figure.

At the maximum 65% proportion of affordable housing, the total supply from planning policies is estimated by the report as being 496, or just under 40% of the identified shortfall, as set out in the table below:-

#### Threshold Limitations on Affordable Dwellings by Sub Area:

Sub Area	Total Allocations and Windfalls	Total on sites above threshold (estimate)	Maximum 65% proportion	Annual Rate limited by Thresholds
Tenbury	147	74	48	5
North	282	70	45	5
Malvern	1068	534	347	39
East	90	45	29	3
South	169	42	27	3
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>1756</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>55</b>
Exceptions		108	108	12
Others		90	90	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>963</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>77</b>

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#### 4.2.6 Housing Needs Assessment Report-----Recommendations

The report lists a series of recommendations for the Council to consider. They are set out as follows :-

**Policy Recommendation 1:** That affordable housing should be sought on sites of 15 dwellings or more in the Malvern urban area, and 5 dwellings or more elsewhere in the District.

**Policy Recommendation 2:** That out of an identified shortfall of 1,405 affordable dwellings over the period of the Local Plan, policies should seek to provide 694. 496 of these would be provided through not less than a target of 65% of the dwellings, on allocated and windfall sites which do not yet have planning consent being affordable, with between 25 and 30% of the total dwellings on those sites being for social rented housing.

**Policy Recommendation 3:** The means by which cash contributions could be levied on sites below the thresholds be investigated and included in Local Plan policies if practicable.

**Policy Recommendation 4:** That Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) be prepared as soon as the policies for an emerging plan have been drafted, in order to provide clarity as to how it is intended that the new policies will be applied.

In regard to the future updating, extending and monitoring of Housing Need in the district the report makes the following recommendations for Council:-

**Recommendation 1:** That when the results of the 2001 Census are known, and following any future stock condition survey, the scale and nature of the lower end of the rented market should be quantified and assessed for ways in which it might be assisted to make a greater contribution to meeting housing need.

Note There may also be opportunities for the involvement of both private and public sector landlords in developing 'sub market' accommodation at prices which are in between social and market rents, and which would relieve pressure on social rented accommodation.

**Recommendation 2:** That R.S.Ls are recommended to place greater emphasis on creating vacancies in family houses within the existing social rented stock, by investigating and meeting the needs of under-occupiers and aspiring home owners, than on the re-purchase of such accommodation in competition with first time buyers.

**Recommendation 3:** That the waiting and transfer lists should be treated as the principal means of on-going monitoring of housing need, as well as the means by which vacancies are allocated.

Note Registration should be encouraged, rather than discouraged, even when the likelihood of suitable properties being offered is remote, on the basis that this will increase the prospects of additional properties being provided. Reasons for registration, and de-registration, and the nature of vacancies created by transfers, deaths, purchases, moves away etc. should all be monitored for the valuable information they will provide as to both needs and supply.

**Recommendation 4:** That this form of survey should be repeated every two to three years, to provide a supplement to the waiting list and to identify trends which would allow for longer term projections to be made.

**Recommendation 5:** That the needs of the elderly, and of other groups with various levels of support needs, which cannot be met within the 'general needs' housing stock, should be separately recorded. These needs can then be assessed against the potential for both adapting stock which is in reducing demand and acquiring purpose built or converted accommodation.

**Recommendation 6:** That due importance is given to carrying out of Housing Needs Surveys in rural parishes to ensure that up to date assessments of rural housing needs are maintained.

Note This information is a crucial component of assessment of needs for the whole District.

**Recommendation 7:** That the monitoring of housing need and supply will be considerably assisted if the sub-areas are used consistently in applications to, and in allocations from, both the waiting and transfer lists, together with a recording of the type and location of the vacancies that would be created by transfers .

Comment

The completion of the Housing Needs Assessment report is one of the most important recent achievements in terms of the Council's Housing Service. As recommended by Government departments involved in national housing policy formulation, the justification for strategic and investment decisions must be based on sound needs analysis. The level of demand for affordable housing in the district is proven, based on a methodology and guidance issued by the former DTLR. The data will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the information remains up to date and reflects movements in demand and needs.

It is pleasing to note that reference was made to the Council's draft report by the Countryside Agency in their submission to the recent House of Commons Inquiry into Affordable Housing. A consultant with the Agency made this comment:

*'This is the best housing needs survey I have read ( and believe me I have read quite a few!). I sat on the steering group which advised on the DETR guidance and this is the first time I have seen a rural local authority really exploit the model to the full. It's a mine of invaluable information and I will be using its content and citing it as an excellent example of good practice. Thank you for sending it to me.'*

The Council recognises that Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for affordable housing is now required to provide a basis for the implementation of Local Plan policies. As sites considered appropriate for an element of affordable housing continue to come forward in advance of the first deposit draft local plan it is essential that, through SPG, MHDC has a scheme of negotiation which is clearly related to existing development plan and policy guidance whilst having regard to the likely content of emerging Local Plan policies. The resulting SPG will be clearly and explicitly linked to the affordable housing needs and priorities established through the Malvern Hills District Housing Needs Assessment.

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## The Housing Review 2002/2003

### Part Five

#### 5.1 Conclusion

The Council has an excellent record in delivering a high quality Housing Service. It has recognised that meeting housing needs and enabling the provision of decent secure accommodation for all sectors of the community, brings many benefits to its citizens.

Members and officers are determined to treat housing as a major priority for the Council and will continue to work in partnership with all agencies, organisations and individuals, to secure the objectives set out in the Housing Strategy 2002-2007.

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