

Agenda Item No:4

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 22nd July 2014

Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18

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Summary:	This report summarises the 2014 annual report of the Housing Framework 2013-18. It highlights work that is ongoing to achieve the five priorities of the Framework and opportunities and constraints that have presented over the last 12 months since the Framework was adopted.
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The committee be asked to:
Note the annual report and agree its publication on the
Ashford Borough Council website**

Policy Overview: Ashford Housing Framework 2013-18
Corporate Plan, Focus 2013-15
Kent Forum Housing Strategy 2012-15
Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England
2011

Financial Implications: None

Risk Assessment NO

Equalities Impact Assessment Undertaken for Housing Framework 2013-18

Other Material Implications: None

Exemption Clauses: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

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Report Title: Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18

Purpose of the Report

1. To present an update on achieving the five priorities of the Ashford Housing Framework 2013 - 18 since its adoption in July 2013.
2. To provide members with a copy of the annual report for agreement to publish on the ABC website

Issue to be Decided

3. To note the progress towards delivery of the five priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18
4. To agree the publication of the Housing Framework Annual Report 2014.

Background

5. The Housing Framework 2013-18 was developed during 2013 and adopted in July that year. The document can be viewed at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing> The Framework details the five broad priorities to achieve over the next five years. The action plan gives the structure to develop work-streams that will contribute to achieving the five priorities.
6. The five priorities of the Housing Framework are:
 - a. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas
 - b. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures
 - c. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people
 - d. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement
 - e. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness
7. The Annual Report (appendix 1) highlights work that has been undertaken in the previous year. The emphasis is on illustrating how in delivering the five priorities good quality housing has far reaching beneficial impacts on residents' lives, neighbourhoods and the wider environment, both directly and indirectly.

8. Members receive a quarterly performance update from Community and Housing that provides a statistical update on performance. Previous quarterly performance reports are available on the ABC website.
<http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-services-quarterly-performance-report>
9. Operating within a changing legislative and policy environment, continuing financial austerity and budgetary pressures the Housing Service is flexible and innovative in seeking ways to achieve the Framework's priorities. The annual report also highlights constraints and opportunities that have presented since the adoption of the Framework.

Summary of the Annual Report

10. Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas.

Both the Council and Housing Association partners are delivering new build affordable homes. Although a low number of completions in 13/14 (24) this is expected to increase significantly during 14/15 given there are currently 286 starts on site. The Council wishes to increase its ability to build more affordable housing by seeking an increase to HRA debt cap and implementing a programme of conversions alongside bidding to the HCA for grant funding. In addition the Council has purchased empty homes and formed the Property Company to take a more commercial approach and open up other mechanisms to deliver housing in the borough.

Where site viability constrains the delivery of affordable housing alternative ways of delivery are investigated, such as the model used at Newtown Works and using a flexible quota of affordable housing to move sites forward.

Where supply is limited and demand continues to be high, together with impacts of the spare room subsidy, initiatives such as assisted moves, encouraging mutual exchange, flexible tenancies and tenancy fraud investigations all contribute to making best use of existing stock.

11. Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures.

Measures in the Council's own stock to reduce the cost to tenants of heating homes and the work undertaken to encourage private sector landlords to make energy efficiency improvements has contributed to a reduction year on year of the number of households defined as being in fuel poverty.

A more targeted approach could yield greater results in the private sector but would require evidence gathered through a stock condition survey to enable this. Given the cost of a survey and lack of resources to implement any targeted actions a reactive process remains in place.

12. Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people.

Using private rented sector properties helps relieve pressure on the affordable housing stock. The social lettings agency and private sector leasing scheme provide in the region of 100 properties for homeless households. Other work with private landlords aims to improve access to homes, the standard of accommodation and their management. However, high demand from the open market, is restraining the number of properties and landlords becoming involved in Council led schemes.

Disabled Facilities Grants and supported housing schemes assist vulnerable people to remain living as independently as possible. Working with partners and through its own sheltered remodelling programme an increase in high quality older person's accommodation will have the added benefit of releasing family accommodation in the borough.

13. Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement.

The Housing Service works with partners, the tenants' panel, community forums and Parish Councils to deliver good housing management services and identify and undertake neighbourhood improvements.

Area managers have individual budgets to take forward small scale improvements. These projects could include clearing a pond or upgrading a play space and these contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour, improving the usability of an area and bringing a community together.

New build projects can also improve an area where small disused sites are brought into use for housing and can offer an opportunity to incorporate other benefits such as improved car parking.

The Council's stock continues to meet 100% decent homes standard and in the private sector complaints relating to disrepair often result in an action that results in an improvement to the property.

14. Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness.

Prevention of homelessness is always the priority and there are a number of prevention tools that Housing Options Officers can use such as the Sanctuary Scheme for Domestic Abuse victims, Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme, Homeless Prevention Payment Scheme, Homeless Repossession and Eviction Scheme as well as negotiation and crisis intervention. Raising awareness with partner agencies through the 'come to us early' approach encourages early liaison with housing to find out what can offered before a crisis occurs.

The two Welfare Reform Intervention Officers are being successful in assisting people to make informed choices where affected by changes to welfare reform. They dealt with 355 cases in the previous 12 months.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, options other than the use of bed and breakfast accommodation are preferable. The Social Lettings Agency homes have enabled the discharge of homelessness duty for 15 households.

Recently the Council purchased a property; this will be refurbished into short stay accommodation for homeless people.

The annual review of the Homelessness Strategy will be carried out during the remainder of 2014 to consider if the priorities are still relevant, where there are gaps in advice or the provision of accommodation and how joint working can further enhance prevention work.

Handling

15. Following Members agreement the annual report will be formatted to meet ABC communications criteria and published on the ABC internet.
16. A link to the published document will be circulated to all members and relevant stakeholders.
17. A light review of the Housing Framework will be carried out in 2014 to consider any external influences that impact both positively and negatively on achieving the 5 priorities and consider ways of embracing and addressing these.
18. A further review of the Housing Framework is planned for 2015, following the general election.

Conclusion

19. With continuing budget pressures Housing Services continues to deliver a range of initiatives and projects that are improving housing and housing related services to residents across the Borough
20. Opportunities to bring in further resources, such as bidding to the HCA, increasing the HRA debt cap and continuing to sustain a high level of rent collection allows Housing Services to maintain its objective to meet the 5 priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18.
21. A strong HRA position will allow sustained expansion of current projects such as LA new build, purchase of empty homes, right to buy 'buy back' and replacement and the sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme.
22. Development of initiatives such as the Social Lettings Agency and the Property Company are enhancing the range of housing services that the Council provides on a more entrepreneurial footing.
23. The Annual Report highlights many achievements which to a large extent are reliant on personal relationships. The depth of skills and knowledge that the housing officers have and their ability to build strong, constructive relationships with individuals and other organisations are vital in ensuring good quality accommodation for people with a range of housing needs across all tenures.

Portfolio Holder's Views

24. "With the current difficulties many people are experiencing in being granted a mortgage to buy their own homes the pressure on rented properties, both in the private sector and publicly funded affordable housing is high. The Borough receives over 200 applications per month for a limited housing stock. The report shows how a range of activities are contributing to achieving the five priorities of the Housing Framework to provide safe, sustainable homes for residents of the borough. I would like to highlight the work carried out by our officers in trying to prevent and reduce homelessness as this is indicative of the high standards of the department."

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ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Framework 2013-2018

Annual Report 2014

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June 2014

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Introduction

This report provides an update on progress towards meeting the five priorities set out in the Housing Framework 2013 – 18. Achieving these priorities will make a significant contribution to the Corporate Plan (Focus 2013-15) aim of ‘Quality Homes and Places To Live’.

Adopted in July 2013, The Housing Framework’s five priorities are:

1. Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough’s urban and rural areas
2. Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures
3. Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people
4. Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement
5. Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

The Housing Framework 2013-18 document is available at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing>

This report seeks to highlight actions that have made or are making a difference to residents’ lives. Given the diverse range of work undertaken across the breadth of the Housing Service, many actions contribute to achieving more than one specific priority. Similarly other agendas benefit positively from housing related interventions, such as health and wellbeing, the local economy and employment, prevention and fear of crime, education and skills.

The Housing Service continues to seek more effective ways of maintaining a high standard of service across its mandatory and discretionary areas of work. Performance is monitored and reported to members through the Community and Housing quarterly performance reports which can be accessed through the Council website at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-services-quarterly-performance-report>

Many of the activities undertaken by the Housing Service have positive social benefits to both the recipient and the wider community. This can be inherently difficult to measure in a monetary dimension. Some projects will be selected throughout the forthcoming year to pilot measuring social value, through a wellbeing

valuation¹ that helps place a value on activities through looking at their impact on individuals' life satisfaction to demonstrate the value of community investment.

1. Priority 1: Improve the supply of affordable housing to meet local housing needs in Ashford borough's urban and rural areas

1.1 Local Authority Initiatives:

LA new build programme - The securing of grant under the 2011-15 Homes and Communities Agency affordable homes programme will see a further 59 affordable rented homes built by end of March 2015. A further bid has been made to the Homes and Communities Agency funding programme 2015-18. If successful this will enable the building of 60 homes for affordable rent and the remodelling of another sheltered housing scheme.

Empty Homes – Grant Funding of £577,550 from the Homes and Communities Agency has enabled the purchase of 25 empty properties, 4 x one bed flats, 6 x two bed flats, 5 x two bed houses and 10 x three bed houses. With legal and works costs the total expenditure will be approx. £3,377,000. 14 of the properties are let and occupied. There is further grant funding to purchase 5 more properties.

Utilising right to buy receipts – At the end of March 2014, the Council currently has £3,786,010 available to invest in affordable homes to replace the 47 properties sold through the right to buy in 2012/13 and 2013/14. This will initially support 14 additional homes funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

Property company - The formation of the Property Company in May 2014, will offer a commercial solution that contributes to a dual strategy of transforming the Council in to a more entrepreneurial organisation and to help address the housing shortfall in the borough, including cross subsidy of affordable housing through the development of open market housing.

1.2 Registered Providers (Housing Associations):

Since the adoption of the Housing Framework in July 2013 up until 21 May 2014, 2 homes have been built by Housing Associations in the borough, these were for shared ownership. There are a further 34 homes due to be completed by the end of 2014 and approximately a further 200 general needs homes and 67 extra care flats by end of March 2015. Some Housing Associations have developed 'open market' trading arms which enables them to cross subsidise the affordable housing. A site which is benefiting from this approach is at Chilham where Orbit Homes have purchased the whole site to develop mixed tenure, delivering 35% affordable housing on site.

¹ <http://www.hact.org.uk/social-value-services>

1.3 Site viability:

On mixed development sites (s106 sites) the percentage of affordable housing provision is negotiated with developers to achieve the policy target of 30% or 35% in urban and rural areas respectively. Where financial viability is threatening the delivery of the site, a lower percentage maybe agreed or a mechanism used to 'catch-up' the affordable housing provision in later phases. Housing Officers work closely with colleagues in Planning to optimise ways of delivering the maximum amount of affordable housing on each site.

Newtown Works - Phase 1 of Newtown Works is being brought forward by Town and Country Housing Group having agreed with developers of the site, Kier, to purchase all 108 units within that phase on a combined build and land cost basis with payment being made at 'golden brick' stage (construction of all 108 units up to the first course of bricks beyond DPC level). This enabled Kier during the market downturn to bring forward construction on this site which would not have occurred using the traditional payment methods to the contractor. The delivery of the required affordable housing is being met as per the S106 agreement as well as additional affordable housing which will see at least a minimum 82% affordable housing quota, on this phase. The percentage of affordable housing in subsequent phases may differ dependent on financial viability at the time.

1.4 Maximising use of stock:

Void turn around - ensuring void properties are re-let as soon as possible maximises the use of existing stock. The average void period for 2013/14 for ABC properties was 20 days.

Reducing under occupation – assisted moves is a way for tenants over 50 to move to a smaller property, freeing up family sized accommodation. Although tenants of pension age, claiming housing benefit, are not subject to the social size criteria, the Council encourages those older people under occupying a home to consider moving to a smaller home by offering a range of incentives. Between July 2013 and end of May 2014, 32 households have moved supported by the assisted moves scheme.

A couple who moved from a 3 bed house in Ashford Town Centre to a 2 bed bungalow in Smarden through the assisted move scheme are delighted with their new home. Due to health reasons the stairs in their existing home were increasingly difficult to manage. The move to a bungalow has, in their words, been 'life changing for the better'. They commented that the assisted move scheme definitely helped them make the decision to move as they would not have been able to afford to move without assistance and on how helpful everyone had been to ensure the move ran very smoothly.

Mutual exchanges – With the introduction of welfare reform tenants are encouraged to consider their circumstances and alternative options, such as mutual exchange, if they are under occupying their homes. It was felt that tenants who were under-

occupying, particularly those in 3 or 4 bed houses, sought out a mutual exchange so that they could still have a house rather than a flat. 104 tenants mutually exchanged during 2013/14.

Tenancy fraud investigations – There is ongoing joint working between Revenues and Benefits, the Area Managers and Housing Options Officers to investigate cases of fraud in social housing stock. Since July 2013, 4 properties have been recovered and 2 housing applications cancelled where the applicants have been found to be intentionally homeless. One of the properties recovered was linked to a prosecution for benefit fraud but doing the investigation as one enabled the situation to be viewed in its entirety rather than in separate elements. There are currently 18 cases open with a housing link, they are primarily referrals of non residency / subletting but can include false applications, RTB queries or successions. There are also ongoing tenancy audits and one joint investigation with an RSL.

1.5 Strategy and Policy:

Strategic Housing Market Assessment – Housing and Planning Service worked together to commission a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The full report is available at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/local-plan-to-2030> The report identified a need for 368 new affordable homes per year.

Affordable Housing Policy – in line with the review of the Core Strategy, Housing Officers are collaborating with planning colleagues to develop, with members, an affordable housing policy that will best meet the needs of those unable to afford open market housing, without constraining development.

1.6 Constraints:

The number of sites being built over the last year has been low, which together with developers using the affordable housing provision to 'balance' site viability has impacted on delivery. Government policy now allows developers to challenge the affordable housing percentage in existing s106 agreements and the government is proposing to increase the threshold for affordable housing to 10 units. Although would not have a negative impact under the Council's current policy it could undermine any future ambition to lower the threshold particularly in relation to rural areas where smaller sites are more prevalent and the delivery of local needs housing schemes is diminishing. During the last year there have not been any completions of local needs housing, potentially due to landowners submitting sites for allocation as part of the Core Strategy review, and that two thirds of parishes have one of more local needs housing schemes already.

Capital grant available for the delivery of affordable housing is very limited and the Homes and Communities Agency maintains its position that on s106 sites affordable housing should be delivered without grant.

1.7 Opportunities:

The Council has applied for an increase in the HRA debt cap to enable greater borrowing to fund the development of affordable housing. Together with a programme of conversions from social rent to affordable rent in the council's housing stock (that has been approved by members to commence in April 2105) and a bid for grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency 2015-18 programme will further enhance the Council's ability to build new homes.

The development of a new affordable housing policy presents an opportunity to investigate how the Council could be more flexible in its approach given the variety of sites coming forward in the borough. Housing will continue to work alongside Planning to evidence and promote the need for affordable housing.

Site viability training is to be delivered by the Homes and Communities Agency and two Officers will benefit from this which will aid a greater understanding of this complex issue and assist in ensuring an appropriate percentage of affordable housing is provided on site.

The development of a resident reward scheme is currently being considered. This, if implemented could include an incentive to encourage tenants leave their properties in a good state of repair. This could improve the turn-around between outgoing and incoming tenants, reducing void times and increasing the number of weeks each home is occupied.

2. Priority 2: Improve environmental quality of homes and address fuel poverty in all tenures

2.1 Increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty:

Fuel poverty indicator– The definition of fuel poverty was amended in 2013 to the Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator. Under this measure in 2011, 7.6% of households in Ashford were defined as in fuel poverty, equivalent to 3586 households. This compares favourably to the Kent average of 9%. Using the previous definition there was a 1.3% fall in households in fuel poverty between 2010 and 2011

Energy efficiency for tenants – measures to reduce the costs to tenants of heating their homes include; the installation of air source heat pumps, electric panel heaters to replace oil boilers with the electricity subsidised by solar photo voltaic panel, cavity wall and loft insulation upgrades, replacing communal lights in blocks of flats with low energy light fittings which are controlled by PIR sensors to maximise energy efficiency and maximising opportunities in the maintenance programme such upgrading insulation when replacing the flat roofing at Luckley House.

Four 'Airey' houses, in the council's stock, were treated with an innovative system to increase energy efficiency. This has provided a benefit both to the tenants who now have warmer easier to heat homes and to the Council in terms of the long term maintenance. The installed system has exceeded current building regulation standards. The full case study is presented in Appendix 1.

In the private sector – The Council is committed to supporting the aims of the Kent Environment Strategy and as part of the Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership and the Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership to promote and signpost residents to schemes that can assist in reducing domestic energy consumption. Under the HeatSeekers initiative 124 measures have been installed in the borough (70 loft insulation and 54 cavity wall insulation).

2.2 Constraints:

In the private sector an increased knowledge of areas where of housing stock is the least energy efficient would assist in taking a more targeted approach. A housing stock condition survey would provide such information but stretched resources currently prevent this being undertaken or being able to implement any actions based on its findings.

2.3 Opportunities:

We are establishing data on the energy efficiency rating of our residential accommodation by undertaking an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) every time a heating system is installed or upgraded and upon every void that does not currently have a valid certificate.

To encourage improvements to energy efficiency in the private sector we work with landlords to encourage them to increase the energy efficiency of their properties. EPC's are currently a requirement when considering a Rent Deposit Bond for homeless households moving into the private sector. Within the landlord accreditation scheme there is a loan facility specifically for energy efficiency works, including insulation and replacement boilers.

On the Council's new build properties, energy efficiency is high priority and wherever feasible the use of renewable energy is included. The Housing Service is also working with one Housing Association to support them investigate the development of a passivhaus standard housing scheme.

3. Priority 3: Increase availability and choice of accommodation including for vulnerable people

3.1 Utilising the private rented sector:

Social lettings agency – The social lettings agency has 51 homes under full management option. This initiative is increasing the amount of homes available to those who ordinarily would not be considered suitable tenants by private landlords and are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A young woman and her 2 year old son have been rehoused out of bed and breakfast in to a social lettings agency property providing them with suitable, settled accommodation.

From June ABC Lettings expanded its management service into Shepway and in partnership with Shepway Council will commence working with landlords in the area to provide homes for people from Shepway.

Private sector leasing – this scheme continues with 67 homes leased from private sector landlords at end of March 2014

3.2 Increasing the availability of well managed private rented homes:

Landlord accreditation scheme – There are two fully accredited landlords with three or so more in the pipeline that have completed the training and are due to have their properties inspected.

Landlord working group – A focused group which meets every 3 to 4 months, there are terms of reference for this group and it considers issues facing the borough in terms of private sector housing and how they can be addressed together with other items that are relevant and of interest to the landlord.

Landlord Forum – Annual event, last July attracted 70 landlords. The forum covered items such as services the Council offer, green deal, how to finance properties and how to recognise and address damp and mould issues.

Houses in Multiple Occupation – Several new HMOs, that fall under the mandatory licencing requirement of the Housing Act 2004 were licenced in the past 12 months. Together with relicensing brings the overall number of licenced HMOs to 67. The licence runs for 5 years and relicensing provides an opportunity to re-inspect and update any conditions ensuring the property remains safe for occupation.

3.3 Disabled adaptations:

Adaptions in Council homes – 305 adaptations were completed in 2013/14 with a total spend of just under £300,000. The most commonly fitted adaptations are grab rails, flush floor showers and ramps to improve access to the property.

A husband and father who was suffering from a hereditary medical condition, which their children also have, needed a Flush Floor Shower, which would enable him to look after himself without depending on the care of others. Living in a two story property it was difficult to provide a FFS on the first floor as access and space was tight. As his bedroom was to be located on the ground floor, it was decided that the redundant outbuilding attached to the property would be an ideal area that could provide him with this facility. In partnership with Occupational Therapy and with a local builder the outbuilding was turned into a flush floor shower area, which consisted of an electric thermostatic shower, a new WC and basin with lever taps, a humidistat fan and light fitting, as well as appropriate grab rails and other associated fittings. A ramp externally and level access internally was also provided, which allowed clear access to and from the new shower area. Once completed, the family seemed to be exceptionally pleased with the transformation and appeared to be very happy, as it has improved their living conditions and has made life easier for the whole family.

Disabled facilities grants – 47 disabled facilities grants were authorised and works completed during 2013/14 at a total cost of £342,142.

3.4 Supported Housing:

Young people – planning permission has been granted for a scheme of 8 units to prevent homelessness and help young people at risk of homelessness into more settled lives, training, employment and independent living. The scheme is being developed by Golding Homes and the support service will be tendered for under the Supporting People programme

Move on accommodation – The Kent PFI agreement, signed and sealed in June, includes for Ashford the development of 11 units of supported move on accommodation in South Ashford.

Sheltered and extra care accommodation – The remodelling of 8 of the Council's sheltered housing schemes commenced with Farrow Court, with phase one well under way and due for completion by April 2015. In addition the redevelopment of Little Hill sheltered scheme in Tenterden to a 41unit extra care scheme will come forward through the Kent PFI. The Housing and Care 21 extra care scheme at The Warren is due for completion by April 2015, providing 67 flats with a mix of affordable rent and shared ownership. Their other scheme at Aldington, with 33 flats, is due to start on site by September after the ecological mitigation works are completed.

Adapted property for disabled people – As part of the Council's new build programme a home has been designed specifically for a large family with a disabled child. This has been brought forward in consultation with the family and the occupational therapist. A further two homes designed to wheelchair standards are also due for completion by January 2015.

3.5 Constraints:

High demand for private rented homes is restricting the number of landlords working with social lettings agency due to landlords achieving rent higher than the local housing allowance rates by letting on the open market.

Demand for disabled adaptations and disabled facilities grant outstrips funding available. Some households experience long waiting times for work to commence.

Reduction in the percentage of affordable housing delivered on sites, can negatively impact on the capacity to provide more supported housing that forms part of the overall affordable housing quota.

The delivery of sheltered housing scheme remodelling programme is constrained by borrowing available through the HRA and the programme timescales are dependent on the financial capacity available.

3.6 Opportunities:

The bid for further grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency programme for 2015-18 includes the re-provision of another of the Council's sheltered housing schemes. In addition the bid to increase the HRA debt cap in the 15/18 programme also assists in the delivery of supported affordable housing.

Where there are planned maintenance works for upgrading bathrooms in council homes, designated for older people, wet rooms are incorporated to reduce the need for adaptations at a later date. A prioritisation process for disabled adaptations, will be introduced to provide greater clarity about the process of assessing the need for work and time spent on the waiting list. In addition adaptations that cost over £1000 will not be undertaken where the tenant is under occupying the property by two or more bedrooms. The tenants will be offered assistance to move to more suitable accommodation.

4. Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement

4.1 Good housing management:

Housing Associations – the Council continues to facilitate a meeting with all social and affordable housing providers to share good practice, highlight any areas of concern and maintain good relationships so any issues can be resolved swiftly.

ABC Tenant Panel - the ABC Tenant's Panel works with the Council, as its landlord, to seek improvements across a range of services that relate to homes and neighbourhoods.

The Tenants Panel is taking on more responsibility, for instance estate inspections which have evolved as commented on by one member of the Panel ' In the future we will be able to complete our own Estate Inspections and report any concerning issues whenever we want/feel appropriate to. This will ensure that problems don't become out of hand. They can be addressed quickly and with less expense to our landlord. We can also audit our Area Managers and ensure that they are identifying everything in a timely manner. The Tenant Inspections aren't a process of catching the Council out but one of working with them to ensure that our services run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Because the Area Managers are only able to complete 1-2 inspections a year they rely on us to give them this information.'

Using the social wellbeing toolkit, the wellbeing value of the Tenants Panel (for nine members) has been calculated as equivalent to £48,896 per year. That is the equivalent amount of money needed to increase the Panel's wellbeing by the same amount.

Tenant initiatives – the annual tenants garden competition is one way of encouraging tenants to take a pride in their immediate surroundings. The results are published in Housing News, the quarterly magazine for tenants, which provides information, articles and news items to help foster good relationships. Many of the sheltered schemes run activities which contribute to wellbeing and social inclusion. As an example of this using the wellbeing valuation tool for the 6 people who regularly attend the gardening club the equivalent overall value that would need to be paid to them is £8366 (£1394 each).

Sheltered housing review – Following consultation with residents, new working arrangements for the sheltered scheme managers have been introduced.

The Seniors Forum members commented that the scheme managers are very important, especially for older single people who can feel very isolated and its comforting knowing there is help available if needed. The Forum felt more resources should be directed towards sheltered housing to ensure each scheme had its own dedicated manager and to ensure there is sufficient cover for leave and illness. The Forum members highlighted that there is a good network of neighbour support but there needed to be more accommodation such as extra care, for older people when their needs increased and sheltered housing was no longer suitable. Increased dementia awareness was thought to be very important for both residents of sheltered schemes and staff supporting them.

Improvements at Chilmington gypsy site - In addition to regular site clearances, in the last year there has been one resident and officer 'clear up day', fencing works to the site and improvements to the utility blocks for drainage and electrics which included the installation of smart meters to all blocks to improve and protect the electrical supply.

4.2 Neighbourhood Improvements:

Area Manager projects – a number of small projects, identified through estate inspections and/or resident consultation, are undertaken to improve areas with local residents input. This includes, pond improvement works, fencing to play areas and initiatives such as litter picking and communal shrub border tidying. Each Area Manager is responsible for agreeing projects with residents and allocating their budget.

Community Safety Unit – Housing Services is represented at the CSU, which allows for swift, joint action where issues of concern arise and to work together on a preventative agenda to improve safety and reduce fear of crime across the Borough.

Clean sweeps – Joint operations between agencies continue as part of the Community Safety Unit initiatives to tackle problems in a specific area. This includes tackling a range of problems like fire prevention, poor housing, licensing and rubbish clearing. The police commissioner visited a clean sweep in Ashford parishes at the end of 2013.

4.3 High quality homes:

Decent homes standards – The Council's own housing stock continues to meet 100% decent homes standard

Park homes – In response to the government consultation a briefing session is to be held in June for all residents of commercially licenced sites to discuss how the proposed changes will affect them. Housing Services is also consulting with the residents regarding the introduction of fees for inspecting licenced sites. This will feed into formulating a park homes policy.

Private sector improvements – the private sector housing team responds to complaints about disrepair, any enforcement action taken to rectify the issue will normally result in an improvement to the property, such as replacing a faulty boiler

4.4 Constraints:

The majority of homes in the borough (69%) are in owner occupation and a further 13% privately rented. With a small private sector housing team, work to tackle areas of disrepair or empty homes is in the main a reactive service. The last Stock Condition Survey was undertaken in 2002, prior to the introduction of the Health and Housing Safety Rating System. Evidence from an up to date Stock Condition Survey would provide a strong foundation on which to develop robust Private Sector Housing Policies.

4.5 Opportunities:

A proposal to introduce a residents' reward scheme to ABC tenants is being developed with the aim to incentivise tenants to take greater responsibility for their

homes and surroundings. A number of housing associations run such schemes and have noted a reduction in low level complaints, such as noise, untidy gardens as well as improved rent collection rates.

A number of the Council's new build schemes are often built on small areas of land or garage sites that are not overlooked these may attract anti-social behaviour and the development of these sites reduces these nuisances. They can also include benefits to the wider community, such as improved car parking and open space.

5. Priority 5: Prevent and reduce homelessness and increase access to settled accommodation for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness

5.1 Preventing homelessness:

Come to us early – an awareness raising approach with external agencies of what the Housing Options Officers can offer and that the best prevention is to make contact early. Presentations have been made to the Early Intervention team at Social Services, and all the Family Liaison Officers in schools. A review of the Whole Needs Assessment Tool will enable more agencies to be contacted and promotion undertaken.

A range of other homelessness prevention initiatives are used, including the Sanctuary Scheme for Domestic Abuse victims, Homeless Prevention Bond Scheme, Homeless Prevention Payment Scheme, Homeless Repossession and Eviction Scheme as well as negotiation and crisis intervention

Welfare reform intervention – the two officers provide a vital link to vulnerable people who are facing difficulties as a result of changes to benefits. In the 12 months to June they have dealt with 355 cases; direct enquiries and those referred from other agencies such as Citizens Rights for Older People, Early Intervention Team at Social Services, Adult Mental Health Team and the Family Liaison Officers in primary schools and CAB . Referrals have been related to issues such as under occupancy, benefit cap and council tax support. This service is helping people make informed choices as two examples demonstrate.

An unemployed single person receiving employment and support allowance, living in 3 bed Council property was awarded 26 week Discretionary Housing Payment with the stipulation that she would look to downsize. Although initially very reluctant to move and suffering from depression with encouragement from her Housing Manager and the Welfare Reform Intervention Officer she managed to source an exchange and has moved into a 2 bed property and has also returned to work. She has been granted a further DHP on her new property but on the understanding that she needs to gradually increase her working hours and therefore have no further need for either housing benefit or DHP.

A single person in part time work living in a 1 bed property was unable to meet all her rent as her benefits were not covering the full amount. She was encouraged to increase her working hours which enabled her to claim working tax credits. The tenant is not always able to cope with paperwork but by meeting with her regularly and helping her understand how to budget she now works 3 separate part time jobs and is paying her rent and council tax without any help.

5.2 Accommodation for homeless households:

Temporary accommodation - The Council has purchased a property to refurbish into short stay accommodation for people who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness. This will also reduce costs incurred through the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. The homes and communities agency has agreed a grant of £150,000 towards the total costs of £560,000.

Social lettings agency – has enabled the discharge of homelessness duty for 15 households

5.3 Constraints:

The lack of affordable housing means fewer opportunities to develop appropriate accommodation pathways for vulnerable people, to enable a structured move from supported accommodation through to independent living.

The increasing demand for private rented accommodation has increased rental values, making landlords less interested in letting properties to people in receipt of benefits.

5.4 Opportunities:

The Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed during 2014 to ensure that the priorities are still relevant and meeting the need of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness in the borough.

Prevention of homelessness is a priority and opportunities to expand this work in partnership with other agencies will be brought forward wherever possible.

The government has recently announced additional funding to tackle homelessness. Any opportunities to bid for the fund will be considered.

6. Conclusion

The Housing Service is delivering against the five priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18. The diverse nature of the work of Housing Services means that actions often cannot be solely attributed to one priority but have a beneficial outcome on several.

The new build programme and the purchase of empty properties has increased the amount of affordable housing available in a time when the more traditional routes are constrained.

Good housing management ensures the Council's stock is well maintained and residents are involved in neighbourhood improvements which instils increased 'ownership' and pride in an area.

Residents across the Borough are supported with a range of advice services, both directly by officers and through partner organisations, whether it is in the Council's own housing stock or the private sector. Vulnerable people are assisted to live as independently as possible. Preventative work is key to tackling homelessness and reducing costs to the Council for temporary accommodation.

Working in cooperation with other departments and outside agencies strengthens the ability to deliver good services and respond to an ever changing environment, which contributes to making the Borough one of high quality homes and places to live.

7. Appendix 1: Tackling Hard to Heat Homes

Airey House Case Study:

1. The Airey House:

There are a significant number of non-traditional dwellings within ABC's housing stock. These homes don't have a wall cavity that can be filled with insulation, to help lessen heat loss. Unless the walls have been upgraded in some way, they are homes that are "hard to heat".

Most of the non-traditional buildings have had an external wall insulation system (EWI) installed at some stage in the past. Those that haven't are lacking, due to the absence (until recently) of an appropriate insulation technique. This is particularly relevant in the case of our Airey houses. There are approximately 80 Airey-style houses, in the Council's ownership, similar (or identical) to the one shown below



Airey's were a fast-build system to help ease the housing shortage, following WW2. Due to problems with the concrete supporting frame, they were structurally repaired, on a nation-wide scale, in the late 1980's or early 1990's. The external walls were provided with some insulation, in the form of insulated plasterboard, on the inside. Even though improved however, the thermal performance is still inferior, when compared to traditional external wall construction.

In addition to thermal transmittance, heat losses are also made through air leakage. Although the repair system carried out was considered suitable for its day it did not take this into account. The concrete panels have (more or less) open joints, giving freer passage for air leakage to occur than compared to traditional external wall construction.

2. Energy Consumption:

Complaints from Airey house tenants about their homes being draughty and cold are common place, especially as fuel poverty is becoming an ever increasing cause for concern.

Preventing heat loss through the building fabric is a key factor in reducing fuel consumption. With good insulation, a comfortable internal temperature can be maintained for less expenditure of energy. The direct benefits of this include:-

- Reduced Carbon (and other harmful) emissions, to the atmosphere.
- Reduced household running costs.
- Reduced risk of damage (through condensation and mould) to the décor and fabric of the building and;
- Improved health and wellbeing of the tenant.

Generally, the Council's Aireys have already benefitted from:-

- Loft (top-up) insulation.
- Double glazed windows and doors and;
- Reasonably efficient gas-fired central heating.

Despite this the Aireys are still "hard to heat". Being incompatible with standard EWI systems they are amongst our most inefficient homes.

Given that some 50% of heat losses from a home are through the external walls, it is felt that efforts need to be concentrated in this area.

3. Key Design Considerations:

We looked into several improvement proposals. In doing so, we felt the following issues needed to be addressed:-

3.1: Building regulations, compliance: The building regulations set minimum performance standards for exposed elements of a structure. An exposed element is an area where heat loss occurs (e.g. an outside wall, window, etc.). The thermal performance is known as its U-Value. The lower the U-Value, the more thermally efficient that element is. A system was required that exceeded current boundaries, knowing full well that thermal efficiency targets were likely to become more rigorous in the near future.

3.2: Ongoing maintenance: There are signs of deterioration in some properties where panels have slipped or become dislodged. Remedial works are difficult because the panels are interlocking thus one or two panels cannot be worked on in

isolation. Large areas need to be stripped just to “get to” one defective area. Replacing the panels would reduce an ongoing maintenance liability.

3.3: Cost Effectiveness: There are a number of systems for refurbishing Aireys. Some involve construction of foundations and/or underpinning of the existing structure. Entire reconstruction of the external walls (together with associated, rewiring, redecorations, new skirting boards and carpet adjustments, etc.), is also required. Although a small number of Aireys have been refurbished in this way it was felt that work to this extent was not justified nor would it be financially viable and looked at other, simpler, proposals.

3.4: Disruption: Works along the lines of the above, would result in decanting the tenants during the work. This would have a further financial impact on cost due to removal costs and loss of rent. A system that could be installed with the tenant’s in-situ, with minimal disturbance was required.

3.5: Appearance: One of the other major benefits of the work was that it provided and opportunity to improve the aesthetic appearance of the dwellings. A system that could offer flexibility in choice of the external finish was sought.

4. Deciding Factors:

A lightweight, structural, insulated render system (SIRS) was the preferred option. This was an innovative approach as this type of product is normally fixed to a masonry surface. Although slightly unusual, we discovered that it could be fixed to a structural framework with equal success. It “ticked the boxes” because:-

- Calculation showed that the current standards were easily exceeded*.
- The defective concrete panels would be removed. The insulated render system provides the weather-tightness, as well as the thermal efficiency. This truly is a huge side- benefit and is likely to save the authority many thousands of pounds in the long term.
- It is a lightweight solution, no costly ground works or reconstruction.
- Non-Intrusive. Apart from being asked to remove pictures, etc. from the walls and some unavoidable noise, there was no internal disruption.
- The appearance of the building could be vastly improved. Flexible options for “brick-effect” or plain rendering were available, as shown in below.



5. Installation and Review:

5.1: The SIRS was trialled on all four of our Aireys within a small hamlet. The basic work comprised:-

- Removal of the existing concrete panels.
- Fitting of 80mm thick, composite insulation panels/stainless steel, structural caging. The panels were mechanically fixed to the structural steel frame of the houses, as shown in below.



- The application of 1-3 coats of proprietary render system.

5.2: Tenant Feed Back: The pilot scheme was completed before the on-set of winter 2013 and is being monitored over the heating season. Early tenant feedback

suggests the system performs well and there is a marked improvement in ability to maintain and control ambient internal heating levels.

One tenant reports that their hallway, still feels cold; compared to the rest of the house. The hallway however, contains a disproportionate amount of glazing; which is less thermally efficient than the surrounding walls. This could give rise to a distorted and exaggerated effect.

5.3: Officer Feed Back:

Negatives: The main criticism of the system is that it was time consuming and “fiddly” to install. The cage spars and panels have to be cut and adapted around windows and other openings. Each joint also requires seam-crimping to lock abutting panels together.

Another slight “negative” is the cost. Despite huge savings (compared to other methods) the work is still quite costly at around £25,000 per property.

Positives: Calculations show that prior to the works, the U-Value of the walls was 0.56; post works, it was found to be 0.25 (remembering the lower the U-Value - the better). The rating required by Building Control (at the time) was only 0.35. Logic would suggest that, the heat loss prevented through air leakage must also be considerable. The open-jointed panels have been removed and replaced with a seamless and impervious wall surface. The generally positive tenant feedback would appear to confirm this.

Apart from the time taken, the SIRS installation was relatively stress and trouble free. The work can be done in stages (if required) to avoid exposing too much of the structure to the elements (and possible inclement weather) at any one time. This would be particularly important if work were to be undertaken through the winter months.

The render system can be applied by spray machine or by hand. Two of the houses underwent machine application and two hand application. It was considered that the most successful, was the hand application. There was much less mess, due to accurate placement of the render and less wastage.

There are now other innovative solutions available that could achieve similar performance levels, but are perhaps, less arduous and time consuming to install. A system that could be fitted quicker would realise a cost reduction.