

# **Harrow Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy**

**2003/2005**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction, Vision, Aims and objectives

### Introduction

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 removed many of the detailed provisions that govern the way authorities carry out housing renewal giving authorities greater flexibility and discretion in delivering housing renewal to address local needs. This new power is not exercisable until the authority has adopted and published a Strategy which details how this discretion will be exercised which must include the policy for providing assistance and the conditions to which that assistance is subject.

This Strategy for Private Sector Renewal establishes how we will address the identified housing needs of the authority, raise standards in the poorest accommodation and increase the number of decent homes within the borough.

Poor quality housing can have an impact on the health of the occupants and on the quality of life in an area. Accepting that it is primarily the responsibility of homeowners and landlords to maintain their own properties, the Council is committed to improving housing quality across all tenures. It is acknowledged that some homeowners, particularly the elderly and the most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to keep their homes in good repair. The strategy sets out how assistance will be provided to those groups identified as a priority to ensure that viable communities are sustained and opportunities to deliver and support regeneration are maximised.

The Strategy has been developed through an assessment of identified housing need, National, Regional and Local Strategic priorities and in consultation with the public, partners and internal and external partners. This process has been managed and provided the framework for the Best Value Review of the Private Sector under the Your Home Your Needs review of Housing.

### Vision, Aims and Objectives

Harrow Council's vision is to lead the development of Private Sector Housing Renewal in the Borough, working with partners to enable and influence policy, delivering services that make a positive difference to individuals, helping achieve sustainable communities and contributing towards a more sustainable environment to live and work in. This complements the Council's vision for Harrow set out in the replacement Harrow Unitary Development Plan.

Our aims and objectives have been developed in consultation with stakeholders using information on:

- Local Demographics
- Private Sector Stock Condition
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- The Local Housing Profile
- Poverty/Wealth Streams
- Housing Need and Demand
- Current Service demands.
- Key health and social care priorities
- BME communities including asylum seekers and refugees

In order to provide a supply of good quality, sustainable, secure and affordable private sector housing, our primary objectives are to:

- Develop integrated approaches within the Council and with other agencies to tackle poor housing, poor health and social exclusion.
- Target investment to promote regeneration and strengthen local communities.
- Continue to deliver and support measures that secure higher standards and better management in the private rented sector.
- Bring empty properties back into residential use under the Empty Homes Strategy.
- Provide advice and assistance to ensure that properties do not fall into disrepair.
- With regard to property which is occupied the strategy sets out how the Council will:
- Enforce the standards laid down in housing legislation, Government guidance, circulars and codes of practice to ensure that private rented sector accommodation is maintained to a minimum standard.
- Enforce standards laid down in our registration scheme to ensure Houses in Multiple occupation have adequate fire precautions, basic amenities (baths, wash hand basins, toilets) and are properly managed.
- Administer Disabled Facilities Grants to enable adaptation of properties to address the needs of disabled people.
- Administer a transparent policy and criteria for awarding Discretionary Grants targeted at those living in the worst conditions who are least able to afford the necessary repair and improvement works. In order to deliver strategic priorities this will be based on the condition of properties as well as the financial means of the applicant.
- Provision of housing guidance, support and advice to both landlord and tenant and owner occupiers.
- Consult on use of resources with service users and partners

For unoccupied property the authority is committed to successfully bringing empty or underused properties back into full and effective use, the benefits of which include:

- Improving the local environment
- Assisting with wider area regeneration
- Reducing the threat of crime or vandalism and nuisance to neighbours arising from long term empty properties
- Providing people in need with a greater choice of properties to rent or buy

For all properties energy efficiency remains high on Harrows agenda and contributes to anti-poverty and health improvement strategies as well as environmental protection and maintaining good property condition. We will seek to secure continuous improvements in energy efficiency performance and the alleviation of fuel poverty through:

- Continuing to work with partners to target the poorest households and properties, make strategic links and identify opportunities to seek additional resources.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency measures through advice, education and promotion.
- Promotion and development of renewable energy

The above aims and key priorities have been developed following an in-depth examination of the national, regional and sub-regional context, and a range of other Council strategies (or strategies in which the Council is a partner) which in turn have been derived from wide array of information.

## **Further Information and Contact Points**

Further information on specific aspects of housing provision are available through the following contact points:

Housing Strategy: Jane Fernley, Strategy & Resources Development Manager, Telephone 020 8424 1283. Email [Jane.Fernley@Harrow.Gov.UK](mailto:Jane.Fernley@Harrow.Gov.UK)

Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy: Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Telephone 020 8424 1374. Email [gareth.llywelyn-roberts@Harrow.Gov.UK](mailto:gareth.llywelyn-roberts@Harrow.Gov.UK)

Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy: Ian Sanderson, Improvement Grant Manager, Telephone 020 8424 1406, email [ian.sanderson@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:ian.sanderson@harrow.gov.uk).

Staying Put home Improvement Agency & matters relating to Home Energy Conservation and the promotion of renewable energy: Paul Bandy, Team Leader, Telephone 020 8424 1902, email [paul.bandy@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:paul.bandy@harrow.gov.uk)

Private Sector Enforcement: Bruce Williams, Environmental Health Manager, Telephone 020 8424 1367, email [bruce.williams@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:bruce.williams@harrow.gov.uk)

Empty Properties Officer: Nick Caprara, Empty Properties Officer, Housing Provision Team Telephone 020 8424 1096, email [nick.caprara@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:nick.caprara@harrow.gov.uk)

Housing advice: Housing Advice Centre, Milton Road, Harrow, HA12XH, telephone 020 8861 4079.

Alternatively information may be accessed on any of the Strategies or Services described within this strategy through the Harrow Borough Council web site at [www.harrow.gov.uk](http://www.harrow.gov.uk)

# Chapter 2

## Strategic Context

### National

The Government's Housing Policy Statement, 'The Way Forward for Housing' 2002, includes the main themes of quality and choice emphasising the importance of links to the wider issues of tackling social exclusion and the need to achieve lasting regeneration.

The key priorities for the private sector, which we have incorporated, are measures to:

- Enhance the strategic role across all types of housing.
- Support sustainable home ownership and promote affordable housing.
- Improve standards in the private rented sector and houses in multiple occupation.
- Improve stock condition in the private sector.
- To ensure equal access to all services.

Central Government's Public Service Level Agreement 7 states

***"By 2010, bring all social housing into decent condition with most of this improvement taking place in deprived areas, and increase the proportion of private sector housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups."***

The Government's aim is to offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home, promoting social cohesion, wellbeing and independence.

Other relevant national strategies which have been taken into account include Best Value, Quality and Choice for Older Peoples Housing, the Social Care and Health Agenda, Fuel Poverty Strategy, Urban White Paper, Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future & Sustainable Communities in London, Supporting People Strategy, ODPM guidance on the Reform Order, Delivering Adaptations etc, guidance on preparing community strategies and other relevant legislation.

### Regional

The Regional strategies are clearly stated in the London Housing Statement 2002, 'Working Towards Solutions and the Government Office for London's 'Regional Housing Priorities in London.' The key issues for London related to the private sector are the:

- High demand for housing, especially affordable housing, outstripping supply, which has led to increasing use of temporary accommodation.
- Lack of affordable housing making it difficult for households on low or medium income to secure suitable and affordable accommodation, including key workers.
- The continuing presence of social exclusion, particularly in black and minority ethnic people and asylum seekers, and the need to link housing, regeneration and community safety initiatives to secure improvement in local communities.
- The condition of the housing stock and the need to improve these to decent homes standards and minimum levels of fitness.
- Promotion of the Supporting People agenda in relation to vulnerable people who would benefit from housing related support.

There are four relevant priority areas for action in London:

- To increase affordable housing
- To decrease homelessness and develop suitable forms of temporary accommodation and support for vulnerable people.
- To develop an effective private sector strategy.
- To ensure that housing renewal is contributing effectively to wider regeneration strategies.

## West London

The West London Housing Strategy 2003 provides a sub-regional strategic context for existing and new housing strategies; including local housing strategies, homelessness, Supporting People, private sector strategies, the intermediate housing market and Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) strategies and to feed into the review of the forthcoming London Housing Strategy.

The Strategy identifies four key aims for the boroughs up to 2012:

- **Increase the supply of housing** to meet anticipated growth in population and employment.
- **Increase the provision of affordable homes** to ensure those not able to access the private market can continue to live in West London
- **Improve the quality of housing** to meet the decent homes standard across all tenures and ensure provision of quality housing services
- **Create sustainable communities** to ensure our diverse population is effectively served and housing promotes the well-being of communities

## Corporate Context

The Corporate Vision is to strive for a community:

- where everybody is able to enjoy healthy and happy lives in an environment which is clean, safe and secure
- which is cohesive and strong
- where all have the widest range of opportunities to succeed and the capacity to achieve their aspirations
- where no-one feels excluded where young people have a strong voice and are heard

The Council's Corporate Strategic Priorities were reviewed in 2003 to focus activity in 5 Key areas that will make a real difference to those living and working in Harrow. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy impinges directly on four of the five corporate priorities as follows:

- i **Strengthen Harrow's Communities**
- ii **improve the quality of health and social care**
- iii **Develop a prosperous and sustainable economy**
- iv **Enhance the Environment**

## **Local Housing Strategy Statement 2002 - 2007**

The Housing Strategy remains the predominant housing strategy. The housing mission statement and strategic aims for Harrow are as follows:

Our mission is to enable choice and access to a range of good quality, homes, including affordable homes, for all the people of Harrow

We will achieve this by working:

1. To maximise the supply of affordable housing
2. To deliver excellence in housing services
3. To build quality and choice into housing options across all tenures
4. To combat poverty, social exclusion and increase community safety
5. To ensure housing meets the needs of all groups in the community
6. To make sure best use of the resources available – people, property, finance, information technology and other assets – in support of strategic priorities
7. To work in partnership with customers, service providers and other stakeholders to meet strategic and service objectives
8. To contribute to more sustainable communities in social, economic and environmental terms.
9. To ensure equal access to all services

And we will ensure the following cross-cutting themes are incorporated into our work:

1. Equalities – ensuring we promote equal access and combat disadvantage for all groups for example people from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people.
2. Sustainability – aiming to promote housing solutions that are viable in the long term from an economic, social and environmental perspective.
3. Partnership and inter-borough working – the benefits of working with partners and other authorities in pooling ideas, resources and effort to meet common objectives.
4. Choice, consultation and customer focus – the basis of our approach to strategy and service development.

## **Relationships with Other Strategies**

In addition to the strategic context outlined above, development and successful implementation of the strategy is dependent on a clear understanding of the aims, objectives and action plan/programmes of a number of other Council strategies or those in which the Council is a partner. Effective delivery will continue to be achieved through strong working relationships which will also enable effective monitoring to take place to facilitate positive review of policies in this strategy, and vice versa.

The key strategies with which this strategy inter-relates are:

## **Homelessness Strategy**

The Homelessness Act requires that all homelessness strategies address the following:

- Prevention of homelessness.
- The securing of accommodation for people who are homeless or are likely to become homeless.
- The securing of satisfactory support for people who are homeless or those who need it to prevent them from becoming homeless again.



In Harrow we have taken these core requirements and translated them into practical, innovative objectives with the aim of making a real difference to the lives of homeless people.

(i) Prevention and Options

We believe that every case of homelessness or threatened homelessness is preventable. Through direct early intervention and targeting the main cases of homelessness in Harrow we will seek to keep people in their homes wherever possible. Our approach will be combined with the development of options and support to enable homeless people to help solve their own housing problems.

(ii) Securing of Accommodation

We will ensure that homeless families spend the minimum amount of time in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation and that no family with children will spend over 6 weeks in a bed and breakfast hostel. Temporary housing itself will be self contained and located in the borough boundaries.

No one will need to sleep rough in Harrow and accommodation and support options will be offered to all single homeless people regardless of priority.

We will continue to maximise the number of affordable housing units available in the borough for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Homeless people will be given choice in allocations through our Locata Scheme and will have fair and equal access to all our available social housing.

(iii) Support

We will provide support for all homeless people. We accept that homelessness and its causes can only be successfully tackled through addressing the broader socio-economic issues of employment, health, education and vulnerability. Only by taking a wider prospective will high levels of homelessness and repeat homelessness be reduced.

## **Economic Regeneration Strategy**

The Draft economic regeneration strategy 2003 states 'By 2010 Harrow will be known as a genuinely enabling borough, with a proactive council who together with our partners in Harrow will have acted as the catalyst for sustainable development.' Two of the top ten outcomes identified are directly relevant to private sector housing renewal.

These are to:

- Have made major strides working with both the private and public sector to address joint issues particularly to both increase the amount and range of key worker and affordable housing and to have provided a support mechanism for those in need in the private sector to greatly improve the standard of their homes
- Have an acknowledged role in the West London sub region

The strategy also identifies that support is necessary for some residents to improve housing conditions and sustainability. This will be achieved by supporting the development and implementation of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy to provide a mechanism to help improve private sector housing standards for:

- Owner occupiers, vulnerable residents and the disabled
- The private rented sector, and,
- Bringing empty properties back into use.

## **Replacement Harrow Unitary Development Plan (HUDP)**

The replacement HUDP, due for adoption early in 2004, incorporates a vision that includes the following:-

- Performs a dynamic role as part of a more sustainable world city.
- Plays a part in securing the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Provides a healthy and safe environment.
- Continues to be an attractive, vibrant and enjoyable place to live and work in.
- Provides a better choice of good quality housing that promotes developments with an appropriate mix of housing to cater for local needs thereby contributing to London's overall housing provision
- Promotes development that contributes to improving the overall quality of life for residents, workers and visitors.

It also includes objectives and strategic policies aimed at creating more sustainable communities and pattern of land use in the Borough. Whilst the Plan focuses on the interactions between a number of land uses, considerable attention has been paid to the need to develop a range of policies which relate to the largest land use in the Borough, housing, reflecting the role of the private sector, which comprises the overwhelming proportion of overall housing. Various policies are included relating to housing provision and mix, maintenance and improvement, the use of empty property, conversions and houses in multiple occupation, as well as aspects of sustainable design and construction.

Delivery of several corporate housing objectives is achieved through the HUDP, and monitoring and close co-operation will continue to take place to ensure that both this strategy and the HUDP continue to fully complement each other.

## **Supporting People Strategy**

Supporting People is a new framework for delivering supported housing services to the vulnerable people. Led by the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Supporting People will administer grant funding to service providers, ensure service quality by introducing a framework for monitoring and reviewing services in Harrow. Supporting People aims to make Harrow a place where people are able to achieve their potential for independent living.

The Supporting People strategy recognises that; 'Harrow is a borough where home ownership is very high (80%). The supported housing sector, however, is dominated by services for people in local authority or RSL (Registered Social Landlord) rented housing.

The Supporting People programme, which is based on funding from the existing supported housing rented sector, has very limited ability to respond to the needs of home owners. Most of the supported housing in Harrow is accommodation based with few floating support services.

This means that there is extremely limited capacity to develop services that would support national and local strategies, to allow people to stay in their own homes. The strategy also has a clear role for the Home Improvement Agency and recognises the needs of the older homeowner.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy is committed to working in unison with Supporting People to develop services that respond to the needs of homeowners and allow people to remain in their own homes. We will seek to build a partnership with the Supporting People Team in pursuit of common priorities.

## **Empty Homes Strategy**

The Empty Property Strategy was launched in 1996 and has been successful in bringing 636 properties back into use by April 2003.

The high level of demand for affordable housing in the Borough means that it is unacceptable for properties to remain empty. The Empty Property Strategy aims to reduce the number of empty and wasted properties in the Borough and is a key element in Harrow's overall Housing Strategy. Households from the Housing Register have been nominated to 543 (87%) of the properties which have been brought back into use. This has assisted with the Council's successful bid for Beacon Status for Tackling Homelessness for other clients who are in housing need such as key workers and supported housing.

The Empty Homes Strategy is well developed, has shown significant achievement since its inception and is likely to be self-maintaining but is also heavily dependent on sufficient capital funding and grant policy.

## **Crime and Disorder Strategy**

Crime prevention remains a key priority for the Council, particularly relating to hate crime and domestic violence. As a result of the last Crime and Disorder Audit conducted in 1998 the then Harrow Partnership identified the following areas as requiring individual strategy development relevant to housing:

- Burglary with the overall objective to 'reduce the level of burglary offences'.
- Domestic Violence with the overall objective to 'raise awareness of domestic violence and encourage reporting'

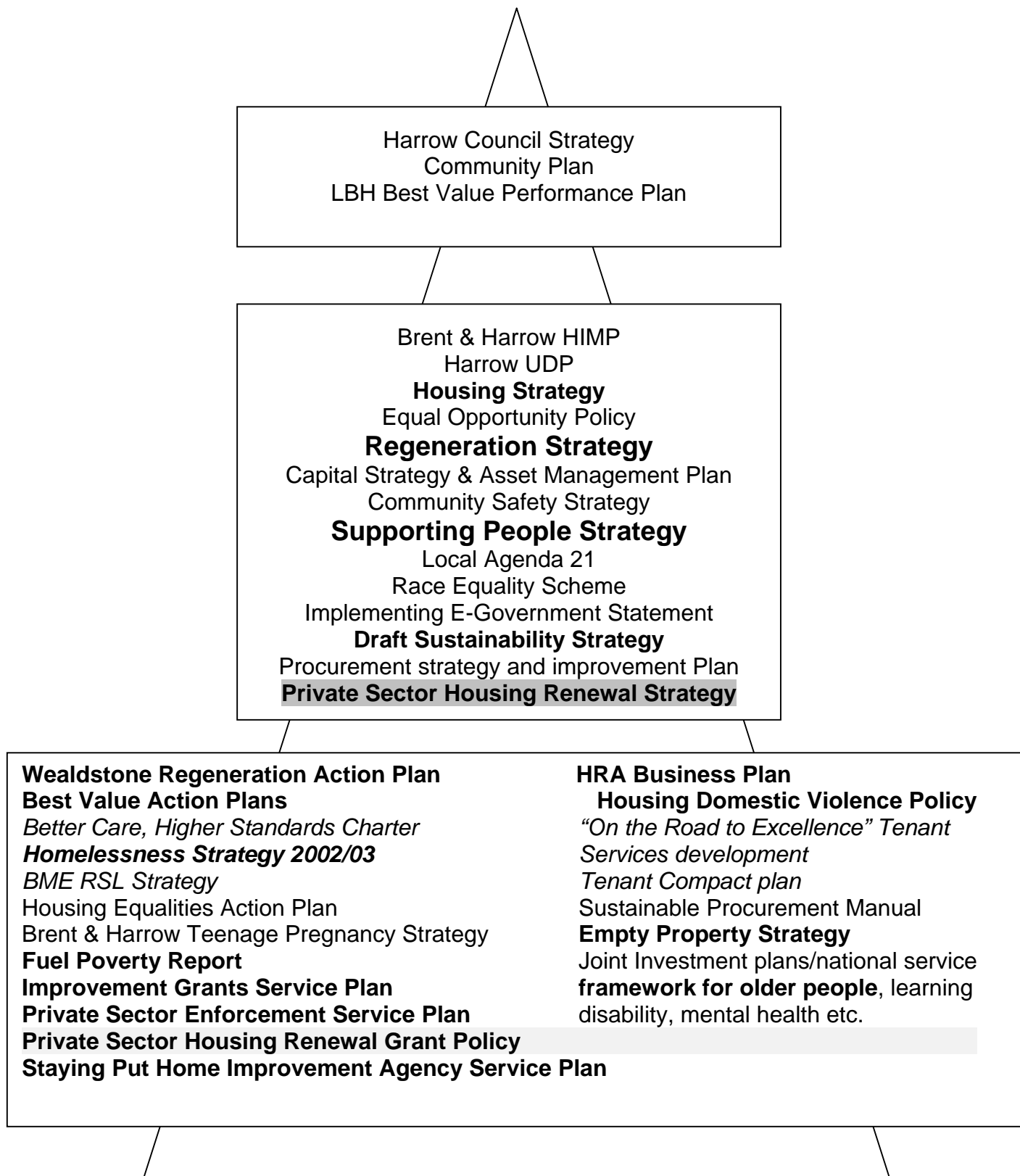
As a result of the audit and simultaneous review of Harrow's performance in relation to the Objectives set out in the Crime and Reduction Strategy 1999 to 2003, carried out under the 'Safer Harrow' Best value Review, the following were identified as issues for development in relation to these objectives:

- Expansion of the Handyperson Scheme, providing practical help and advice to burglary victims.
- To reduce the number of offences of repeat victimisation for domestic violence by 10%.

In order to implement these objectives a system operates whereby the Handyperson Scheme will undertake works to provide a safe refuge for victims of domestic violence and to make the properties of the victims of burglary secure on referral through the Crime and Disorder Partnership. This is targeted at those in need with labour provided free but has not been supported through any direct financial support for the scheme.

## How Do The Plans and Strategies Link

The manner in which the Strategies and Plans link is shown pictorially below.



## Chapter 3

### Development, Review, Partnership and Consultation

#### Development and Consultation

The private sector housing element of the 'Your Home Your Needs' best value review has been used as the main vehicle for developing the Private Sector Regeneration Strategy within the framework of the Regulatory Reform Order (July 2002). The process is detailed in the Housing Strategy 2002 – 2007, which remains the overriding Housing Strategy.

The assessment of our current performance was undertaken through completion of the Housing Quality Network Self-assessment Workbooks relating to the private sector and the Foundations Best Value Toolkit for the Home Improvement Agency which enabled the authority to undertake an honest assessment of our performance. This was undertaken by the individual service teams and managers and validated through both internal challenge meetings within the remit of the review attended by a variety of internal stakeholders and critical friends. This was also validated through a challenge event to a cross party panel of Elected Members in March 2003.

This assessment was validated through a Challenge and Consultation day, which took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2003 and as part of the 'Housing Strategy Consultation Day' and BV Review Staff Challenge event. These events were structured to enable consultation in three targeted areas through presentations and discussion groups and the use of questionnaires:

- Validation of current performance and identified service development and provision priorities for inclusion within the Strategy.
- Strategic Priorities to inform development of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.
- Priorities for grant assistance, eligibility criteria for applicants, eligible works and grant conditions to inform the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy.

The events were attended by a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders, partners and "critical friends". This included the public, previous recipients of renovation and disabled adaptation grants, users of the Home Improvement Agency, representative groups i.e. Harrow Action for the Disabled, Harrow Racial Equalities Council, Age Concern, Panel for Older People etc. Internal attendees included Elected Members, Housing Services, Planning, Occupational Therapy Service, Supporting People and staff from all housing provision services.

Consultation was also undertaken through the Landlords Forum held in conjunction with Housing Services through presentations, discussion groups and the use of questionnaires. This event was specifically used to consult on:

- Strategic Priorities to inform development of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.
- Priorities for grant assistance in the private rented sector and empty properties, eligibility criteria for applicants, eligible works and grant conditions to inform the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy.

Attendees were predominantly landlords drawn from private and public sector and service providers to these groups from both the public and private sector. Also in attendance were Elected Members, staff from all housing provision services and representative groups as stated above.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Grant Policy final draft documents were subject to targeted internal and external consultation with interested parties identified through attendance at the consultation events. Where relevant the Strategy states the consultation source of the strategic priorities, priorities for action and grant priorities.

## **Best Value Review**

As stated the Private Sector Housing element of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review was carried out between June 2002 and May 2003. The review process has been used as the main vehicle for developing the Private Sector Renewal Strategy. The Review and resultant action plan will be reported in September 2003 and is due for inspection in November 2003.

The key service improvements emerging from the private sector element are as follows:

- Review the current organisational structure to provide a single point of accountability for all private sector services to provide a single system for service delivery.
- To work with partner organisations and internal services to provide a purpose built evidence base to guide service provision and strategy development.
- The establishment of a long-range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of services is a critical factor common to all service areas.
- Research, develop and implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to funding provision to enable delivery, to improve HECA returns and deliver corporate priorities.
- Development of links to the Supporting People Strategy, Community Strategy and Economic Regeneration Strategies to ensure critical issues are addressed and funding streams maintained and developed.
- Develop the Home Improvement Agency to work with groups prioritised within the Supporting People Strategy to assist in needs assessments of the relevant groups.
- Improve service delivery working with a broad range of partner organisations to develop effective liaison arrangements with external agencies and internal services.
- Research, develop and implement an enforcement strategy for private sector housing.
- Increasing enforcement activities in the private rented sector and in relation to the HMO Registration Scheme for non compliant landlords.
- Increase the number of empty homes refurbished each year to ensure that the Empty homes strategy is implemented and an increased number of properties are brought back into use.
- Work with Housing Needs and the west London Private sector Housing Group to reduce the level of reactive enforcement work in Assured Shorthold Tenancies and Registered Social Landlord sectors.

- The provision of transparent policy statements and clear and simple procedures so that customers have access to information regarding the services available.

In 2001 the Renovation Grants and Staying Put Services were subject to a Best Value Inspection following the review of the service in 2000. The service was assessed at that time as a 'fair' 'one star' service that 'will not improve'. The inspectors' recommendations were incorporated into the best value improvement plans for 2000/1 and 2001/2 and have been fully implemented. The re-inspection of the service in May 2002 confirmed that all of the recommendations made had been fully implemented and the service assessed as a 'two star' 'good' service that 'will definitely improve.' This underlines the progress and service improvement that has been made in the last two years. These include:

- Reorganisation of services to bring together Renovation Grants and the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency functions to improve efficiency and customer service to provide a comprehensive home improvement agency approach.
- The routing of all disabled adaptations via a single delivery system working closely with the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency and Adaptations Service in line with the Disabled Adaptations Best Value Review.
- The setting and achievement of challenging targets, response and service standards for the service and all stages of the grant process reported through the Annual Service Plan.
- Increasing the involvement of residents, internal agencies, users and other stakeholders including the Harrow Association for the Disabled and Harrow Racial Equality Council through a range of liaison and focus groups.
- Consultation in addition to the above through the use of customer questionnaires and satisfaction surveys including the monitoring of uptake by vulnerable and black and ethnic minorities and the Builders and Landlords Forum.
- Establishment of an approved contractor list to drive up quality of work and customer care in conjunction with staying put.

The service was awarded the Charter Mark award in 2001 in recognition of the customer service ethos, which has been applied to service development.

## **Best Value Performance Indicators**

The most significant is BV62 for which the authority achieved 1% following revision in 2001/2, which is in the bottom quartile against the top quartile for London Borough's of 4.4%. This PI is also included in those taken into account by the CPA Assessment and as such is a critical indicator. There has been a significant improvement over the last three years from a position where we were unable to calculate the indicator to 0.25 % in 2000/01 to 1% in 2001/2. There has been no identifiable improvement in 2002/03 with the indicator remaining at 1%.

The indicator is made up of three elements, Renewal Grant activity on unfit properties, unfit empty properties brought back into use and houses in multiple occupation and private rented sector properties made fit through enforcement activity.

The critical factor in achieving a high level of activity in these areas are sufficient capital finance provision to support grant activity, including that for empty homes, linked to a targeted grant strategy and sufficient staffing to undertake an increased enforcement role linked to an inspection and enforcement strategy.

The other Statutory indicator is BV64, proportion of empty properties brought back into use which had been empty for more than 6 months, which achieved 4.62% against the top quartile of 5% in 2001/02. This indicator has been changed for 02/03 to the number of empty properties brought back into use or demolished, and it is not known how this will affect this position.

Although a range of non-statutory local indicators exist these have been and will be further rationalised as many are not comparable year on year. Largely as a result of previous best value reviews there has been a substantial improvement in the Renovation Grant and Home Improvement Agency performance. These are however primarily input and output indicators targeted at customer service and need to be developed in terms of outcome indicators and rationalised to those within our direct control.

## **Corporate Review**

The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DEA) Peer Review 2002 identified that Harrow Council is a good organisation but insufficiently focused and robust to deliver services to meet changing needs. In response the Authority is in the process of reform to ensure the Council is able to deliver good front line services-and put citizens first. Under the New Harrow Project the existing functional departments are being abolished to create new, customer focused service provision that will adopt area based delivery to reflecting the wide-ranging needs of the diverse local population.

As part of this process the Harrow Strategic Partnership was launched on the 20th May 2003 which will build on the relationships and successes of its predecessor the Harrow Partnership. The Harrow Strategic Partnership will deliver the ten-year vision of what for Harrow will be. It will prepare and implement a Community Strategy for the area which focuses on delivering solutions to local problems and unmet needs, identify and deliver the most important things which need to be done, keep track of progress and keep it up to date. The Community Strategy will be launched in the spring of 2004.

Work has already started on the identification of community need will via the development of a purpose built evidence base. This will provide a strong evidence base to demonstrate to external and internal bodies where local intervention is needed and provide a better foundation for identification of priorities at neighbourhood level. The Objectives are:

- To support the development of the Community Strategy
- To maximise the use of information held and research carried out cross-departmentally and by external partners
- To establish a user-friendly way of storing community profile information
- To make profiles accessible through the intranet for use by all departments and partners in future bidding and service planning

When complete, community profiles will be used to inform other Harrow strategies, e.g. Economic Regeneration Strategy, Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. A monitoring process will also be developed, to ensure profiles continue to be of benefit to all. The content of this Renewal Strategy will be reviewed to reflect the identified priorities of the Council and its partners and to address identified community need.



## Partnership Working within Services provided

Liaison arrangements are essential to the provision of the Service and are in place with the following organisations:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Liaison</b>
Housing Services	Strategic Direction and Provision, Enabling, Resources, Housing Provision, Homelessness, Housing Needs Assessment, Empty properties, monitoring, Advice.
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	Guidance and Advice. Monitoring.
Harrow Council Elected Members	Strategic Direction and decision making. Advice and assistance to public. Portfolio Holder role and promotion.
Elderly Care Management Social Services;	Disabled facilities grant and liaison for joint provision.
Harrow & Hillingdon Primary Care Trust;	Disabled facilities grant referral and liaison for joint provision.
The London, Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	Advisory and support service. Consultee in formal enforcement action.
Housing Associations;	Empty Properties, enabling and provision, Housing Association leasing scheme.
Client Group Representatives;	Consultation and review of provision. Advisory role for Home Improvement Agency.
Age Concern;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Harrow Association of the Disabled;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Harrow Council for Racial Equality;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Housebound Readers Service	Information and promotion
Benefit Agency;	Formal consultation in means test assessment. Advisory role for benefit assessment. Advice to public.
Social Services/ Occupational Therapists	Occupational Health referral system for disabled adaptations. Partnership working in delivering adaptations.
Supporting People	Strategic provision. Funding and monitoring role for Home Improvement Agency. Service commissioning in future.
Building Control	Consultee and advice service for major adaptations and discretionary grant work. Support for enforcement role.
Architects and Surveyors, Builders;	Contractors list and service provider to client.
Office of Fair Trading;	Monitoring role for contractors and suppliers of product. Advisory role.
Environmental Health;	Liaison on housing standards, private rented sector, enforcement activities and advice.
Health and Safety Executive (Gas Safety)	Liaison on enforcement issues.

CORGI	Advisory role and contractor scrutiny.
NICEIC	Advisory role and contractor scrutiny.
Harrow Partnership for Older People (POP);	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Charities, e.g. Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA).	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role.
Carers Support Harrow;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency.
Citizens Advice Bureau;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency.
Crime Prevention Panel	Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Partnership working with Handyperson Scheme.
Greater London Authority	Guidance and Advice. Monitoring.
Empty Homes Agency	Guidance and Advice
BABIE	Enforcement standards for bed and breakfast. Advisory and support role.

## Monitoring and Review

There is no formal legislative process in place at present to assess the 'fitness for purpose' of the Private Sector Renewal Strategy or which dictates the requirement for review. The Strategy is however seen as a dynamic Strategy which must be regularly reviewed in consultation with internal and external stakeholders, partners, emerging housing needs information and the public.

The existing Landlords Forum, Housing Strategy Conference and public consultation processes will be used to inform this review process in conjunction with monitoring information on the effectiveness of implementation of the strategy.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy will also require regular review and development to ensure that it is aligned with the Community Strategy, New Harrow Project and Regeneration Strategy and development of housing/regeneration needs base data to inform service provision. The Policy will also need to be reviewed to ensure that it aligns with the Housing Strategy, Supporting People Strategy and the Homelessness and Black and Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy when the latter are developed.

The implementation of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review and Action Plan will implement many of the identified priorities within the Renewal Strategy which will by necessity require the Strategy to be reviewed to reflect changes in Housing Renewal service provision over time.

The Best value Review of Adaptations, completed in July 2002, Implementation Plan includes disabled facilities grant provision and the recommendation, in line with ODPM guidance on delivering adaptations, to move towards an umbrella organisation and has been endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2003. A Strategic decision regarding implementation of this aspect of delivery will be made in due course.

The draft Housing Bill, which comes into force in April 2004 will provide a major change to the primary legislation with regard to housing fitness and enforcement activities. The West London Housing Strategy and the work of the West London Private Sector Housing group set up to implement that strategy will support these activities and implementation of the Housing Bill. The result of this will be used to inform future review in this regard.

In 2003/04, the Council intends to make use of skills and newly formed working relationships with other departments and service providers to create a more co-ordinated service delivery. This will include joint working to avoid duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy, wherever possible. Regular meetings and working policy arrangements will continue to be held with:

- □ Staying Put Home Improvement Agency.
- □ Environmental Health Private Sector Housing Enforcement.
- □ Social Services Occupational Therapists Department.
- □ Housing Services , Empty Property Officer and Private Sector New Initiatives Officer.
- □ Other relevant service providers, partners and stakeholders.

In order to ensure that the Renewal Strategy is reviewed on a timely basis it is envisaged that formal review will be undertaken as soon as practicable after the Community Strategy is launched in the spring of 2004 which coincides with publication of the Housing Bill.

## Chapter 4

### Private Sector Housing Profile and Needs Data

The Housing Strategy Statement 2002 - 2007, which remains the predominant housing strategy, contains a full assessment of the housing need and supply statistics in Harrow. In addition the West London Housing Strategy 2003 contains detailed information on the socio-economic context and housing need across West London. These documents are available from public information points and through Housing Services or can be accessed through the Council's website.

Selected private sector statistics are as follows:

#### Housing Tenure and Characteristics:

The total occupied housing stock in the borough is 79,112 household spaces according to the 2001 National Census. The Private Sector Housing Stock is 70,314 (89%) with 59,467 (75%) being owner occupied, 10,847 (13.71%) within the private rented sector. The remaining 8,798 households (11.13%) are rented from the Council or registered social landlords.

Information obtained from the 2001 Census shows that:

- 32.2 % of the borough's households owned their own homes outright in 2001, ranking Harrow third in London, for outright owner occupation.
- 42.1 % of households were purchasing their own home with a mortgage or loan,
- 0.9 % of households were purchasing their own home through shared ownership schemes.
- 11.13% of Harrow's households lived in social housing in 2001. This is the third lowest level of social housing in London
- 13.71% of households live in privately rented accommodation
- 30.63% of households have limiting long term illness although only 4% have dependant children indicating that long term limiting illness is predominantly in the older population.
- 95% of households have central heating and sole use of basic amenities.
- 4.4% are without central heating.

79,112 household spaces (defined as the accommodation available for a household) were occupied in 2001, a further 1,622 (2 %) were recorded as vacant and 170 recorded as second homes or holiday accommodation. These vacancy rates are amongst the lowest in London and in England & Wales.

72.4 % of households live in houses, 27.5 % in flats and 0.04 % in caravans/non-permanent accommodation. Semi-detached houses predominate in Harrow, with nearly 40 % of households living in such accommodation, above the England & Wales average of 31.6 % and well above the London average of 19 %.

95 % of households have central heating and exclusive use of bath/shower and toilet in their homes, the highest level in London and above the England & Wales average of 91 %.

## Condition of the Housing Stock

### Private Sector House Condition Survey 2000

As shown above the private housing sector is predominant in Harrow.

We have a good understanding of investment need based on the 2000 private sector stock condition survey and of housing need through the Housing Needs Best Value Review. Private Sector Housing is the major component in meeting overall housing needs within the Borough. Most residents are in a position to secure their own housing either as owner-occupiers or in the private rented sector with 88.9% of Harrow residents living in privately owned or rented property.

Although the responsibility for maintaining and repairing the private sector must lie with the respective owners, the House Condition Survey 2000 revealed 2900 properties were unfit. Disrepair is the main cause with approximately 24% of residents either on benefit or very low income living in 66% of the unfit dwellings.

There is therefore a significant proportion of the population who cannot meet the financial burdens associated with maintaining and improving their homes to an acceptable standard. However, the picture is not uniform with unfit homes concentrated in the less affluent sections of the community and neighbourhoods and in the private rented sector.

Unfit properties are likely to be:

- Occupied by a disabled resident or low income family with 43% of households in unfit properties in receipt of benefits.
- Privately rented rather than owner occupied. There are 1400 identified Houses in Multiple Occupation, 2% of all properties, excluding self-contained flat conversions and hostels.
- Found in the Wealdstone/Marlborough wards (11%)
- Built before 1919 (10%).

The main reasons for statutory unfitness within the Borough are shown to be:

- disrepair – 52%.
- unsatisfactory amenities, i.e. bath, WC, sink and hot and cold water supply – 23%.
- dampness – 17.7%.
- unsatisfactory facilities for food preparation – 36.3%.
- lighting, heating, ventilation, structural repairs – 14%.

According to the 2000 House Conditions Survey the average cost of making an unfit property 'just fit' is estimated to be £4,692. However, repairing an unfit dwelling to the standard required for renovation grant purposes would cost £7,665. Taking into account the income of owner occupiers, this is equivalent to potential renovation grant demand of £10 million over ten years. For all private sector dwellings the total cost of repairs and replacements over the next 10 years is estimated to be £225 million.

These figures show that, despite the Council's investment of more than £1 million each year in private sector housing through grant provision, which has enabled many people to improve their homes, others remain unable to fund improvements and therefore continue to live in poor conditions.

In order to better inform the needs assessment we will undertake additional information gathering and predictive work through the mapping of House Condition and Needs Survey results, Supporting People, Harrow Partnership and Community Strategy activities.

This will include mapping of:

- Local Demographics
- Private Sector Stock Condition
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Housing Need and Demand
- Empty Properties
- Current service demand/experience
- Health and Social Care (?)
- Wealth and Poverty Streams
- BME communities including asylum seekers and refugees

### English House Condition Survey

The English Housing Condition Survey 2001 showed that the number of households has increased by 7% since 1991. At this time this was projected to increase to 88,000+ by 2016.

<b>Households</b>			
<b>Total Households ('000s)</b>	<b>Average Household Size</b>	<b>Proportion of One Person Households</b>	<b>Proportion of Loan Parent Households</b>
83	2.52	27%	5%

<b>Ethnic Origin of Heads of Household</b>		
<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number of Households (Summer 2000)</b>	<b>Percentage of Households</b>
White (non Irish)	50,211	61.8%
White (Irish)	3,928	4.8%
Black	5,361	6.6%
Asian	15,870	19.6%
Chinese	577	0.7%
Other/Refused	5,253	6.5%

This provides a measure of the minority populations against which we are able to measure the effectiveness of provision to meet those persons needs and fair access to service.

<b>Housing need and ethnicity</b>			
<b>Head of Household</b>	<b>Households in need</b>	<b>Percentage of the ethnic group in need</b>	<b>Average income</b>
White (non-Irish)	2,449	4.9%	£20,809
White (Irish)	131	3.3%	£15,477
Black	383	7.1%	£14,646
Asian	1,574	9.9%	£20,415
Chinese	0	0.0%	£23,630
Other	407	8.8%	£21,088

This provides evidence that the minority populations in Harrow are more likely to be in housing need and that the average income is below that which would normally give access to properties through the open market due to the high house prices in the Borough.

### **Average House Price**

<b>Average House Price (Land Registry Report - Jan to March 2003)</b>	
Harrow	£228,437
Neighbouring London Boroughs	£232,645
Outer London	£213,701
Greater London	£240,125

This provides evidence of the likely availability of equity within properties to support the provision of equity release vehicles to enable renewal activities for existing house owners. It also supports the fact that house prices are out of reach of many of the Borough's residents.

## **Housing Need**

### **Housing Needs Survey 2000**

To identify levels of housing need across the Harrow Borough the survey, undertaken by independent consultants, obtained detailed information on key issues such as local property prices, the suitability of current accommodation and income. An estimate of current need across the Borough was derived, together with estimates of the likely level of future need and the number of additional affordable dwellings required. Below is a summary of the main points relating to private sector housing.

- Harrow is characterised by high levels of owner-occupation and low levels of social rented accommodation. Over the last 15 years the Council has lost 2,664 units under 'Right-to-Buy', and presently only 10% of the total housing stock in Harrow is social rented. This compares to an average of 27% across all London Boroughs. Thus the Council's ability to meet current and future housing need is limited because low levels of social rented stock restrict the supply of relet opportunities.

- The survey estimates that 6,070 households (7.5% of all existing households) are living in accommodation that is not suitable for their needs. Some 49% of these households would require a move to different accommodation to resolve their problems. It is estimated that a total of 4,944 existing households are living in both unsuitable housing and cannot afford to resolve this situation. Households in the social rented sector, households with a larger bedroom requirement and lone parent households are more likely to be in need when compared with the population as a whole
- Not all of this housing need will necessarily need to be met through the provision of additional affordable housing. Some households' housing need can be met 'in situ' through repairs or adaptations, whilst need arising from the Local Authority rented sector may well be best solved by increasing transfer opportunities. Taking these factors into account, it is estimated that an additional 7,000 affordable homes (or 54% of net projected need by 2005) would be required if the Council wished to meet all of its current and projected need.

Harrow as in common in many London Boroughs, suffers from acute pressure on the social housing stock, which is diminishing. There is also an increasingly large group of key workers and others on modest incomes who are unlikely to qualify for social housing in the near future and can not afford to buy in the market. This is leading to the private rented sector increasingly performing a critical role as the new 'social' housing within the borough. This is further increased by issues related to Refugee and Asylum seekers settling within the Borough, often in the poorest housing conditions.

The Housing Needs Survey 2000 is being updated in 2003 to reflect Census 2001 and recent house price data. A new survey is planned for 2005 to inform the Harrow Housing Strategy. A new Private Sector House Condition Survey will be undertaken in 2005, which will include an assessment of housing needs related to the stock condition. This will be supplemented by information from the mapping of empty homes.



## Chapter 5

### Harrow Priorities and Approach to Addressing Needs

#### Housing Renewal Policies and Initiatives

We have a number of renewal initiatives at our disposal:

- Renewal Grants Policy including Disabled Facility Grants
- Staying Put Home Improvement Agency
- Harrow Community HandyPerson Scheme (CHIPS)
- Enforcement Activities
- Houses in Multiple Occupation Registration Scheme
- Empty Homes Strategy
- Affordable Warmth/ HECA Initiatives
- Housing Advice
- New Funding Streams i.e. Equity Release

The way in which these renewal initiatives and policies will be used to deliver the identified priorities to address housing and regeneration needs within the private sector is shown as specific actions against each priority identified. The links to the strategic context and source of the priorities and actions to deliver these is also shown.

#### Local Priorities for Private Sector Housing Renewal 2003/05

The key priorities and identified actions to implement these were developed through the consultation processes outlined in Chapter 3. Where accountable to an individual source these have been shown in italics at the end of each action.

#### **Priority 1 – To Develop integrated approaches with the Council and Other Agencies to help tackle Poor Housing, Poor Health and Social Exclusion.**

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I to IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 2,4,5,6,7,8,9, Unitary development Plan, Supporting People Strategy, Crime and Disorder Strategy.*

The identified Actions are:

- Work with other agencies to promote better housing conditions and provide a comprehensive housing renewal service. (*BV Review, Internal consultation, Challenge Event*)
- The development of co-ordinated housing advice services, in partnership with the public sector, RSL's and voluntary sector, not only for those in housing need but also for private tenants including residents in danger of losing their homes and advice and good practice support for landlords. (*BV Review, Internal Consultation*)
- Address the requirements of Best Value indicators BV62, which places a specific requirement on the authority to reduce the number of unfit premises, and achieve top 25<sup>th</sup> percentile performance. (*Corporate BV Performance Plan, BV Review, Internal*)

- The development of the joint working process between the Improvement Grants and Home Improvement Agency Services to a point where the teams operate as a single unit to provide a quality Housing Renewal Service. (*BV Review, Challenge Event, Staying Put Advisory Committee, Internal Consultation*)
- Provide housing advice through the Housing Advice Centre, Housing Services and through the provision of information on request, at public events, public information points, the Council Web Site and through a range of promotional activities. (BV Review)
- Development and provision of a quality Home Improvement Agency, via the Staying Put Agency to provide assistance to the most vulnerable residents across a broad client base including disabled people, elderly owner-occupiers and those in need under 60 including the provision of advice and assistance in repairing, improving, maintaining or adapting their homes. (*Internal Consultation, Challenge Event*).
- The provision and publication of an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to the Housing Renewal Strategy and grant provision which encompasses the development of HECA, HEES and Renewable Energy initiatives designed to address fuel poverty and meet the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act. (*BV Review, Internal Consultation, Challenge Event*).
- The provision of guidance, support and advice to support the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy to the private sector including through the provision of financial incentives and grant aid to support the promotional activities. (*Internal Consultation, Challenge Event*).
- Operating the handyperson scheme to provide works in relation to the crime prevention panel referrals and elderly home owners and people in receipt of benefits by providing quick direct preventive repair work. (*BV Review, Internal Consultation, Challenge Event*).
- Consult with users and partners to develop policy tools with the needs and aspirations of the community we serve in mind.

## **Priority 2: To target investment to promote regeneration and strengthen local communities.**

Links to the following Strategic priorities: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 key priorities 3 & 4, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy key issue 4, Corporate Priorities I to IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 3,4,5,6,8,9, Economic Regeneration Strategy, Unitary development Plan priority 3, 6, Supporting People Strategy, Crime and Disorder Strategy.*

The identified Actions are:

- The effective targeting of grant aid to enable the renewal of Harrow's privately owned housing to reduce levels of unfit and disrepair in the rented and owner occupied sectors including provision for alternative funding vehicles. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review, Consultation from Challenge Event*)
- Promoting independence through the Improvement Grants Service and Home Improvement Agency working in partnership to allow residents to remain in their own homes. (*Internal Consultation, BV Review, Challenge Event*)

- Provide a quality home improvement service, via the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency, to elderly owner-occupiers and those in need under 60 whose homes require repair or adaptation. (*Internal Consultation, BV Review, Challenge Event*)
- Address the requirements of Best Value indicators BV62, number of properties made fit, and BV64, empty properties brought back into use, achieving top 25<sup>th</sup> percentile performance by targeting the limited resources at these priorities through the grant policy to support the renewal tools in use and to ensure that grants decrease the number of non-decent homes within the borough in line with current guidance. (*BV Review, Performance Plan*)
- The provision of disabled facilities adaptations through joint working with the occupational therapists and Improvement Grants enabling access to good quality housing and the independence of the disabled. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- The provision of discretionary grants to encourage property owners to improve private rented and owner occupied properties, targeted at those most in need, and to bring empty homes back into use. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- Enable the renewal of Harrow's privately owned housing through the effective targeting of grant aid, reducing levels of unfitness and disrepair in both the rented and owner occupied sectors. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- Ensure that waiting times for disabled adaptations are reduced through active partnership work with the Occupational Therapy services. (*consultation with OT Service, Adaptation BV Review, Consultation events service users*)

**Priority 3: To continue to deliver and support measures that secure higher standards and better management in the private rented sector.**

Links to the following Strategic priorities: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 key priorities 3 & 4, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy key issue 3, Corporate Priorities Ii & III, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8,9, Unitary development Plan priority 3 & 5,*

The identified Actions are:

- Maintaining and raising standards in the private sector through enforcement activity and operation of the Councils Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation to promote minimum standards of repair, safety and management in the rented sector. (*Legislation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- The provision of guidance, support and advice to owner occupiers, landlords and tenants. (*Internal Consultation, BV Review, Landlords Forum*)
- To set up an enforcement concordat with the major Registered Social Landlords to reduce enforcement demand arising from Housing Association Leases in the private sector through the work of the West London Housing Strategy private sector working group to release resources for proactive enforcement in the private rented sector.(*Consultation with West London Authorities*)

- The development of an enforcement and inspection strategy/policy for non compliant landlords and associated procedures to ensure implementation of the HMO Registration Scheme are identified as critical issues within both the reform order and our own assessment. A specific enforcement policy for the private sector enforcement team is to be developed by April 2004 and will form part of this strategy once completed. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review*)

#### **Priority 4: To bring empty properties back into residential use under the Empty Homes Strategy.**

Links to the following Strategic priorities: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 key priorities 2 & 5, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy key issue 2 & 4, Corporate Priorities III & IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, Economic Regeneration Strategy Priority 3, Unitary development Plan priority 3, 4, 6, Crime and Disorder Strategy.*

The identified Actions are:

- To increase the supply of affordable homes by working in conjunction with owners, partner RSLs and the private sector to provide increased support for the Empty Homes Strategy, linked to targeted grant aid and/or special vehicles i.e. loan facilities conditional upon nomination rights for key workers and homeless households. (*Internal Consultation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- Address the requirements of Best Value Performance indicator BV64, empty properties brought back into use which places a specific requirements on the authority to reduce empty properties within the borough by targeting the limited resources at this priority through the Renewal Grant Policy. (*BV review and Performance Plan, all Consultation Events*)
- The provision of additional accommodation for those in greatest housing need providing accommodation for homeless families or designated key workers and improving the local environment. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review, All consultation events*)
- Reduce the need to rely on bed and breakfast accommodation, whilst providing more suitable homes for families in housing need who are awaiting re-housing from the Council's Housing Register. (*Legislation, Internal Consultation, BV Review*)
- Assist with wider area regeneration linked to area based improvement under the New Harrow Project & economic regeneration work. (*Internal Consultation*)

### **The Private Sector Housing Service Provision**

The private sector housing services available to deliver the identified priorities and aims are as follows:

#### **Improvement Grant Service**

The Improvement Grant Service administers the provision of Housing Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grants under the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy.

Housing Renewal Grants deliver a key intervention role in delivering the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and are drawn up on a local basis apart from the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants which are dictated by legislation.

Through the targeting of grant aid at the private rented or owner occupied sector, a financial incentive is given to owners to improve their properties assisting in the general renewal of Harrow's housing stock. The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants enables adaptation to address the needs of disabled people.

The type of grants available from the authority and the conditions attached to them are set out in the Housing Renewal Grant Policy. This Policy was drawn up in consultation with stakeholders and Strategic Priorities to meet identified need. The aim is to improve the housing stock and protect the occupant's health, which can be placed at risk by poor conditions. Each measure is designed to meet either the full cost or a proportion of the cost of works. Conditions are attached in respect of eligibility and repayment, dependant on the form of assistance given.

The 4 main types of assistance are as follows:

1. Non-repayable Discretionary Grants
2. Discretionary Grant repayable on sale of dwelling
3. Equity release loans/HouseProud Scheme.
4. Non- Repayable Mandatory Grants for Disabled Adaptations.

### **Staying Put Home Improvement Agency**

The Agency's primary role is to work in partnership with allied service providers to enable people to remain or establish themselves independently in the community, in their own home. It makes a key contribution to Private Sector Housing Renewal, in properties owned by elderly, vulnerable, socially or economically disadvantaged persons in the Borough.

Through the work of the Agency it supports those that traditionally experience the symptoms of social exclusion and directly assists them and/or connects them to a range of partner organisations. At present it can only provide service to the private sector due to the conditions attached to the funding arrangements.

Staying Put is a jointly funded Agency between the London Borough of Harrow in partnership the Supporting People project Team. This partnership is enabling the extension of the range of services provided by the agency in line with the Supporting People agenda. The Agency plays an active role in delivering this ensuring that the service integrates with partner agencies, including Housing, Social Services, providers and users.

The development of the joint working process with the Improvement Grants Team has progressed to a point where the teams are in the process of merging into one unit. This work will coincide with the introduction of the Council's new renewal grant policy introduced under the Regulatory Reform Order, and will provide a significant challenge for the new team to implement the structural as well as the policy changes, whilst still providing a quality service to clients.

### **Harrow Community HandyPerson Scheme (CHIPS)**

The Community Handyperson Scheme (CHiPs) is a highly successful project offering small domestic repairs and personal safety equipment installation to vulnerable and elderly members of the Community.

The scheme was initially funded as part of the Brighter Wealdstone European Social Fund Project (ESF), the funding for this project ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2002. The authority recognised the importance of this community resource and has made resources available for the scheme to continue under the management of the Home Improvement Agency.

To date CHiPs has undertaken over 500 small domestic redecoration and repair jobs and over 100 domestic crime prevention and repeat victim support measures. Clients come from the most vulnerable and excluded groups. CHiPS is a highly successful project as demonstrated by a 98% customer satisfaction return.

The scheme operates on the principle that the client pays for the materials used whilst the labour cost, up to six hours duration, is free. This provision is now further supported by the provision of Home safety grants, which are available to eligible clients.

Key Partners in this project are the Staying Put Scheme and Harrow Crime Prevention Panel, with support from Harrow Association of Voluntary Services, Age Concern and Harrow Association for Disabled People.

The monitoring and evaluation procedures have been established through the lifetime of the project and have met with Government Office for London approval with regard to good practice guidance. Funding for the project has enabled tools and equipment to be stockpiled which has enabled start up costs to be kept to a minimum.

There is significant potential to develop the scheme beyond its current remit to support the Staying Put Agency activities. In addition the scheme could be widened to support priorities identified within the Supporting People Agenda and in support of Social Services initiatives such as minor adaptations for the disabled and hospital discharge schemes

### **Private Sector Housing Enforcement Services**

The Private Sector Housing Team enforces the standards laid down in housing legislation, Government guidance, circulars and codes of practice. The Team enforces standards in houses that are unfit, or in serious disrepair, as well as Houses in Multiple Occupation that have inadequate fire precautions, lack of basic amenities (baths, wash hand basins, toilets) and/or are poorly managed.

As well as enforcing standards, the Team has become increasingly involved in raising awareness and offering advice to landlords and tenants and is a partner in the joint departmental Landlords' Forum, which is held annually. The service also supports a tenant's forum. The aim is to provide guidance, support and advice to both landlords, including encouraging self-regulation, and tenants including awareness of safety issues. The forums are used to inform the service planning process by consulting stakeholders on service levels/priority and performance.

The officers of this section also visit premises to assess the occupancy levels to advise British High Commissions in other countries, where the owner/occupier is seeking to invite members of his/her family on a permanent or temporary basis.

The Service operates a highly effective HMO Registration Scheme, which will become a statutory requirement in 2004 under the Housing Bill. The scheme was very successful when launched in 2000 but now that 'compliant' landlords have voluntarily registered improvement is largely reliant on enforcement activity in terms of the provision of a proactive inspection and enforcement strategy.

The purpose of this scheme is to assist the Council in monitoring HMO accommodation. It aims to ensure that new HMOs are created under conditions specifically approved by the Council, and that existing HMOs are maintained in accordance with the Council standards, thus safeguarding the safety and welfare of the occupants.

The introduction of a mandatory national licensing scheme will act as an impetus for reviewing our current registration scheme to ensure that we will be in a position to actively enforce the scheme.

The Team has responsibility for inspecting bed and breakfast hotels, which are used for temporarily housing the homeless/those awaiting Council/housing association accommodation. The hotels are inspected and rated in accordance with the London-wide Bed and Breakfast Information Exchange (BABIE) Standards. This is done with the aim of ensuring consistency in standards provided and is a means to ensure only the best accommodation is used.

As stated above the development of an enforcement and inspection strategy/policy to ensure implementation of the HMO Registration Scheme has been identified as a critical issue. A specific enforcement policy for the private sector enforcement team is to be developed by April 2004 and will form part of this strategy once completed.

The success of this strategy/policy is dependant on the provision of adequate staff resources which has been identified as a critical issue within the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review.

## **Empty Homes**

Harrow's Empty Homes Strategy was launched in 1996 with the aim of reducing the number of empty properties in the Borough and bringing them into residential use. The Council is keen to encourage greater use of empty homes, using publicity, grants and private sector leasing arrangements to encourage private sector owners to use their vacant properties. It is recognised that an empty home is a wasted resource and impacts on the rest of the community. From the outset the initiative has benefited from having a dedicated officer, free telephone line for the public and publicity by the Council and partners. Up to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003, 639 properties have been successfully brought back into use. 87% of these properties have provided social housing.

This re-use of accommodation has helped reduce the need to rely on bed and breakfast accommodation, whilst providing more suitable homes for families in housing need who are awaiting re-housing from the Council's Housing Register.

The wider benefits of successfully bringing properties back into use include the provision of additional accommodation for those in greatest housing need providing accommodation for homeless families or designated key workers and improving the local environment. Targeted action will assist with wider area regeneration linked to area based improvement under the New Harrow Project & economic regeneration work.

In line with the developing agenda dealing with anti social behaviour and community safety, by bringing properties back into use the threat of crime or vandalism, fly tipping and other nuisances to the local neighbourhood are reduced.

As well as being successful in its main objective, the strategy supports other corporate strategies such as the tackling homelessness and meeting housing needs and private sector regeneration and renewal.

Key strengths of our approach:

- Effective partnership working corporately and with external agencies and organisations
- Well-developed links with local stakeholders, such as private landlords and lettings agents, via the private sector landlords' forum. This provides information and advice on relevant issues, to help ensure that properties are not left vacant, but are brought back into residential use.
- Close working with national bodies including the Empty Homes Agency and the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners to ensure that legislative developments and best practice are considered and addressed.
- Active consideration and promotion of best practice – Harrow's Empty Homes Co-ordinator has been invited to provide advice on best practice to the ODPM Research Project Advisory Group on Empty Homes. Regionally Harrow is represented on the North West London Empty Property Forum, which meets quarterly to share information and good practice.

The Council is continuously developing and strengthening its links with a range of RSL partners to increase the supply of accommodation for those in housing need. To date 92% of all properties brought back into use have been provided as affordable housing and 87% of properties brought back into use have been leased by RSL partners, for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households on the Council's Housing Register.

In response to the shortage of available affordable rented accommodation for key workers, identified through consultation and needs analysis, we are working with an RSL and local employers with the aim of bringing empty properties back into use to provide housing for this client group.

Specific capital provision of £250,000 has been made available within financial year 03/04 to bring more empty properties back into use, provide temporary accommodation for priority families and meet Bed and Breakfast targets. The grants available are detailed in the Renewal Grant Policy.

In addition, Harrow's Empty Property Officer is working with partner local authorities in the West London Empty Property Forum (WLEPOF) to develop a bid to the Housing Corporation for a regional allocation of Temporary Social Housing Grant. These funds would be targeted on refurbishing the worst condition properties in the area.

To reflect the increasing requirement to work in partnership with the private sector, funding has been secured to provide an additional post to assist the Empty Property Officer. This officer will also work on securing accommodation through the Finders Fee scheme, and any other private sector initiatives, which are developed to attempt to provide temporary accommodation or prevent homelessness.

### **Affordable Warmth/ Home Energy Conservation Act**

Energy efficiency remains high on Harrow's agenda and contributes to anti-poverty and health improvement strategies as well as environmental protection and maintaining good property condition. This supports Harrow's strategic corporate priorities through improving the quality of health and social care and developing a prosperous and sustainable economy in Harrow.



In 2001/02 The department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) started a review of the policy framework within which local authorities carry out energy efficiency activities and we are currently awaiting the outcome of this. The development of the London Mayors Energy Strategy places further emphasis on all London Boroughs to progress towards energy saving targets and promoting renewable energy.

The Council's Fuel Poverty Report 2000 set out our objectives of creating affordable warmth and energy efficiency across all tenures. The Sixth HECA progress report showed a 6.19% improvement in overall energy efficiency in Harrow from 1996-2002.

Information from the private sector and council housing stock condition surveys indicates that the standard assessment procedure (SAP) ratings are relatively high. This puts Harrow in a good position in terms of achieving its overall objectives but means we will find it increasingly difficult to achieve significant year on year improvements. The Fuel Poverty Report 2000 reported the private sector average SAP rating as 49, compared with the national average of 44, largely as a result of high levels of modern central heating systems installation (nearly 99% compared with just 88% nationally).

Our strategy for securing continuous improvements in energy efficiency performance and the alleviation of fuel poverty is a multi-faceted one including:

- The provision of a free phone energy efficiency helpline in partnership with North West London Energy Advice Centre.
- The referral of eligible clients to the Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme through the Staying Put Agency.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency measures through advice, education and promotion.
- Promotion and development of renewable energy

We will continue to work with partners to identify opportunities to seek additional resources, make strategic links and target the poorest households and properties. We will also raise awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency measures through advice, education and promotion.

There is potential to deliver a significant improvement in direct service provision through the provision of a capital programme for which direct matched funding can be obtained from energy suppliers. The projects could be delivered on an area basis in support of the New Harrow Project or identified economic regeneration areas such as Wealdstone, targeted at the elderly.

During 2003/2004, we aim to provide and publish an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to the Housing Renewal Strategy and Renewal Grant Policy which encompasses the development of HECA, Home Energy Efficiency Scheme and Renewable Energy Initiatives designed to address fuel poverty.

## Chapter 6

### Resources needed to meet demand

In order to put our strategy into action we have evaluated the use of existing resources. We will identify and pursue potential new resources and ensure all resources are being used to maximum effect in support of strategic priorities.

#### Revenue Resources

General Fund revenue resources cover salaries and running costs for the Improvement Grant, Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Staying Put Services. Services provided through Housing Services are covered by the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund revenue resources as appropriate. In 2003/04 the ODPM have provided £10,000 for the development of the Home Improvement Agency which will increase to £14,000 in 2004/05.

The following Table details the revenue resources for private sector housing services and includes both salaries and running costs of the various services detailed.

<b>Private Sector Housing Service</b>	<b>2001/02 Out turn</b>	<b>2002/03 Out Turn</b>	<b>2003/04 Original</b>
Improvement Grants	£1,048,630	£1,461,990	£2,450,720
Staying Put Home Improvement Agency	£72,690	£108,380	£137,580
Private Sector Housing Enforcement	£191,230	£198,570	£192,870
Total	£1,312,550	£1,768,940	£2,781,170

#### Capital Resources

Capital Resources are divided between Discretionary Housing Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grants and Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

In 2001/02 we used the results of the Private sector House Conditions Survey to secure increased corporate capital resources for private sector renewal grants, with most of the increase being allocated to disabled facilities grants.

Improvement Grants	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Approved Capital Allocation	£1.4m	£1.95m	£1.76m	£2.10

In 2002/03 we secured £1.76m for grants with an estimated requirement of 2.25 million, due to increased pressures on the capital pot. In 2003/04 we secured £2.10m, including £0.25m ring fenced for empty properties activities, against an estimated requirement of £2.5m.

We anticipate increased housing renewal grant demand in future due to the increasing number of sources of referral and the growing links between private sector renewal and other socio-economic objectives (see Housing Strategy and West London Housing Strategy).

It is expected that the expenditure of the £2.10m in 2003/04 will be split as follows:

- Mandatory Disabled facilities Grants - £850,000
- Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants - £250,000
- Discretionary Housing Renewal Grants - £750,000
- Empty Properties Grants - £250,000

The medium term budget currently makes provision for the same level of capital provision in 2004/05 and 2005/06. An additional bid for additional capital to support an affordable warmth programme has been submitted but has not been successful to date due to the pressure on the capital pot.

Conventional funding sources are never enough to meet our service and investment needs and we are constantly looking for new ways to increase resources through partnership and government funding for new initiatives.

## **Alternative Funding Streams**

Releasing equity is being put forward by the government as a means of using the debt free equity value of owner occupied homes to provide repairs, improvements and adaptations at nil or minimal public sector cost. The very high property value in Harrow means that the majority of homeowners are equity rich, even where they are cash poor, and that repayment of capital interest will still leave a large amount of equity for other uses.

The Authority has signed up to the Home Improvement Trust Equity Release Scheme which is described in detail in the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy and the Housing Strategy. For a £10,000 investment 'the Council' has access to 100 loans per year. At an average of £15,000 per loan this would lever in £1.5m of private finance to improve, repair or adapt private homes, with a guarantee of no repossession, which may otherwise not be achieved.

The system is not a replacement for the renewal grant system, as many properties and people, especially in the rented sector, will fall outside the criteria. It will however provide an essential supplement that levers in private sector money, enabling scarce resources to be targeted elsewhere. The loan may also represent a client's contribution towards a grant, particularly with Disabled Facilities Grants, or to fund discretionary work in addition to the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant provision.

This scheme is operated in partnership with the Home Improvement Trust, a none profit making charity set up nationally for the purpose, who act as the lead agency. Their experience and resources are invaluable in integrating the various strands of the scheme, reassuring occupiers and minimising scheme time and cost. They act as the main promoter of the scheme and are the first point of contact. Cases are then passed to the Staying Put Agency who will work closely with the Trust until completion of work. It is proposed that by April 2005 2000 enquiries, 25% of which proceed to the second stage with a take up of 100 loans.

In addition the payback condition on disposal of the applicants property attached to relevant Discretionary Renewal Grant will ensure that a significant proportion of capital expenditure will be returned to the authority to reinvest in future renewal activities and reduce the pressure on the capital pot.

## Future Investment Mix

The need for, and availability of, resources in 2004/05 and future years for private sector housing investment will be determined by a number of factors. These include ODPM capital allocations, corporate priorities for revenue and capital expenditure generally, and the priorities in the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy.

In 2003/04 the ODPM funding for the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency is provided via the Supporting People commissioning role, although this is ring fenced to match previous funding levels in this financial year. From 2004/05 the level of funding will be determined through the Supporting People commissioning role in line with the Supporting People Strategy according to identified local need. In order to protect this funding stream it is essential that the Home Improvement Agency is developed in line with the Supporting People Priorities on an ongoing basis.

During 2003/04, as we determine the appropriate mix of funding types and flexibilities for private sector investment in Harrow, we will develop a forward plan as the basis of a bid for corporate capital funding and leveraging in private and partnership finance. This will be reflected in the Housing Strategy for 2005 and beyond, giving a realistic view of the resources available to meet agreed priorities in the medium to long term.

During 2003/04 there are a number of projects underway, which will influence the need for future resources and the corporate ability to meet housing priorities. These include:

- Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review of housing
- The New Harrow Project
- Development of the Community Strategy
- The provision of a range of alternative loan vehicles and grant aid administered through the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency and Improvement Grant service

Areas identified as having a financial resource implication for private sector housing through the Your Home Your Needs, Best Value Review of housing are:

- The establishment of a long-range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of services is a critical factor common to all service areas. This will be coupled with the investigation of alternative funding opportunities and delivery systems to supplement capital funding provision.
- Research, develop and implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to funding provision to enable delivery, to improve HECA returns and deliver corporate priorities.
- Establishing a dedicated Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Officer to implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy and promote energy efficiency initiatives linked to sustainability and corporate strategies.
- Improve HMO Registration levels for known non-compliant landlords in order to meet legislative requirements and protect the safety of Harrow Residents and in relation to the HMO Registration Scheme for non compliant landlords will require evaluation of the requirement for additional enforcement staff within the emerging enforcement strategy.

These resource implications will be managed through implementation of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Action Plan.

## Chapter 7

### Private Sector Renewal Strategy Targets

Detailed Targets have been developed to support the Key Priorities and actions identified in this Strategy in addition to those identified in the overriding Housing Strategy. They are specific, measurable, achievable, time-based and outcome focused. We consider these to be realistic but challenging, affordable and achieving value for money. They have been devised at strategic and operational levels and are cascaded down to individual levels as appropriate. They will be reported against as part of the corporate and divisional performance management system.

#### Key strategic targets and initiatives

The key strategic targets are shown below against the identified priorities:

#### To develop integrated approaches with the Council and Other Agencies to help tackle Poor Housing, Poor Health and Social Exclusion.

Target	Responsible Parties	Completion Date and responsible Officer
Use Community profile data to develop more robust housing strategies and priorities	Harrow Housing Services Harrow Strategic Partnership Key Stakeholder groups	April 2004  Rebecca Price, Strategy and Research manager  Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer
To develop co-ordinated housing services in partnership with the public sector, RSL's and Voluntary sector	Housing services Private Sector Housing RSL's Voluntary Sector Partners	March 2005  Mick Wright, Head of Housing and Environmental Health  Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer
Address Requirements of BV 62 to reach top 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile performance	Private Sector Housing	April 2005  Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer
Provision and Publication of an Affordable Warmth Strategy	Environmental Health Services Environmental Strategy Group	March 2003  Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer
Develop the Improvement Grant and staying Put teams into a single Housing Renewal Service	Improvement Grant Team Staying Put team	March 2004  Ian Sanderson, Improvement Grant Manager

To develop co-ordinated housing advice services	Housing Services Private Sector Housing Services Housing Advice Centre	March 2004  Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review
Development of a quality Home Improvement Agency in line with the Supporting People Strategy	Staying Put Home Improvement Agency Supporting People Team	March 2004  Paul Bandy, Team leader Staying Put Chris Holley, Supporting People Manager
Development of the Handyperson scheme in relation to the Crime and Disorder Strategy	Staying Put Team Handyperson Scheme Crime Reduction Partnership	September 2003  Paul Bandy, Team leader Staying Put

### **To target investment to promote regeneration and strengthen local communities**

<b>Target</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Completion Date and responsible Officer</b>
Establish a long range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of Services.	Housing Services Environmental Health Services Business Connections Directorate	April 2004  Mick Wright, Head of Housing and Environmental Health
Effective targeting of grant aid through administration of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy	Private Sector Housing Staying Put Team Improvement Grant Team	July 2003 onwards  Ian Sanderson Improvement Grant Manager
Review effectiveness of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy in line with identified priorities and actions.	Private Sector Housing Staying Put Team Improvement Grant Team	July 2004  Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts, Chief Environmental Health Officer  Ian Sanderson Improvement Grant Manager
Reduce waiting times for disabled adaptations through active partnership work with the Occupational therapy Team	Staying Put Team Improvement Grant Team Social Services	March 2004  Occupational Therapy Team  Paul Bandy, Team leader Staying Put

**To continue to deliver and support measures that secure higher standards and better management in the private rented sector.**

<b>Target</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Completion Date and responsible Officer</b>
Operation of the Councils HMO Registration Scheme to increase the number of registered properties	Private Sector Housing Enforcement	April 2004  Geraldine levy-Hayes, Private Sector Housing Team Leader
Development of an enforcement strategy for non compliant landlords	Private Sector Housing Enforcement Landlords Forum	April 2004  Geraldine levy-Hayes, Private Sector Housing Team Leader
Development of an enforcement policy specific to private sector housing enforcement and associated procedures	Private Sector Housing Enforcement Environmental Health Services All Housing Forums	April 2004  Geraldine levy-Hayes, Private Sector Housing Team Leader

**To bring empty properties back into residential use under the Empty Homes Strategy.**

<b>Target</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Completion Date and responsible Officer</b>
Bring 1000 Empty Properties back into use	Improvement Grant Team Property Owners Empty Property Officer Housing Services	April 2006  Nick Caprara, Empty Homes Officer
Achieve top 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile for BV64	Improvement Grant Team Empty Property Officer Housing Services	April 2005  Nick Caprara, Empty Homes Officer
The provision of targeted Housing Renewal Grants to implement the Empty Property Strategy	Improvement Grant Team Empty Property Officer	July 2003 onwards  Nick Caprara, Empty Homes Officer  Ian Sanderson Improvement Grant Manager