Chief Executive's Office
Chief Executive: N.M. Pringle

Your Ref:

Our Ref: NMP/CD

Please ask for: Mr. N.M. Pringle

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To: **All Members of Cabinet:**
R.J. Phillips (Leader)
G.V. Hyde (Deputy Leader)
Mrs. L.O. Barnett
P.J. Edwards
Mrs. J.P. French
J.C. Mayson
D.W. Rule MBE
R.V. Stockton
D.B. Wilcox
R.M. Wilson

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23rd August, 2005

Dear Councillor,

MEETING OF CABINET
THURSDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 2005 AT 2.15 P.M.
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD

AGENDA (05/13)

1.   **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To receive any apologies for absence.

2.   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive any declarations of interest by members in respect of items on this agenda.

3.   **INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT**

To receive a progress report on the arrangements now in hand to integrate the performance and other management activity necessary to successfully implement the Corporate Plan. Appendix to follow. *(Pages 1 - 2)*

4.   **AUDIT SERVICES ASSURANCE REPORT 2004/05**

To receive a report on Audit Services activity during the year 2004/05 and an opinion on the Council's overall level of internal control including any areas of concern. *(Pages 3 - 16)*

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5.   **HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL**

To endorse the draft of "Herefordshire Thinks Rural", an approach to rural proofing.   *(Pages 17 - 74)*

6.   **HOUSING STRATEGY FOR HEREFORDSHIRE**

To consider and agree the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005-2008, for submission to the Government Officer for the West Midlands (GOWM). *(Pages 75 - 138)*

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS
In the opinion of the Proper Officer, the next item will not be, or is likely not to be, open to the public and press at the time it is/ considered.

RECOMMENDATION:
That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act as indicated below.

7.   **RELOCATION OF THE LIVESTOCK MARKET**

To note that a preferred site has been identified for a new Rural Business Park which would incorporate a new livestock market. *(Pages 139 - 142)*

This item discloses any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services.

Yours sincerely,

N.M. PRINGLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Copies to: Chairman of the Council
                 Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee
                 Vice-Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee
                 Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
                 Group Leaders
                 Directors
                 County Secretary and Solicitor
                 County Treasurer

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- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. (A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.

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- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title.

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COUNTY OF HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD.

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Do not delay your vacation of the building by stopping or returning to collect coats or other personal belongings.

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY:
CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET   **1ST SEPTEMBER, 2005**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a progress report on the arrangements now in hand to integrate the performance and other management activity necessary to successfully implement the Corporate Plan.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Recommendation

THAT progress towards a fully integrated performance management system be noted.

Reasons

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out the Council's objectives, priorities and targets for the three years 2005-08. The Annual Operating Plan is the detailed "action plan" for the first of these years, 2005-06. The attached report summarises progress so far in the first four months of the year.

Considerations

1.   The majority of the ambitions in the Herefordshire Plan will be delivered through cross-service partnership working. The Corporate and Annual Operating Plans reflect this, and represent the Council's contribution to the successful delivery of the Herefordshire Plan's strategy. Bringing all of the Council's service and financial management together in an integrated format encourages managers to work cooperatively, with mutual support where necessary, and also ensures that the whole managerial effort is directed towards pursuit of the agreed corporate objectives

Alternative Options

For practical purposes there is no realistic alternative approach to be considered. In the past, and in other Councils, individual Directorates can and do contribute to the pursuit of corporate objectives. But experience demonstrates that an integrated approach produces better results and is better appreciated by the Council's partners. This is particularly relevant in the context of the successful negotiation of Local Public Service Agreements with Central Government and the potential to secure a Local Area Agreement, a delivery approach which is based on successful, integrated performance management.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
David Stewart, Interim Head of Performance Management on 01432 261743

Risk Management

As above, good integrated performance management produces efficiencies, and encourages successful partnership working. Its absence makes these benefits harder to achieve.

Consultees

Relevant internal officers have been consulted. No external consultation has been felt necessary.

Background Papers

None identified.

AUDIT SERVICES ASSURANCE REPORT 2004/5

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY:
CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE,
AND RESOURCES

CABINET   **1ST SEPTEMBER, 2005**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a report on Audit Services activity during the year 2004/05 and an opinion on the Council's overall level of internal control including any areas of concern.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

THAT the Assurance Report be considered by Cabinet and referred to the Audit Committee.

Reasons

Compliance with good practice as set out in the CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the United Kingdom.

Considerations

1.   The detailed Assurance report for 2004/05 is attached at Appendix 1 with the key conclusions set out below.

2.   Following assessment of the Council's overall level of internal control, a satisfactory level of control has been achieved.

3.   There was no Audit Committee during 2004/05. However, the core functions of an Audit Committee were undertaken by Cabinet and Strategic Monitoring Committee.

4.   The four-year Strategic Plan is based on a detailed risk assessment evaluation, which directs Internal Audit work as encompassed in the Annual Plan.

5.   The core financial systems have been identified and annual reviews of their effectiveness showed that with the exception of one, all were given satisfactory audit opinions or better.

6.   Although issues have been identified at service level, there are no material issues that affect the Council's overall level of internal control. It is likely, however, that

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Tony Ford Principal Audit Manager on 01432 260425

AuditServicesAssuranceCabinetReport20045final0.doc

within the Audit Commission's annual management letter reference will be made to fundamental systems, which have a marginal or worse opinion.

7. The key issues highlighted relate to the overspend in Social Care and the Council's overall disaster recovery arrangements.

8. Management continues to respond positively to recommendations and has agreed to take action on 95% of the recommendations made, which is broadly the same as last year. Audit follow-up of previous recommendations on a sample basis has shown that action was being taken on some 89%.

9. The Audit Commission continues to be able to rely on the work of the section; an important factor as it continues to increase the extent to which this is the case.

Risk Management

The four-year strategic plan is based upon a 'Traffic Lights' Methodology, with Red being high risk, Amber being medium risk and Green being low risk. Within each risk area consideration is also given to residual risk for specific functions or establishments based upon their last Audit opinion and current knowledge.

Consultees

None.

Background Papers

None identified.

Herefordshire Council
Audit Service Assurance Report 2004/05

1. Introduction

1.1 The CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit In Local Government requires the Head of Internal Audit to formally submit an annual report to members. In line with good practice this Assurance Report :

- Includes an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's internal control environment.

- Discloses any qualifications to that opinion, together with the reasons for the qualification.

- Presents a summary of the audit work undertaken to formulate the opinion.

- Draws attention to any issues the Head of Internal Audit judges particularly relevant to the preparation of the Statement on Internal Control.

- Compares the work actually undertaken with the work planned and summarises the performance of the Internal Audit function.

- Comments on the compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice.

1.2. In compliance with the Code of Practice, the Council now has an Audit Committee with terms of reference:

"*To provide:*

- *Independent assurance of the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and the associated control environment.*

- *Independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non- financial performance to the extent it affects the Council's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment; and*

- *To oversee the reporting process".*

1.3. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 established requirements related to systems of internal control and the review and reporting of those systems. Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 requires that from 1st April 2003 '*The relevant body shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk'.*

1.4 Herefordshire Council also has an obligation to include in its Statement of Accounts a statement on the system of internal financial control. The statement should set out the framework within which financial control is managed and reviewed and the main components of the system, including arrangements for internal audit. This statement reports on significant identified weaknesses and the actions undertaken to rectify them. Cabinet approved the Statement on 14th July 2005.

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Herefordshire Council
Audit Service Assurance Report 2004/05

2.   Audit Approach

2.1   Internal Audit is the independent appraisal function established by management to review the internal control system as a service to the Council. It objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of internal control as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources.

2.2   Audit Services acts as an aid to management and produces reports as a result of each of the reviews undertaken. It works in partnership with management to find solutions to any issues identified and seeks its agreement to any recommendations for improvement. Recommendations are developed with managers to produce action plans.

2.3   Audit Services is generally well received and helps management to achieve its objectives within a culture of strong stewardship.

2.4   The Audit Service would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff for their help and co-operation during audit visits.

3.   Background

3.1   The four-year strategic plan is based on a risk assessment evaluation, which utilises a 'Traffic Lights' Methodology, with Red being high risk, Amber being medium risk and Green being low risk. Within each risk area consideration is also given to residual risk for specific functions or establishments based upon its last Audit opinion and current knowledge.

3.2   The Annual Plan emanates from the four-year Strategic Plan. To ensure that Directorate and Department priorities are considered, the Annual Plan is developed in consultation with Directors, Heads of Departments and Heads of Service. Both the four-year and Annual Plans have been approved by Cabinet.

3.3   Audit Services terms of reference has been formally agreed by Cabinet in the form of an Audit Charter, which outlines the independence of Audit Services and its reporting protocols.

3.4   The Audit Commission has completed its review of Audit, which involved comparing audit activity with the CIPFA Code of Practice. The review has confirmed its ability to place reliance on the work of Audit Services.

3.5   The actual cost for Internal Audit Services amounted to £418,069 compared to a budget of £445,053. In the main, the underspend was owing to a member of staff on maternity leave.

Herefordshire Council
Audit Service Assurance Report 2004/05

4.   Action taken on 2003/04 key issues

4.1   There were six key issues identified in the 2003/04 Assurance report that required attention:

- **Improvement in IT security arrangements to comply with BS 7799**

  The need to provide a secure environment to support the main servers and communications equipment at Rotherwas, on which the majority of the Council's systems operate, has been recognised. The Audit review of physical security at Rotherwas identified that suitable steps were being taken to provide a high standard of protection, based upon effective physical controls and sound disciplines.

  Full protection will not be in place until the refurbishment of the server room is complete and controls relating to certain threats, such as fire detection and fighting have been fully implemented. This work is in progress.

- **Improved data collection procedures for performance indicators.**

  On 12th October 2004 the Chief Executive's Management Team approved the Performance Indicator Action Plan and Performance Indicator handbook pro-forma with the expected outcomes of:

  - Improved Leadership and Ownership.

  - Improved understanding.

  - Improved accuracy of BVPI Information.

  - Improved consistency of calculation.

  Recommendations for improved data capture and monitoring have been provided to staff responsible for the compilation of the BVPIs.

  This year's audit reviews of BVPI have shown a significant improvement in data collection and accuracy.

- **Risk Management continues to be embedded across the Council**

  Corporate, Directorate and Departmental risks have been identified and Directors and Heads of Departments are now responsible for their risk logs. They also have to ensue that all risks, both new and inherent, are regularly recorded and monitored so that they can be effectively managed.

  Regular Risk management updates are presented as part of the Corporate Performance Reports to the Chief Executive's Management Team, highlighting key risks and the measures in place to address them.

  Cabinet has considered both corporate and significant service risks and has assured itself that sufficient mitigating actions are being undertaken to safeguard the Council's business and reputation.

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- **Improvements in relation to the Jarvis contract**

  A follow-up by Audit Services on the recommendations previously made showed that good progress was made on the action taken on the sixteen recommendations made with nine fully implemented, four substantially implemented and three partially implemented. To help improve the outcomes from future reviews, external consultants are working with Audit Services to produce audit programmes tailored to partnership working. A recent report by the Audit Commission confirms that risks associated with the Jarvis contract have been identified, classified as corporate, and that control measures are in place. In addition, that risks are formally monitored by the Chief Executive's Management Team on a quarterly basis and informally on a daily basis by the partnership officers.

- **The publication of up to date Accounting Guidelines**

  The Assistant County Treasurer (Accountancy and Exchequer Services) has produced the key Accounting Guidelines, which include Budgetary Control, and Journals. Guidelines on Inventory and imprest account management have been piloted and comments made included in the final documents. These four guidelines will be published by the beginning of September. The Assistant County Treasurer (Accountancy and Exchequer) has a timetable for the piloting of the remaining guidelines.

- **Improvements are needed to arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud**

  Audit Services has developed a risk-based programme of work as part of the annual operational plan. This programme includes audit reviews of car mileage, travel and subsistence and renovation grants. In addition, Audit Services has circulated anti-fraud awareness flyers to all members and staff.

  Financial Regulations require the County Treasurer to be informed of any suspected or actual fraud within the Council. Anti-fraud and Corruption returns have been sent to all Directors and Heads of Departments for them to report any incidents of fraud identified. All returns relating to 20040/5 have been returned stating that none had been identified for the year. In addition, the Chief Executive's Management Team and Heads of Service have signed Declaration returns in relation to gifts and hospitality.

  Once again, it is important to emphasise the Council's minimal experience of fraud and the significant faith the Council has in its staff. The key issue remains to ensure that anti-fraud and whistle-blowing policies, together with the high standards of conduct required of all staff and members, are regularly publicised and maintain a high profile.

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Audit Service Assurance Report 2004/05

5.   **Summary of Audit work undertaken**

5.1   Fundamental systems

Fundamental systems are systems whose failure could cause major disruption or loss of financial control to the Council. The outcomes are summarised in below:

TABLE 1

SUMMARY FUNDAMENTAL AUDIT OPINIONS	
Audit Opinion	**Number**
Good	1
Satisfactory	10
Marginal	1
Unsatisfactory	0
Unsound	0
TOTAL	**12**

A marginal opinion was given to the audit review of the Council's creditor system. Whilst the processing of payments on a day-to-day basis was generally satisfactory, a number of weak controls were noted during the review with most having been raised in previous audits. It should also be noted that nine of the original nineteen recommendations have been actioned, with those not actioned all at level 2. The Assistant County Treasurer (Accountancy and Exchequer Services) has confirmed that a new manager has now been appointed and urgent action is being taken on the recommendations with a view to having them completed by the next audit visit later in the year. The areas identified for improvement in the creditors report related to duplication of creditors, identification of potential duplicate payments, correction of incorrect payments, procedures in relation to emergency payments and cheque security.

It should be noted that where a fundamental system has a marginal or worse opinion, it is likely that the Audit Commission will make reference to it in its management letter.

5.2   Non-fundamental systems

In addition to the fundamental systems that Audit reviewed, including seven non-fundamental systems, one was found to be unsound. This related to Homecare cash handling, where controls were poor and documentation did not give assurance on transactions undertaken. Recommendation have been made and the Head of Service is working with partners to put things right.

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5.3   Corporate Governance arrangements (including Anti Fraud arrangements)

As part of the Council's robust approach to its ethical framework, the Council has established a Standards Committee and has adopted a Code of Conduct for members incorporating the mandatory requirements of the model code. In addition, members have signed a formal declaration accepting the terms of the code.

The Council has established a Standards Committee in accordance with Section 53 of the Local Government Act 2000, with the role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors.   In fulfilling its role, the Standards Committee meet six times during the year.   The Herefordshire Council Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2004/05 has been published and provides evidence of the continuing development of the scrutiny role within Herefordshire Council.

Key corporate governance documents are in place and Table 2 highlights their availability.

TABLE 2

SCHEDULE OF KEY CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS DOCUMENTS				
Policy/Document	Availability			
	Public	Partners	Staff	Members
Standing Orders	✔	✔	✔	✔
Financial Standing Orders and Regulations	✔	✔	✔	✔
Scheme of Delegations	✔	✔	✔	✔
Whistle-Blowing Policy	✔	✔	✔	✔
Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy	✔	✔	✔	✔
Complaints Procedure	✔	✔	✔	✔
Code of Conduct for Employees	✔	✔	✔	✔
Standing Orders for the Regulation of Contracts	✔	✔	✔	✔

Owing to the importance the Council places on its partnership arrangements, which is recognised nationally, it is advisable that Council partners are reminded of the Council's key corporate governance documents.   However, it should be noted that the Audit Commission report entitled Probity in Partnerships was positive about arrangements in place.

All Directors and Heads of Service have given written assurance through a signed statement as to the operation of internal control and risk management within their Directorate/Service. In addition, all officers at Head of Service level and above have made individual declarations with regard to gifts and hospitality.

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The Council took part in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data matching exercise for 2004 with 1,292 (971 housing benefit and 321 non-housing benefit) matches generated for review. With regard to the non- housing benefit cases, all high priority reports (149 cases) have been subject to preliminary investigation in accordance with Audit Commission guidance. 19 potential high risk cases were identified, of which 13 cases required no further action. With regard to the remaining 6, further information has been requested from the relevant matched authorities.

Once investigations on the high risk cases have been completed, work will start on medium risk cases.

The current position with Housing Benefit cases is that 49 cases have been process so far, with 2 cases recommended for prosecution, 1 recommended for a formal caution, and with 1 formal caution already being administered. There are 16 cases still under review.

Anti-fraud awareness flyers for both members and officers have been produced and should be distributed by the end of August.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the Council has a major issue in relation to fraud, it must continue to build on the proactive approach it has adopted.

5.4 Performance Management Framework

Performance Management is embedded across the Council, with the Head of Performance Management and Performance Leads taking a leading role. The Council's Performance Management Framework was first adopted in May 2003. Since then, significant developments and improvements have been made to elements of the framework, which has led to a revised Performance Management Framework being approved by Cabinet in June 2005.

Audit Service reviewed 12 Best Value Performance Indicators and table 3 shows the outcomes of these reviews.

TABLE 3

Summary BVPI Audit Opinions		
Audit Opinion	2004/05	2003/04
Good	0	0
Satisfactory	8	3
Marginal	3	8
Unsatisfactory	1	3
Unsound	0	0
Total	**12**	**14**

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As the table shows, there has been a strong improvement in the outcomes of BVPI's reviewed by Audit Services. The unsatisfactory audit opinion relates to BVPI 53, Intensive Home Care per 1000 population aged 65 or over, and was given because data could not be verified to a satisfactory level.

5.5 Risk Management Framework

The Council has adopted a risk management strategy that was approved by Cabinet in April 2004.

The strategy requires the Council to identify corporate and operational risks, assess risks for likelihood and impact, identifies mitigating controls and allocates responsibility for managing mitigating controls.

The Chief Executive's Management Team, on 9th November 2004 and 15th March 2005, reviewed the risks facing the Council and the mitigating actions being applied to control them. On 14th April 2005, Cabinet considered both the corporate and significant service risks and assured itself that appropriate mitigating action was being taken to safeguard the Council. Cabinet also agreed that no changes were to be made to the current Risk Management Strategy, with a further annual review in March 2006.

At operational level, services plans have to identify risks and indicate how they intend to mitigate them.

The Council has adopted the Project Management Tool, Prince 2, which means that all project and business risks must be identified as they arise, and contingency plans put in place to ensure the success of Council projects. The project issue and risk logs record such risks.

In line with good practice, reports to Cabinet and Committees include a paragraph on risk management, which highlights the associated risks.

There are clear links to the Council's Performance Management Framework with the publication of its Integrated Annual Outturn Report for 2004/05, which was approved by Cabinet on 23rd June 2005. Now that risk management is integrated into the Council's operations, there is a need to give consideration to positive risks.

5.6 ICT Protocols and Controls

A range of reviews were carried during the year and it is pleasing to note that physical security arrangements at Rotherwas were given a satisfactory audit opinion. However, this has to be contrasted with arrangements at other sites which were given an unsatisfactory opinion and recommendations have been made. A follow-up audit review will take place to see the level of progress being made in this area.

The key area where substantial improvements are required related to disaster recovery arrangements, which was given an unsatisfactory audit opinion. It must be borne in mind that the Council has allocated additional funds to help improve arrangements, and although progress is being made, it will take time to achieve the required outcome.

A Gap Analysis comparing BS7799 on the Code of Practice for Information Security Management with the Council's arrangements showed that progress to full implementation of Information Security has been slower than anticipated. However, the Council has identified ICT, Children Services and Adult Services as high risk areas, and is currently

Herefordshire Council
Audit Service Assurance Report 2004/05

working with external consultants to improve information security in these areas as a matter of urgency. Once improvements have been made in these high risk areas, a rolling programme will be instigated to cover the areas of lower risk.

5.7 Establishment Visits/Verification and Probity

The most important weaknesses are those expected where resources are stretched: lack of separation of duties; non-compliance with authorisation levels and out of date inventories. Other areas for concern in some schools were inadequate financial records and reporting. This was mostly coupled to changes in staff and unfilled posts. A less common but important concern was poor budget monitoring. In all identified problem areas, remedial action has been initiated.

5.8 Other Corporate Issues

No other corporate issues that require reporting have been identified.

5.9 Level of Recommendations agreed by Management

Currently there are two levels of recommendations made. Level 1 recommendations are owing to statutory obligations, legal requirements, Council policy or major risk. Level 2 recommendations are in order for sound internal control and confidence in the system to exist. The level of recommendations accepted by management was 95% (98%) at level 1 and 95% (96%) at level, which is slightly down on last year.

An improvement to recommendation reporting has been introduced for 2005/06 and entails the introduction of a new category of audit recommendation called 'Critical'. There will be recommendations where non-compliance will be a high risk to the Council and where action is required urgently or within an agreed timescale.

Critical recommendations and progress being made on them will be highlighted in future reports to the Audit Committee who will then take the opportunity to recommend further action if required.

5.10 Results of recommendations follow-up

Recommendation follow-up is featured in the Audit Plan for the year 2004/05. The outcome of the follow up work is summarised in Table 4 overleaf.

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TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF FOLLOW-UP OUTCOMES		
Status	**Number**	**Percentage**
Fully/substantially implemented	225	69
Partly implemented	65	20
Not implemented	36	11
TOTAL	326	100

As can be seen from the table, 11 percent of recommendations had not been implemented. Of the 36 not implemented 28 were level 2 recommendations. Audit follow-up action will continue in relation to the recommendations not implemented.

5.11 Statement of Internal Control

The sources of assurance to support the Statement of Internal Control have been identified and reviewed by the County Treasurer's Management Team.

There are two issues, which are judged as particularly relevant to the Council's Statement of Internal Control. The first issue relates to the overspend in Social Care and the second relates to the Council's overall disaster recovery arrangements. Both issues have been brought to Cabinet's attention and management have in place action plans to help reduce the level of risk exposure. In addition, audit reviews are planned in both areas during 2005/06.

5.12 Compliance with the Code/ Audit Performance

CIPFA issued a revised Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in 2003. Two issues were raised during its review of Audit Services in 2003/04. One related to the production of an Audit Strategy and the other Audit's Independence.

The Audit Commission has carried out its follow-up review of Audit Services for 2004/05 and its report has highlighted two areas for action. Firstly, the need for the Internal Audit work programme to provide for the timely completion of fundamental systems audits during the financial year. Secondly that action is taken to ensure full compliance with the Code of Practice standards on independence and Audit Committees.

Cabinet approved the Audit Strategy on 14th April 2005. In relation to independence, the Council now has an Audit Committee and the Principal Audit Manager reporting line will be reviewed by the new Director of Resources. The Audit programme has been structured to ensure that reviews of fundamental systems are completed by the 31st March 2006.

In relation to customer satisfaction, 57 satisfaction survey were sent out with 23 (40%) being returned. There was an overall satisfaction rating of 88%, with the overall usefulness of the audit scoring 100% satisfaction. Areas for improvement related to

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timeliness/duration of audits and usefulness of initial discussions regarding scope, objectives and audit process. Members of the Chief Executive's Management Team have been sent indicative quarterly plans to circulate to their managers and Audit Assignment Briefs have to be signed off by the relevant manager. The Audit Commission continues to place reliance on the work of Audit Services.

6. Audit Opinion

I am of the opinion that the Council's overall level of financial control is satisfactory. However, the Council needs to continue its ongoing improvements in relation to disaster recovery and information security.

R A FORD
PRINCIPAL AUDIT MANAGER

August 2005

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY:
RURAL REGENERATION AND STRATEGY

CABINET   **1ST SEPTEMBER, 2005**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To endorse the draft of "Herefordshire Thinks Rural", an approach to rural proofing.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Recommendation

THAT (a)   the content of Herefordshire Thinks Rural be endorsed;

(b)   a Members' workshop be held to permit any further refinements;

and

(c)   a more detailed report on how the action plan can be delivered be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 29th September, 2005.

Reasons

To establish a Herefordshire approach to rural proofing.

Considerations

1.   The notion of rural proofing, the means by which local authorities and other organisations including Government test out their service delivery, policies and strategies in a rural context has been in existence for a number of years. The extent to which it is applied has been more haphazard.

2.   In Herefordshire the need to reflect this was originally demonstrated through the impact assessments required to comply with the Race Relations Amendment Act within the Diversity agenda. One of the categories against which policies and service delivery are now tested is access. Particularly through inspections, officers and Members have been asked to evidence what we do differently or what is the result of operating in a rural area and what impact that has on our thought process. Our response has been that this is almost intuitive. However, over recent years both peer challenges and inspections have consistently raised the issue. Most recently in the

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Jane Jones, Director of Corporate and Customer Services on (01432) 260037

area wide 14-19 inspection this was a theme which emerged.

3. In April of 2005 Alison Mclean Consulting was therefore commissioned to undertake a piece of work aimed at defining what it is that makes Herefordshire distinctive, to look at current practice in relation to rural proofing and to construct an action plan which the authority could use to move its thinking in this area forward.

4. The work was undertaken in a comparatively short period up until the middle of July. In addition to desk top research, drawing on good practice from other areas and authorities, it was mapped across to the activities of, for example, the Countryside Agency. Alison McLean worked with a small group of senior officers who met a limited number of times over the course of the work to develop Herefordshire Thinks Rural.

5. The document, which is attached, is divided into three with an executive summary. The first section is a definition of Herefordshire followed by an analysis of the current position including examples of good practice and case study material and the third is an action plan which is divided into short medium and long term actions which Cabinet is asked to consider.

6. In addition the current document should be used as a starting point for further development particularly involving a Members' workshop with the aim of modifying the content and actions appropriately.

7. Progress has been reported to the Herefordshire Partnership Board and including the initial application relating to the Council, it is prepared to discuss how principles can be applied across the Partnership/

8. Finally, there is already considerable interest regionally and nationally about this piece of work and particularly in relation to future local area agreements.

9. Once agreed the report will be published. At that stage the use of maps etc will need to be acknowledged.

Alternative Options

None

Risk Management

The capacity of the organisation to implement actions.

Consultees

None

Background Papers

None

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL

FINAL REPORT

ALISON MCLEAN CONSULTING
JULY 2005

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Executive Summary

Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Herefordshire is above all a rural county. Its spatial geography, composition and distribution of population, the characteristics of the economy, as well as the historical and cultural context of the County are all elements that come together to produce a quintessentially 'rural' flavour to any description of either the people or places of Herefordshire.

Herefordshire Council has commissioned a project to help it develop a new approach to identifying and meeting the needs of its rural areas and their communities. The intention is to build on the Council's own best practice and that from elsewhere to achieve a more systematic and effective consideration of the rural context when designing and delivering Council services.

The terms of reference of the project identify three objectives:

- **To articulate the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and identify specific rural needs.**

- **To establish a baseline of Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.**

- **To develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach that ensures that Council policy and delivery meets the specific needs of rural people and places in Herefordshire.**

Alison McLean (independent consultant), working with a small internal project team, led the project. The consultant gathered information from a wide variety of sources and conducted a series of interviews with a selection of Herefordshire Council staff. The analysis of this information has been used to formulate the three parts of the final report of the Herefordshire Thinks Rural project.

Part 1   Key Characteristics of rural Herefordshire

Part 2   Findings in relation to Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.

Part 3   Conclusions, Recommendations and Action Plan

Part 1 of the report draws together the key characteristics that give Herefordshire its rural feel. It is designed to summarise what we know about the rural nature of the County and to suggest how this knowledge can be extended. It will be published separately as an information document for Herefordshire Council members, staff and partners.

PART TWO - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF AND RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS

1. Understanding and identifying rural issues and needs

- Herefordshire Council staff have a high level of understanding of the issues faced by rural communities.
- The statistical evidence base for the County is in good shape and is well used, although there is more limited information about variations within the County.
- There is some evidence of 'rural proofing' already embedded in the Council's planning and decision making processes. On the whole however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of need and particularly how this varies between rural and urban areas.
- Although there are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison with other local authorities, the evidence of service delivery being mapped within the County is patchy.
- LPSA and Best Value targets are generally county-wide and reporting is not broken down on a geographical basis.
- Some consultations are analysed geographically, but this is not standard practice.

2. Responding to rural issues and needs - evidence of good practice

- The study found many examples of good practice in meeting the needs of the most scattered rural communities in the County.
- These examples include innovative, partnership-based initiatives, the use of mobile facilities and multi-purpose outlets, using IT and flexible working arrangements to improve the accessibility of services, and policy development work at regional and national level to strengthen the 'rural voice' in the formation of government policy.

3. Responding to rural issues and needs - barriers and gaps

- There is also a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to delivering services to the most rural areas and the gaps that result from these. These were particularly well articulated during the semi-structured interviews.
- Interviewees were clear about the impact of national and regional drivers, although they were less confident that they could do anything about these. Also, although there are examples of the Council challenging regional and national frameworks, there is not a coherent influencing policy or or any process for identifying priorities or focus for influencing activity.
- Lack of resources and staff capacity were identified as the most important constraints to meeting the specific needs of rural communities. Although the overall costs of delivering services are clear, there is little evidence of the analysis of differential costs between rural and urban areas within the County.
- Attitudes of various elements of the community are seen as sometimes standing in the way of improving the quality of life in rural areas, as well as the capacity of communities to help themselves.

- Territorial attitudes within Council departments can sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. Also the pressures of a large and multi-faceted workload for many council staff can act as barriers to meeting rural needs, which can be more time consuming and yet less productive in terms of meeting County wide targets.

PART THREE - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Herefordshire Council is well placed to be a leader in developing an effective approach to 'rural proofing' its services and so improving its understand and response to rural needs and issues at a local level. Much is already in place, but there is more that could be done to make sure the Council has a systematic and effective approach to meeting the needs of rural communities.

Success will depend on how far "thinking rural" is embedded into the culture of the organisation. The following recommendations are a pre-requisite for ensuring that the Action Plan delivers real improvements for rural communities.

- Thinking Rural has to be 'internalised' into the thinking of staff and culture of the organisation.
- Thinking Rural has to be rewarding and to make a difference (as well as sometimes being a requirement).
- Thinking Rural has to be led at a senior management level and to be championed by members.
- Thinking Rural must be outward looking as well as inward looking. Part of the job is to challenge others to Think Rural.
- Thinking Rural means considering the interdependence between urban and rural areas.

Key Recommendations - A Framework for Action

Thinking Rural is a journey not a destination. The key recommendations arise from the findings of the study and are designed to build on the strengths of the organisation. and to take the current practice of 'rural proofing' one step further. There are five key recommendations, each of which has a number of suggested activity areas.

1. **Improve the information and evidence base**

- Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.

- Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County.

- Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery and impact of services across the County.

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2.   Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review

- Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.

- Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision making processes

- Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.

- Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.

- Plan responses to future rural challenges and opportunities

3.   Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas

- Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location

- Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services

- Identify and copy best practice

4.   Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'

- Nominate rural ambassadors - both members and staff

- Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members

- Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities

- Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural

5.   Influence others to 'Think Rural'

- Challenge national (and regional) government when policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'

- Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level

- Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership

A detailed Action Plan has been developed to address each of these key areas of activity. It describes some quick wins and actions that can be tackled in the medium and longer term.

Recommendations for Future Work

A number of areas for future work arose from the findings of the study

1. **Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to the wider partnership.** Ideas for initial partnership based activity are included in the Action Plan.

2. **Develop a partnership-based strategy for countryside and land management activity.** This would develop a single vision for the countryside in terms of the natural environment and land management and develop a framework for responding to the potentially huge changes that will result from the CAP reforms.

3. **Initiate 'futures' thinking with partners to respond to future demographic changes**. The changes that will happen over the next period, both in terms of a rapidly ageing population (including the out-migration of young people) and increasing population of migrant workers from (Eastern) Europe and elsewhere, present both opportunities and challenges. A co-ordinated approach with partners in responding to these demographic changes would help both the Council and its partners to grasp the opportunities presented by this new demography and to minimise its negative impact.

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire is, by all definitions, a rural county. It follows naturally that people working in those organisations that serve the rural area take account of this rural context and adapt both policy and practice to meet the needs of rural communities. One could say that people working in a rural area 'rural proof' intuitively - Herefordshire Council is no exception to this.

Nevertheless there are a number of drivers that indicate that now is a good time for the Council to examine its approach to the needs of the rural areas and to make explicit how it will act to meet the needs of rural people and places in the future.

Firstly, the government's new Rural Strategy (Defra 2004) resulting from the Modernising Rural Delivery review aims to find the best mechanisms for devolving delivery even closer to rural communities. The Rural Strategy emphasises the crucial role of local authorities as community leaders responsible for ensuring local rural needs and priorities are identified and met.

Secondly, rural proofing is expected to be a standard aspect of local authority work in the future and specific references to the needs of rural communities appear in the new Key Lines of Enquiry for the Corporate Assessment (Audit Commission - CPA 2005 draft).

Thirdly, contrary to traditional perceptions, change is ever present in the countryside. However, the current changes in relation to the European funding (including the Common Agricultural Policy) and national and regional rural policy (particularly in relation to social and economic regeneration) are of such as scale and pace that the potential impact on rural areas is considerable and demands specific attention.

Fourthly the pressures for efficiency savings in the context of local government will continue. New and innovative approaches for delivering local services in rural areas need to be identified if these savings are to be achieved. The Council needs to be aware of and implementing best practice.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to help Herefordshire Council develop a new approach to identifying and meeting the needs of its rural areas and their communities. The intention is to build on best practice and to achieve a more systematic and effective consideration of the rural context when designing and delivering Council services.

Central government has made rural proofing part of its policy making process. This means that as policies and programmes are developed and implemented, Whitehall departments must:

- think about whether there will be any significant differential impacts on rural areas;
- if there are such impacts to assess what these might be;

- consider what adjustments /compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances.

Rural White Paper 2002
The Countryside Agency has also worked with central and regional government to embed rural proofing and to develop checklists to help policy makers identify rural issues. There has also been some work with unitary and district councils, which provides useful first steps when considering embedding 'rural proofing' at a local level.

The intention of the project is to build on this best practice but to take it one step further and to put in place a process that embeds 'thinking rural' into every step of the Council's decision making and review process. The terms of reference of the project identify three objectives:

- **To articulate the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and identify specific rural needs.**

- **To establish a baseline of Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.**

- **To develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach that ensures that Council policy and delivery meets the specific needs of rural people and places in Herefordshire.**

The intention is also that this new approach to rural proofing could be rolled out to other key partner organisations or adapted as appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the project were addressed in the following way:

1.   A desk study to identify from existing data sets the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire.

2.   A study into the Herefordshire Council's current understanding and response to rural issues and needs, using information from an analysis of a selection of corporate and service plans and a series of semi-structured interviews (see Annex 1 for list of plans and interviewees).

3.   The development of a series of recommendations and detailed Action Plan developed from the findings of the study and from desk research into best practice.

An internal project team with a membership drawn from across the Council has overseen the project and has worked with the independent consultant to arrive at the recommendations and the details of the Action Plan (see Annex 2 for membership of the Herefordshire Thinks Rural Project Team).

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The structure of this report is arranged to deal with each of the key objectives of the project.

Part One - is written in the form of a text for a short publication that identifies the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and gives examples of how the new urban-rural definitions developed by Defra can be used to understand the differences between more urban and rural parts of the County. The idea is that this text will be published separately as an information document for members, staff and partners.

Part Two - details the findings of the study into Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.

Part Three - presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from the studies and has annexed to it a detailed Action Plan for implementation.

PART ONE

TEXT FOR SHORT PUBLICATION

THE EVIDENCE BASE - KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL HEREFORDSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire is above all a rural county. Its spatial geography, composition and distribution of population, the characteristics of the economy, as well as the historical and cultural context of the County are all elements that come together to produce a quintessentially 'rural' flavour to any description of either the people or places of Herefordshire.

This short publication draws together the key characteristics that give Herefordshire that rural feel.   It is designed to summarise what we know about the rural nature of the County and to suggest how this knowledge can be extended.   The more we understand about the nature of rural areas, about who lives in the countryside, about how people make their living or access services, about the difficulties and delights of rural life, the better we can design and deliver services that will make a difference to rural communities. Having strong and robust evidence about what it is like to live and work in rural areas can also help in making the case to government and others for additional resources and for government policy and guidance that takes account of the realities of rural life.

Most of the information in this publication has been drawn from existing documents. There is a list of the key sources of more detailed information at the end together with a list of useful contacts for more detailed statistical information.
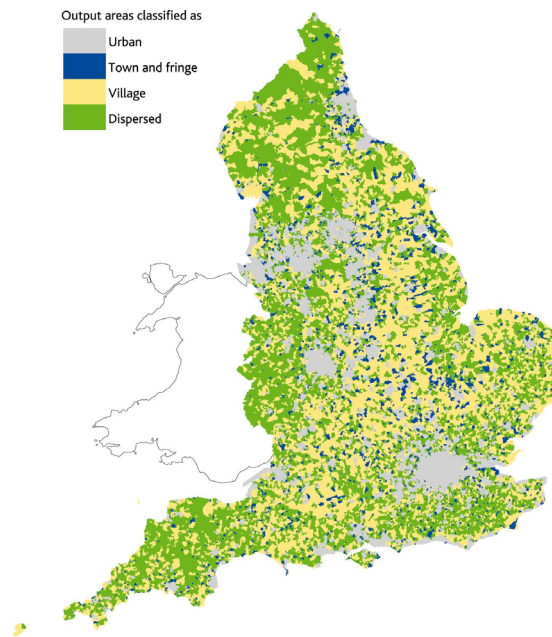
HOW RURAL IS HEREFORDSHIRE?

The government's Rural Strategy (2004) launched a new set of rural-urban definitions. The attached maps show these new classifications across England at output area level[1]. As can be seen, the new classification has two elements:

1.   Settlement Size - these are divided into one urban and three rural groups; town and fringe, village and dispersed. Map A shows clearly that Herefordshire has predominantly village and dispersed areas, with relatively few urban and town areas.

2.   Sparsity - describes the context in which settlements are located. Map B shows the western edge of Herefordshire as part of just a few areas in England that are classified as 'sparse' and part of the only area that is classified as 'sparse' in the West Midlands[2].

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[1] The 2001 Census introduced output areas as the smallest statistical geographic area for which Census information is available. Each output area has approximately 125 households.
[2] A more detailed explanation of these definitions is available on the DEFRA web-site, in the Rural Strategy (2004) and in Herefordshire Council's Quarterly Economic Report August 2004
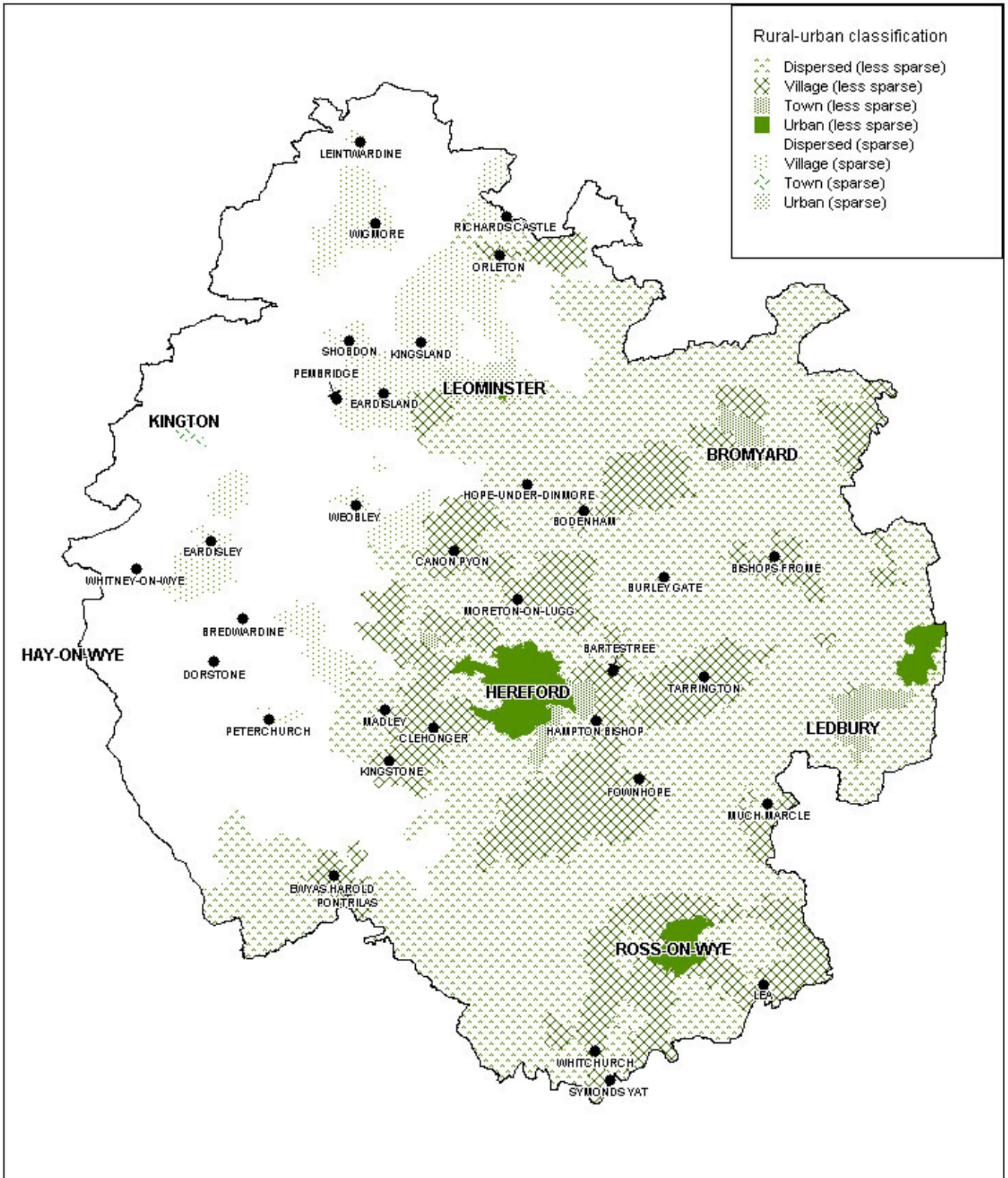
MAP A

MAP B
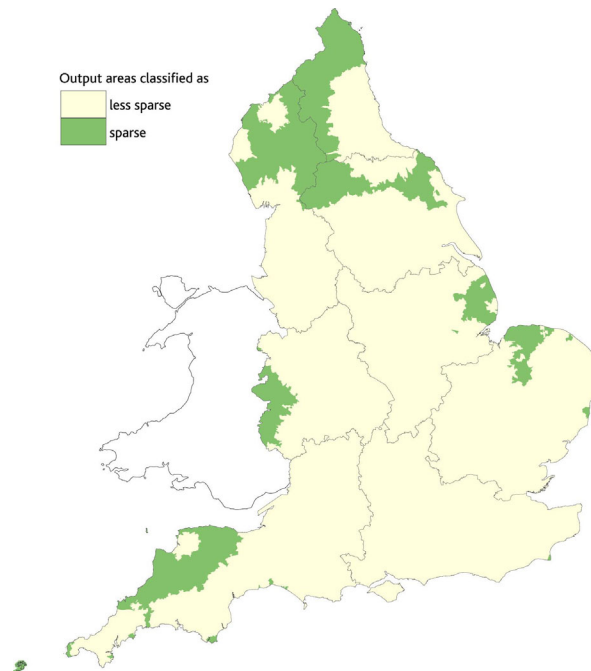
MAP C   (below) shows the new urban-rural classifications in Herefordshire in more   detail.

Rural-urban classification

- Dispersed (less sparse)
- Village (less sparse)
- Town (less sparse)
- Urban (less sparse)
- Dispersed (sparse)
- Village (sparse)
- Town (sparse)
- Urban (sparse)

LEINTWARDINE
WIGMORE
RICHARDS CASTLE
ORLETON
SHOBDON
KINGSLAND
PEMBRIDGE
EARDISLAND
LEOMINSTER
KINGTON
BROMYARD
HOPE-UNDER-DINMORE
WEOBLEY
BODENHAM
EARDISLEY
CANON PYON
BISHOPS FROME
WHITNEY-ON-WYE
BURLEY GATE
MORETON-ON-LUGG
BREDWARDINE
BARTESTREE
HAY-ON-WYE
DORSTONE
HEREFORD
TARRINGTON
LEDBURY
PETERCHURCH
MADLEY
CLEHONGER
HAMPTON BISHOP
KINGSTONE
FOWNHOPE
MUCH MARCLE
EWYAS HAROLD
PONTRILAS
ROSS-ON-WYE
LEA
WHITCHURCH
SYMONDS YAT

NORTH

Rural-urban classification of Census Output Areas 2004

Scale: 1:325,000

Herefordshire Council
P.O.Box 4
Plough Lane
Hereford
HR4 0XH
researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk

So even by national comparisons Herefordshire is one of England's most rural counties with similar characteristics to other peripheral areas in that it is sparsely populated and less well connected to services in larger towns and cities. Also it has been classified by Defra as one of England's economically 'lagging' rural areas; that is to say, it is in the worst 25% of rural districts in terms of productivity[3].

The following facts about Herefordshire's people, economy and environment give a flavour of the rural characteristics of the County as a whole and give examples of how the new definitions can be used to examine the differences within the County in more detail.

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE PEOPLE

- *A sparsely populated county*

Herefordshire is one of the most sparsely populated areas in England and Wales, with only 0.8 persons per hectare. At a County level only Northumberland and Cumbria have lower population densities.

- *A population that is scattered*

Just under half of the population of 176,000 live outside Hereford City and the market towns. This means Herefordshire has a very scattered population compared to other rural areas, which often have large tracts of uninhabited land and higher percentages of their population living in towns or larger villages.

- *A rapidly ageing population*

Herefordshire has a large and increasing number of people over 65 years compared to the country as a whole. The percentage of the population over 75 years is forecast to grow at such a rapid rate that it will account for nearly 11% of Herefordshire's population by 2011.

- *Young people moving out of the County*

At the same time Herefordshire is 'losing' younger people as they move out of the County to find higher education and better jobs. Over the last five years about half of all migrants were 15-24 year olds leaving the county. Only 15% of local authority areas nationally lose a higher proportion.

- *Not an ethnically diverse population*

Herefordshire has a very low proportion of residents from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest minority ethnic group is probably gypsies and travellers. Also seasonal agricultural workers from Europe and elsewhere come into the County under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme for between five and six month stays. *(Need to check if SAW scheme still applies to accession states).*

- *Poor and deteriorating access to services for rural residents*

Most of Herefordshire's rural population (outside Hereford City and the market towns) does not live within a reasonable distance of key services compared to England as a

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[3] Defra measures productivity in terms of earned income by those of working age adjusted for the proportiion of people of working age participating in the labour force. The measure is based on people who live in the area.

whole. Rural residents live much further from banks and building societies, GP surgeries, libraries and supermarkets. The evidence suggests that the situation has deteriorated and fewer people are finding it easy to access services.

- ***Rural communities are not deprived (measured by IMD)***
Except in terms of Access to Services, rural Herefordshire is relatively less deprived when measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). None of the 7 Super Output Areas in the County that are within the 25% most deprived in England are in the rural areas of the County.

- ***A lack of affordable housing***
If you compare house prices to the amount of earned income coming into households, Herefordshire has one of the worst 'affordability ratios' in the region. It is higher (worse) than the ratio for the South East region as a whole (although there are some areas within the South East with higher ratios).

- ***A healthy population***
The life expectancy and mortality for Herefordshire suggest that Herefordshire people are generally healthier than the national average. The figures for limiting long term illness are similar to the averages for England and Wales.

- ***Low levels of crime***
Herefordshire has less crime than England and Wales as a whole and crime rates have reduced steadily even though crime rates nationally have increased.

Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County

% in various age groups (Analysis so far shows very little difference in % of older people in rural/urban areas)

% of lone pensioners, long term limited illness analysis

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE ECONOMY

- ***Agriculture is important to the local economy - but so are other sectors***
The main sectors of employment in Herefordshire are wholesale, retail and repair trade, manufacturing and health and social care. Agriculture and tourism remain important sources of employment in the County.

- ***Low levels of employment in knowledge industries***
Herefordshire has a much lower proportion of people employed in technology and knowledge based industries compared to the West Midlands region and nationally - and the numbers employed in these sectors is decreasing.

- ***Many small, surviving businesses, but generating relatively low levels of economic wealth***
Herefordshire has a large number of small businesses and businesses that start up in the County have a better chance of survival than in other parts of the country. But

Herefordshire generates relatively low levels of economic wealth compared to the region and to the UK as a whole.

- ***Low levels of unemployment, especially in rural areas***
The unemployment rate in Herefordshire remains very low overall and is particularly low in the more rural parts of the County.

- ***Longer hours for less pay***
People who work in Herefordshire earn less than those in other areas and full time workers work longer hours. Average earnings are much lower than regional and national figures. There are also more people working in part-time jobs.

- ***Farm incomes are low***
Just over a fifth of farms specialise in lowland cattle and sheep, which has by far the lowest income compared to other farm types. Also 60% of farm holdings in Herefordshire are less than 20 hectares in size.

- ***Economic inactivity is more of an issue in more remote parts of the County***
Economic inactivity among the 16-74 age group is more concentrated in the northern and western parts of the County. This may be as a result of less access to employment, learning and training or childcare.

- ***Poor communications and infrastructure***
Economic vitality is hampered by poor road and rail infrastructure and lack of access to broadband, particularly in the most remote parts of the County.

- ***A mixed picture when it comes to learning and skills***
Herefordshire students perform strongly at GCSE level and particularly well in terms of post 16 qualifications. That said, there are less people in Herefordshire in higher level occupations than nationally, and the share of the County's workforce with degree level qualifications is lower than nationally.

Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County

% self employed - variations across the County
% with no qualifications and % with Level 4 qualifications

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE ENVIRONMENT

- ***The special quality of Herefordshire's countryside is protected by designation, but it is not always in the best condition.***

% of land with designation of SSI or AONB.
But Herefordshire is lagging behind other areas in the condition of its SSSIs

- ***The rivers are in very good condition***

Compared to other areas, more of Herefordshire's river length is judged to be in good or very good condition.

- ***More landowners have Countryside Stewardship agreements***

Herefordshire has a quarter of all the Countryside Stewardship agreements in the West Midlands. 3% of the land in Herefordshire is covered by these agreements.

- ***Herefordshire has a special build and historic environment***

There are nearly 6000 entries on the listed buildings register in Herefordshire. There are 262 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 63 conservation areas and 19 registered parks and gardens.

- ***More household waste is recycled***

Herefordshire recycles more household waste than in the past and this compares well with regional and national figures.

- ***There is more traffic on the roads, particularly rural roads***

Herefordshire aims to restrict the growth of traffic on the roads to 1% per year, but this has been exceeded for the last two years on the rural roads in the County.

- ***Herefordshire roads are getting safer***

The number of people killed or seriously injured on Herefordshire roads has continued to decrease in the last 2 years and is falling faster than the average for the UK.

- ***There is less opportunity for rural residents to travel by bus***

The rural bus service is shrinking both in terms of the extent of the service and the frequency of buses. This places increased demands on the Community Transport schemes, whose capacity is constrained by the number of volunteers they are able to recruit.

Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County

- *% of employment in agriculture, fishing and forestry*

CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

More details about the information contained in this publication can be found in the following key documents

- The State of Herefordshire Report - Monitoring report 4 2003-2004
- Herefordshire Economic Assessment 2005-2007
- Audit of Crime, Disorder and Drugs within Herefordshire 2004

For more information and advice about how to gather and use evidence about rural Herefordshire the first point of contact should be:

Madeleine Spinks, Herefordshire Partnership Research Officer

Herefordshire Council Research Team
PO Box 4
Plough Lane
Hereford
HR4 0XH

Tel:01432 261944

E-mail researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk

PART TWO - STUDY FINDINGS

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF AND RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS.

INTRODUCTION

This second part of the report presents and analyses the findings from the desk study and the semi-structured interviews. In particular it reports on Herefordshire Council's current level of understanding and response to rural needs, identifying both good practice and gaps. This is the part of the report that assesses how much Herefordshire Council 'thinks rural' now.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Understanding and identifying rural issues and needs

- Herefordshire Council staff have a high level of understanding of the issues faced by rural communities.
- The statistical evidence base for the County is in good shape and is well used, although there is more limited information about variations within the County.
- There is some evidence of 'rural proofing' already embedded in the Council's planning and decision making processes. On the whole however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of need and particularly how this varies between rural and urban areas.
- Although there are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison with other local authorities, the evidence of service delivery being mapped within the County is patchy.
- LPSA and Best Value targets are generally county-wide and reporting is not broken down on a geographical basis.
- Some consultations are analysed geographically, but this is not standard practice.

Responding to rural issues and needs - evidence of good practice

- The study found many examples of good practice in meeting the needs of the most scattered rural communities in the County.
- These examples include innovative, partnership-based initiatives, the use of mobile facilities and multi-purpose outlets, using IT and flexible working arrangements to improve the accessibility of services, and policy development work at regional and national level to strengthen the 'rural voice' in the formation of government policy.

Responding to rural issues and needs - barriers and gaps

- There is also a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to delivering services to the most rural areas and the gaps that result from these. These were particularly well articulated during the semi-structured interviews.
- Interviewees were clear about the impact of national and regional drivers, although they were less confident that they could do anything about these. Also, although there are examples of the Council challenging regional and national frameworks, there is not a coherent influencing policy or any process for identifying priorities or focus for influencing activity.
- Lack of resources and staff capacity were identified as the most important constraints to meeting the specific needs of rural communities. Although the overall costs of delivering services are clear, there is little evidence of the analysis of differential costs between rural and urban areas within the County.
- Attitudes of various elements of the community are seen as sometimes standing in the way of improving the quality of life in rural areas, as well as the capacity of communities to help themselves.
- Territorial attitudes within Council departments can sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. Also the pressures of a large and multi-faceted workload for many council staff can act as barriers to meeting rural needs, which can be more time consuming and yet less productive in terms of meeting County wide targets.

UNDERSTANDING AND IDENTIFYING RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS

1.   Staff analysis of rural issues and needs

Both the examination of the service plans and the discussions with staff reveal a high level of awareness of the issues faced by rural communities, the sorts of responses that are most likely to meet rural needs and the barriers to implementing these. This understanding is built upon many years experience of working (and often living) in a rural area, as well as a strong commitment to delivering quality services to everyone, irrespective of location.

"We want to remove all barriers - physical, cultural, financial and perceptual - so that everyone in Herefordshire finds it easy to use the Library service"

Library Strategy for Herefordshire 2005-2009

Interviewees were able to articulate both general issues facing the rural communities of Herefordshire and those that have a particular significance for their service area. The issues that were highlighted chime closely with the issues that emerge from the data analysis in Part One of this report. The list below summarises the key issues raised most often in the semi-structured interviews.

- Accessibility of services, including transport infrastructure and cost, and depletion of village based services.

- A rapidly ageing population and the corresponding out-migration of younger people, and the significant impact this will have on the delivery of services as well as social and economic vitality.
- Sparsity of population and issues of 'critical mass'.
- Low wages and economic uncertainty.
- Large numbers of SME's and micro businesses and a high proportion of self-employed people (not necessarily indicating economic vitality).
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Rapid changes in the agricultural economy including the impact of CAP reforms and increasing number of migrant workers.
- Social exclusion caused by poverty and rural isolation.
- The costs of delivering services to the most scattered communities.

The interviewees also displayed a good understanding of the interdependence between city, market towns and rural areas especially when it comes to designing the delivery of services to more outlying rural areas. The roles of the market towns are seen as crucial in this respect - "how many people never travel to one of the six centres?"

In most instances interviewees felt that they have a good understanding of the issues facing rural communities although they could not always identify a specific evidence base, nor necessarily were they always confident that needs were being met. They also had a strong sense of the positive aspects of living in a rural area, including strong and active communities, good schools, access to fresh local food and an outstanding natural environment.

2.   The statistical evidence base

The statistical evidence base for the County as a whole is in good shape. The State of Herefordshire report, the Economic Assessment, Landscape Character Assessment and many of the partnership-based strategic documents analyse the state of the County particularly in relation to its near neighbours, the region and the nation. In addition the Herefordshire Council research unit together with the Social Inclusion Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership have published a short leaflet entitled "Social Exclusion in Rural Herefordshire", which includes useful data and evidence that indicates the type and level of social exclusion in rural Herefordshire. There is however, far less information about the differences within the county although some analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, of census data (e.g. age groups) and employment data has been completed.

Data on the variation of needs within the County is sometimes difficult to access especially when the evidence base is only available at County level. Also, different definitions are used to describe 'rural' within the County. Mostly it is taken to mean 'everything outside Hereford City and the market towns'. In relation to transport policy however, it means everything outside Hereford City. Despite these problems of definition it is possible to use the data that is available at ward and now at output/super output area level to develop a more sensitive and spatially aware analysis of information. The next step in terms of understanding specific rural issues would be to use this information to drill down below county level and in this way analyse the variation across the County.

The Council has made considerable investment into various types of consultation, and customer surveys. Also progress has been made on co-ordinating and quality checking consultations across the County. There are examples of responses being analysed by postcode and of using rural contacts (parish councils and particularly the parish planning process) to assess the needs and aspirations of the most rural communities. Analysis of responses to draw out differences between various parts of the County however is not done on a consistent basis. It would be relatively easy and inexpensive to do this as long as the information in relation to the location of people participating in the consultation was collected along with the responses. In the case of the User Satisfaction Survey (2004) for example, since respondents postcodes are known, further analysis could be made of the differences of perceptions of residents in rural and urban areas.

The LPSA targets are countywide (apart from one focused on anti-social behaviour in Hereford City) along with most Best Value Performance Indicators. There is the possibility for some of these to inadvertently disadvantage rural areas by concentrating effort in centres of population in order to achieve specified targets. Information in relation to these targets is not currently broken down geographically as a matter of course (although individual departments may hold this information). It would probably be relatively easy in most cases to analyse the differences across the county (e.g. satisfaction with Home Care Services). The development of specifically rural performance indicators could be a longer term goal.

3.   **Consideration of rural needs in Herefordshire Council planning and decision making processes**

At the highest strategic level the recognition of the importance of the interdependence of town and countryside as well as the specific needs of different communities is clearly flagged. The Herefordshire Plan identifies 'geographic communities' as a 'golden thread', or cross-cutting theme running through all the ambitions of the Plan. Herefordshire Council's corporate plan identifies the sparsity of the population as a 'key characteristic' of the County and highlights the impact of this on the delivery of Council services, particularly in terms of the extra costs of delivery. Also the Corporate plan includes 'geographic location' in its diversity and equality priority and this is translated into the questions raised in the diversity impact assessment documentation. In many of the impact assessments that have been carried out to date access to services (in terms of location) has been flagged up as an issue. The inclusion of 'geographic location' in the Council's approach to embedding issues of diversity into its decision making process is a good start to embedding a "thinking rural" approach. The evidence that this has been a driver for identifying or responding to specific rural needs is as yet unclear.

There are some examples of Council services using a systematic and comprehensive approach to the analysis of needs across the county and from there the development of specific responses depending on both the type of need revealed and the logistics of implementation. The programme of housing needs surveys, for example, is designed to collect data on housing need across the County and to develop a strategic response that takes account of the variations between City, market town and rural locations.

Children's Services not only know the home address and school of every child, they have also mapped all early years provision and used this information to devise alternative provision (networks of childminders) in areas where low numbers make nursery provision unsustainable. The recently completed Economic Development Strategy also makes clear distinctions between the characteristics of various parts of the County, identifying the Rural Heartland as a specific spatial type in terms of economic development. This analysis then enables the strategic approach to ' focus distinctive policy measures on the difficulties and opportunities faced by remoter rural areas'.

Also, where services are of a statutory nature and focussed on the needs of individuals, both the interviews and the service plans reflect a general assumption that the same quality and level of service is available to those individuals irrespective of where they live. This is most notably true for Children Services, particularly in respect of education, services for looked after children and child protection. Evidence of this approach is also seen in Adult Services through the processes of agreeing individual care plans supporting people to live independently, and in services which have County-wide targets for responding to individual requests (e.g. Revenues and Benefits service).

In general however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of and response to rural issues. In many instances the service plans do not include an assessment of need nor specifically whether these vary across the County, although these may exist in other strategic documents. Most surprisingly perhaps service plans do not always make it clear that they are delivering a service in a rural area. In some instances the plans reflect back government priorities, but are not explicit about how the rural context shapes the nature of the delivery. Although in other instances the rural nature of the county is a clear driver for shaping the plans for the service (the Library Service for example).

There are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison to other local authorities, for example the comparison of library services with other authorities with a similar low population density and the work done in benchmarking waste management. There is also evidence of geographical analysis of service delivery for universal services such as education. The study found only patchy evidence however, that information about service delivery or its impact is mapped across the County, although a number of interviewees said that it would not be too difficult to collect this information. Information about the take up of housing and Council Tax benefits for example, is not currently mapped. In general Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offers a huge opportunity, as yet largely untapped, to track spatial variations across the County and to improve the understanding of both the needs of rural communities and the level and impact of service provision. In addition the requirement from the Department of Transport to work with partners on "Accessibility Planning" includes guidance to produce detailed mapping of services across the County (in the first instance, retail, health services and centres of employment).

The issue of the 'rural premium' is highlighted in the Corporate Plan, and comparable costs for individual services for the County as a whole are collected. Also there are very clear messages from Council staff that the costs of delivering services in rural

areas are a major constraint on the Council's ability to respond to the needs of rural communities (see 'Barriers and Gaps' below). However the study suggests that very little specific information about the differential costs of delivering individual Council services in different parts of the County is currently collected.

Although members almost certainly consider rural issues during the decision-making and review processes, there does not appear to be any triggers in the procedures or protocols to encourage this. For example, the Cabinet report template does not ask if the decision will have a differential impact across the County (although neither does it include a diversity check nor a sustainable development check). Also while almost all reviews will have some impact on the rural areas of the County, and many will have a particular resonance for rural areas (e.g. the recent review into polytunnels), the Council processes for scrutiny and review do not specifically require a check on impacts in rural areas.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1.   Use of satellite offices, multi-use centres, Info shops to improved accessibility

The study found many examples of Herefordshire Council using a variety of locations for delivering services to more outlying areas. Schools, libraries, village halls, churches, shops and pubs are all used as locations for delivering services to more scattered communities. The use of the market towns as service centres or as part of a 'hub and spoke' model of delivery is also crucial in this respect. Herefordshire's geography is helpful here. The market towns are well spaced around the County and within striking distance of the City, which lies at its heart. Only the Golden Valley area was highlighted in the interviews as an area that did not have an obvious market town to act as a service centre.

The development of the Info shops in the market towns is a key Council strategy for delivering services across a scattered community.   The customer-focussed, partnership-based approach to delivering a variety of services from one location has clear benefits both for the Council (and its partners) in terms of costs of delivery and for the customers in terms of ease of access. The quality of the service is also likely to be better when offices are staffed by people who live locally and who know the area and its community well, as is the case with the Info shops. There is however potential to deliver a wider variety of services from the info-shops, whether Council services or those delivered by other agencies.

CASE STUDY

CO-LOCATION OF SERVICES

The Bromyard Centre *was opened in January 2004 as a one-stop community facility serving the north eastern sector of Herefordshire. The vision for the centre was to co-locate a wide range of services and is a product of the Herefordshire Council's*

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2.   Use of IT to improve accessibility

The integration of the Info shops with the web-based information system of the Council also enhances the ability of the Council to respond consistently to customer queries and requests, from wherever in the County they originate. Customers are able to pay bills, search the library catalogue and order books, fill out a benefit claim form, apply for a grant, ask a question, make a complaint, respond to a consultation - all online. There are also some examples of education and training being delivered by video-link ('A' level classes in rural VI forms linked to Hereford VI Form College). As access to broadband spreads across the county, the possibility of using these systems of a way of overcoming the constraints of geographic distance increases. There are however, some important caveats. To begin with, access to broadband in the most remote parts of the county remains uncertain. In addition, all the research shows that it is older people who find it more difficult to use IT to access services, and there are more older people living in the rural areas than the towns. The evidence also suggests that those most in need are the ones least likely to benefit from increased access to the Internet because of low income and low skills. This is likely to be just as true in rural areas as in urban.

Insert case study of use of IT to increase access to services - Case study awaited from Julie Holmes

3.   Mobile provision - moving the service to the people and the people to the service

The use of mobile services, especially mobile libraries, has long been a traditional approach for improving access to services in rural areas. There are some interesting other examples of this approach being used in the County, including the Museum on the Move, the Youth bus and the Sure Start mobile unit. There are also some examples of people being transported to services, for example the transport of young people to youth clubs, children to playgroups and elderly people to day centres, where this is more suitable and sustainable. Mobile units can be expensive to maintain especially when they are delivering a single service. There is good evidence that

innovative approaches to combining the delivery of a number of services have been developed, for example combining the Council's benefit advice with pensions advice on the pensions service mobile unit.

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CASE STUDY

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE - AND ON THE MOVE

Herefordshire Council and the local Pensions Service have been working in partnership to ensure that people in rural areas have access to their services.

The Pensions Service has a mobile unit nicknamed 'Muriel' that is funded by the Department for Works and Pensions and visits the rural areas across the County on a set timetable each week. The unit's locations are publicised in Herefordshire Council Info Shops and Herefordshire Matters magazine. Pension service staff on the unit will help claimants fill out forms and answer queries for both pension and for Housing and Council Tax benefits.

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4.   **Gaining collaborative advantage - combining services internally and externally**

The use of collaborative working between Council departments and with other agencies is a distinctive feature of Herefordshire Council's approach to delivery in rural areas.   Herefordshire has a well deserved reputation for strong partnership working and it is clear that the driver for this has in many cases been the necessity to look for ways of reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of delivering services to a scattered population.   The delivery of services in the most scattered communities let alone efficiencies of scale are often only possible by collaborating with other providers.

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"On our own we can deliver hardly anything" Interviewee

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Some examples of this collaboration are well planned, on a large scale and well documented; the collaboration between schools in the Golden Valley for example. Others are less comprehensive in scale, but nonetheless well established and of an ongoing nature, for example the co-location of other advice services (CAB, Age Concern, Job Centre+ etc.) in the Info shops and the work with Parish Councils on identifying exception sites for affordable housing in rural areas. There are also some interesting examples of a more pragmatic approach being taken. For example the home care workers and district nurses swapping jobs, depending who was due to visit; home care workers will administer eye drops following an operation to save the district nurse a separate visit.

There are many examples of collaboration with the voluntary sector; community car schemes and the Rural Sure Start scheme as well as all manner of personal services delivered under service level agreements by the voluntary sector organisations

involved in the Community Care Alliance, to name but a few. Of course volunteer based services are not targeted solely on rural communities, but are arguably even more essential in areas of low population density where public services are constrained by the costs of delivery.

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CASE STUDY

COLLABORATION ACROSS SECTORS

Herefordshire's Out and About Rural Transport Scheme assists people with mental and physical disabilities to access support, educational facilities and other local services. The project is delivered by Herefordshire MIND, receives funding from Advantage West Midlands and Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and was developed with the support of Herefordshire Rural Transport Partnership and Herefordshire Council.

The project makes a real difference to the lives of its clients. It provides a Transport Information and Brokerage Service and a support worker helps clients to develop their own personalised travel plan helping them to build the confidence to travel independently. A specialist transport service also currently has 180 regular users and provides over 600 passenger journeys throughout the County each month.

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5. Staffing, flexible working arrangements

Interviewees were enthusiastic about flexible working arrangements where these were available. In a rural county such as Herefordshire the ability to work at home was seen as particularly beneficial. It provides benefits for the individual in terms of reducing the pressures of commuting to work every day, to the services, in terms of increasing productivity and to the environment, in terms of reducing car use. In some services (for example home care) a greater number of part time workers are used to gain greater coverage of the service and to reduce travelling times between appointments. Flexible employment also allows for more flexible opening times for Council offices. The new centre in Bromyard for example (see case study above), is now open well outside usual office opening hours.

6 Influencing others - cross boundary working, attracting additional resources to meet the needs of rural areas.

Herefordshire Council has a good track record in attracting funding. Inspections and peer reviews have indicated that it 'punches above its weight' when it comes to attracting external resources. Much of the context of the case made for this additional funding has been centred around the rural nature of the county and the particular difficulties this causes in terms of social and economic development as well as in terms of the costs of delivering public services. Herefordshire has been the subject of a series of 'rural' designations. It has been a Rural Priority Area and an Objective 5b area and is now part of the West Midlands Objective 2 area and AWM's Rural Regeneration Zone and it has a LEADER+ programme, all of which have brought

funding targeted specifically on rural issues. In addition the Council has bid successfully from central government funding for investment into transport improvements (for example the rural low-floor bus project and the re-building of the bridge at Bridge Sollers).

The study showed evidence of Council staff being actively involved in both regional and national policy debates. They are contributing to forums, consultations and events, trying to raise the profile and understanding of rural issues and joining forces with other rural 'champions' where there is a clear advantage to do so. The Strategic Housing Service, for example, is seeking a shared approach with Shropshire in order to influence the next iteration of the Regional Housing Strategy with the specific aim of ensuring that the strategy considers rural housing needs.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - BARRIERS AND GAPS

Both the interviews and the examination of the service plans were used to explore the barriers to responding to the needs of rural areas and to identify gaps.   The following themes emerged from this analysis.

1.   National and Regional drivers

National or regional policy frameworks are perceived as not always 'rural friendly', particularly where the Index of Deprivation is used to either design or fund particular government programmes.

"National guidance in relation to planning for housing is poor on rural areas"? - Interviewee

"Government constraints bear disproportionally on rural areas" Corporate Plan

"Children's Centres are essentially an urban model" Interviewee, in relation to original government guidance.

"Government gives us capital, but really we need revenue to improve transport in rural areas" - Interviewee

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As well as the more obviously urban focused targets of 'within pram pushing distance' (in relation to Sure Start facilities) and 'within 2 miles of a static library' (subsequently amended to include mobile library stops), interviewees quoted many examples of an urban bias when it comes to the details of government policy and guidance. The new 14-19 curriculum for example is constructed around the needs of the individual student, using different providers to meet these individual needs, especially in relation to non-vocational learning. The possibilities of doing this in a rural area are clearly limited, both by the distances between providers and the choice of provision.

Where need is defined by statutory requirement, this does not always fit well with the local rural context. The national standard for home care 'Fair Access to Care' does not

consider shopping or lighting fires as 'critical or essential services' for someone in receipt of home care. In rural areas an open fire is often the only form of heating and access to shops is clearly more problematic for housebound and older people.

Also government regulations can have a disproportionate impact in rural areas. Herefordshire has a large number of SMEs and micro-businesses, which lack the capacity to deal with regulation or respond to bureaucratic demands.

In addition 'silo' national and regional financial systems can discourage collaborative provision. In adult learning for example, it is difficult for training providers to join forces when the trainees must 'belong' to a single organisation to attract funding from the Learning and Skills Council. Also in some cases (e.g. Housing Capital Funding) there is increasing competition with urban areas for limited cash.

Finally government targets and indicators are often set and measured at a County level, including LPSA targets. This may encourage effort to be concentrated on centres of population where reaching the target will be that much easier (e.g. % of private dwellings made fit or % improvement in energy efficiency; % of young people participating/contacted by Community Youth Services; % of household waste recycled).

Although interviewees were well able to articulate the national and regional drivers that constrained their ability to respond to the needs of rural communities, they were not always clear about the routes through which they could raise these issues. When they did highlight these difficulties with the relevant government departments they were often not clear whether they had any impact on regional or national government thinking or indeed any chance of making an impact. The difficulties of making the 'rural voice' heard together with the day-to-day demands of delivering a service could mean that opportunities for highlighting the difficulties of operating in a rural context are being lost.

2.   Lack of resources. Higher costs combined with a low population base.

The combination of higher costs related to the sparsity of population and less resources associated with having a small population base is the single most important barrier to responding to rural needs identified by the interviewees.

This "double whammy" has an impact on almost every Council Service. Libraries have an income based on the number of people in the County, yet the price of books is the same however many people are served. Small rural sixth forms struggle to offer a wide choice of 'A' level subjects, where the finance for teaching staff is based on the number of students. Transport budgets for almost every service are high. This applies not just to the more obviously large costs of maintaining the extensive road system and bussing (and sometimes taxiing) children to and from school and college every day (although a logistics programme has been introduced to co-ordinate special transport to minimise costs). The costs of all manner of home visits, site visits, training sessions and meetings are perceived to be high both in terms of travel costs and staff time taken to travel to venues, whether inside the county or to regional centres, although figures for this are not collected.

A 'sparsity' allowance is factored into mainstream funding to Local Authorities, although they have long argued that this does not meet the added costs of delivering services to a scattered population. Also sometimes government funding is targeted particularly at rural circumstances (e.g. the rural bus subsidy). On the other hand there are some external funding regimes that do not include a 'rural premium'. In these cases too increased costs and the lack of a 'critical mass' can threaten the sustainability of provision. Nurseries, adult education, training sessions for foster carers, advice to SMEs (particularly farmers), investment in public rights of way, were all quoted by interviewees as vulnerable or inadequate to meet rural needs.

> *"We don't deliver to rural areas as much as to other communities because we can't afford to. We have limited resources, we can use them more effectively in urban areas" - Interviewee in relation to delivery of adult and community learning.*
>
> *" It is not just the sparsity of the population, it is the fact that the population is so scattered. The current bus network is very limited in the rural areas because of the low demand that results from this settlement pattern." - Interviewee*

This lack of critical mass can also hamper the ability of services to respond to changing needs. Where numbers are small, small changes can have a disproportionate effect on the quality of services. If pupil numbers fall below a certain number then the school will be subject to review; but also if one member of staff changes, or if there are two families who move into the village with children who do not speak English, or if the only male teacher moves on - these changes can have a profound effect on the quality of the education that is available to the children.

Resources other than finances are also often more constrained in rural areas. There is a lack of development land available for housing. Also there is a perception that less staff resources results in heavier workloads for many Council staff both at managerial level and at the front line.

There are also difficulties of consulting meaningfully with the most isolated rural communities who are literally in the 'hard to reach' group when it comes to assessing both needs and aspirations. At the same time delivering services to both travellers and migrant workers is restricted both by costs and by the logistical difficulties of meeting the needs of transient populations.

2.   Tension between a specialising and a multi-functional approach.

One of the more surprising themes that arose during the interviews was the tension between a general (national) trend to have specialist provision and the need in a rural context to be able to deliver a number of services simultaneously, and therefore the value of multi-skilled, more generalist staff. Adult services need specialists in dementia, reablement and palliative care, but when it comes to delivering home care to older people in remote rural areas, what is called for is a generalist that can meet a variety of needs at one visit.

> *"The specialisms within Environmental Health and Trading Standards tend to reflect urban issues. They put a constraint on thinking holistically" - Interviewee*

Having less of everything means that each one has to offer more, whether it is a trading standards officer, a teacher, a home care worker, a library, an information centre or an 'extended' school. Multi-skilled staff and multi-purpose centres are seen as an essential element to working in a rural area, but not only does this create its own complexity in terms of training and implementation, also it does not always sit comfortably with external pressures to specialise nor with the hierarchical structures of a Local Authority setting.

3. Attitudes - both external and internal

Tensions within rural communities are seen, at times, to hinder improvements to the quality of life in rural areas.

> *"People tend to think that rural communities are happy, but tensions and disputes can be persistent and pernicious" - Interviewee*

Tensions between 'in-comers' and the indigenous population, between village hall committees and youth clubs, between developers and the parish councils were all quoted as barriers to addressing the needs of rural areas. In particular, where development land is in short supply landowners will hold out for the greater gains from planning permission for housing for the open market, rather than release land for schools or affordable housing. In more general terms there was a perception among some interviewees that the cohesiveness of village life has changed, that people are less connected to the place where they live and that therefore geographic communities are less able to meet their own needs, although the evidence of extensive involvement in Parish Planning activity in the County belies this impression.

There are also internal, organisational tensions that can hinder the Council's ability to address rural needs. Despite the many examples of good practice in relation to collaborative working, territorial attitudes within Council departments are seen sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. There is a perception that managers can be reluctant to 'let go' of services especially if they think that it might affect staffing levels in their department.

A number of interviewees felt that there is still more that could be done by investing in and encouraging innovative, collaborative approaches both between Council departments and with partners.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

1.   A more strategic approach to the Countryside and Land Management

By and large the strategic documents around which the vision for the future of the County is based, including the Herefordshire Plan and its various sub-strategies provide a strong and clear decision making framework for the Council. However, there was one area that was highlighted as in need of a more coherent approach, which has a particular relevance for this study. Different Council departments have responsibilities for landscape, commons, open spaces and parks, small-holdings, conservation and bio-diversity, footpaths and access to the countryside. There does not appear to be clarity about how these work together towards a single vision for the countryside within the Council or with partners. The scope of this study did not include a remit to look at this area of activity in any depth and further work would be needed to assess the accuracy of this perception.

The Council is currently reviewing its approach to this area of work and developing proposals to iron out the overlaps within the Council around 'countryside' services. However, it would be well worth taking a broader view and developing a joint strategy with partners, including representatives of landowners and local and regional environmental and countryside bodies. The establishment of Natural England as a new integrated agency responsible of land management, countryside access and the natural environment provides the ideal context to look more broadly at this area of activity.

2.   Future Opportunities and Challenges

Although the study did not look particularly at future challenges and opportunities a number of issues that will impact on rural areas were raised during the interviews that may be worthy of further work. Relatively small changes can have disproportional impacts on rural communities (for example the sale of council houses in a village or the loss of a single large employer in a market town) and there are some aspects of life in rural areas that are changing very rapidly. A pro-active approach to preparing for these changes can help harness the benefits of change and reduce the negative effects and it is here that public bodies need to focus their attention

2.1   The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy - is likely to have a profound impact not only on the economic viability of many farms, but on the social fabric of rural communities and on the environment in the countryside. Further major changes can be expected over the next ten-year period. Some of these changes may be for the good, but the effects of rapid change need to be managed if the environmental quality and the prosperity of the countryside are to be maintained and improved. Many organisations at national, regional and local level will be concerned with managing this change. The Council will need to consider what role it should play.

2.2   Demographic changes, a rapidly increasing older population -
The rate of increase in the numbers of people over 65 years, and particularly people over 80 yrs. is likely to be very rapid in Herefordshire and this will have particular

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impacts in smaller and more scattered communities.   There will be important implications for the delivery of adult and community services, although there will also be opportunities in terms of increased volunteering. Also older people (over 65 yrs.) are likely to be an increasingly essential element of the workforce and it will be important to ensure that they have up to date skills.

The corresponding decrease in the numbers of younger people as they continue to leave the County in pursuit of higher education and better paid jobs will also impact on Council services as well as on the social and economic vitality of the County.

2.3   *Increasing numbers of migrant workers -*
There are increasing numbers of migrant workers, especially from (Eastern) Europe, who are coming to the County to meet the labour and skills gaps in the local economy.   Many come on a temporary basis to undertake seasonal work in agriculture, while others are moving permanently. Again this trend is likely to bring both benefits and difficulties. This flow of labour is essential for the local economy and the opportunities of increasing diversity in terms of economic and cultural vibrancy can be grasped. On the other hand demands on some public services are likely to increase or require a different response (e.g. translation of material, access to Internet services, access to public transport).

PART THREE - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPROVING HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSE TO RURAL NEEDS AND ISSUES.

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire Council is well placed to be a leader in developing an effective approach to 'rural proofing' its services and so improving its understand and response to rural needs and issues. Council staff have a high level of awareness of the issues faced by rural communities, the sorts of responses that are most likely to meet rural needs and the barriers to implementing these. There is not however a systematic approach to embedding 'thinking rural' into the planning, implementation and review cycle, nor into organisational and individual development plans. This is unsurprising, as there are relatively few Local Authorities that have started to develop anything more than the checklist approach originally developed by the Countryside Agency.

There has been some interesting work done by the Countryside Agency, the LGA and the University of Birmingham among others on developing more sophisticated approaches to rural proofing at a local level. However this is a relatively new sport and the rules of the game are still being puzzled over. The recommendations below arise from both the findings of the study and the desk research into best practice elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE GENERAL APPROACH

As with any improvement programme success will depend not only on having the capacity and systems in place but also on how far "thinking rural" is embedded into the culture of the organisation. The following recommendations are a pre-requisite for ensuring that the more detailed action plan achieves the improvements it is designed to deliver.

- Thinking Rural has to be 'internalised' into the thinking of staff and culture of the organisation.
- Thinking Rural has to be rewarding and to make a difference (as well as sometimes being a requirement).
- Thinking Rural has to be led at a senior management level and to be championed by members.
- Thinking Rural must be outward looking as well as inward looking. Part of the job is to challenge others to Think Rural.
- Thinking Rural means considering the interdependence between urban and rural areas.

"All rural proofing activity is not an end in itself, it should ultimately lead to improvement in the quality of life of those living in rural areas"
"Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England". K.Spencer and S. Rogers,

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Thinking Rural is a journey not a destination. With this in mind the Action Plan (attached at Annex 3) has been designed to signpost the first steps along this road. The Action Plan describes some quick wins and actions that can be tackled in the medium and longer term. It is designed to be achievable within the capacity restraints of the organisation and to build on the strengths of what is already in place. At the same time it will challenge the Council in terms of how it allocates resources across the County. It also flags up some activity that can be rolled out to partners as the first stage of widening the Herefordshire Thinks Rural approach into the Herefordshire Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership for Herefordshire). It has been constructed around a clear set of recommendations that have arisen out of the study findings.

Key Recommendations - the framework for action

1.   Improve the information and evidence base

2.   Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review

3.   Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas

4.   Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'

5.   Influence others to 'Think Rural'

A brief rationale for each of these is given below.

1.   Improve the information and evidence base

The study found that the information and evidence base for the County as a whole was in good shape, but there was far less information about the differences between different parts of the County. Also data that is collected about service delivery and as part of the various consultation processes undertaken by the Council are sometimes, but often not, analysed for differences between urban and rural areas. An improved evidence base will help both with planning and delivering services to rural areas and with making the case to regional and national government for appropriate policy frameworks and resources. Three key activity areas have been identified under this heading. This activity will need to be supported by appropriate research capacity.

- *Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.*

- *Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County.*

- *Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery and impact of services across the County.*

2.   Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review

One of the clear findings of the work done by the University of Birmingham was the importance of embedding rural proofing activity into the planning, decision making and review processes that were already in place. Herefordshire Council does include rural thinking into the strategic planning and the design of services, but not in a systematic way. The result is that consideration of specific rural needs can be hit and miss. This part of the Action Plan suggests activity that will penetrate each part of the existing planning cycle.

- *Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.*

- *Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision making processes*

- *Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.*

- *Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.*

- *Plan responses to future rural challenges and opportunities*

3.   Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas

There are many examples from within the Council and from elsewhere of good practice in terms of responding to rural needs, but opportunities for learning from these and rolling out the experience to other parts of the Council and other partners are often missed. This part of the Action Plan includes activity that will improve the quality of services for rural communities without placing impossible demands on Council resources (both financial and staff resources). Using pilots and exemplars will help staff learn about what works and gain some quick wins for rural communities.

- *Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location*

- *Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services*

- *Identify and copy best practice*

4.   Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'

Embedding Thinking Rural into the culture of the organisation is a key to success. The activity included in this part of the Action Plan supports the other activity areas in building the capacity of both staff and members to understand and respond to the needs of rural communities. The trick to success will be to focus on activity that will inspire innovation without increasing burdensome bureaucracy.

- *Nominate rural ambassadors - both members and staff*

- *Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members*

- *Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities*

- *Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural*

5.   Influence others to 'Think Rural'

Local Authority activity can only go so far in meeting the needs of rural communities. The Council is constrained both by its statutory powers and by its access to resources. Improving the quality of life for rural communities depends on the actions of a wide variety of organisations at local, regional and national level. This part of the Action Plan identifies activity that can influence others to Think Rural at all three levels.

- *Challenge national (and regional) government when policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'*

- *Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level*

- *Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership*

MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

The management, implementation and review of the action plan were discussed with the project team. The following actions were agreed as the next steps to ensure that the momentum for Herefordshire Thinks Rural is not lost at the end of the study period and that the recommendations are taken forward.

- Chief Executive Management Team/Cabinet appoint corporate and member leads.

- Herefordshire Thinks Rural to appear as a standing agenda item for Heads of Service Group.

- Corporate lead to identify staff to support the work and provide the 'engine room' for implementing the Action Plan.

- Cabinet agrees actions to ensure strong member involvement including scrutiny.

- Cabinet requests progress reports on Action Plan implementation (frequency to be decided).

- Rural proofing is addressed in the review of the Herefordshire Plan

- A State of Rural Herefordshire report is published as sub-set of the State of Herefordshire report.

In addition it is recommended that an evaluation and review process be built into the more detailed Action Plan that will need to be developed as part of the management of the process.

KEY RISKS AND BARRIERS

Both the study and the work of the project team identified a series of risks and obstacles to the success of rural proofing Council activity. These are described briefly below together with initial suggestions for contingencies. The risk register including identification of risk owners will need to be developed as part of the management of the Action Plan. By far the greatest risk is that of nothing or very little happening because of either lack of management 'buy in' or lack of resources and staff capacity.

Risk	*Impact*	*Probability*	*Contingency*
Action Plan not seen as priority - not a legal requirement	H	H	Cabinet and CXMT nominate leads and request progress reports.
No capacity or resources to deliver the Action Plan	H	M	Focus on quick wins that are not resource intensive. Review Action Plan after 9 months and reshape in line with existing capacity.
Lack of 'buy in' from all levels of management	H	M	Appoint Think Rural Ambassadors with a role to enthuse and inspire Avoid burdensome bureaucratic processes
Failure to learn from best practice	M	M	Use existing networks to exchange ideas with other Councils. Use exemplars and pilots to test out and disseminate ideas.
Identification of differential in service delivery that cannot be met - reputational risk.	M	L	Log the unmet need. Be clear about realistic levels of service. Feed back early to stakeholders explaining the constraints and explore other options
In focussing on rural issues the needs of urban centres receive less attention.	M	L	Build into Action Plan exemplars of rural urban interdependencies. Include this challenge as part of scrutiny and review.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The following recommendations for future work are based on issues that emerged from the findings of the study that do not necessarily relate directly to rural proofing the Council's own activities but to a wider consideration of the rural context.

1. ***Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to the wider partnership.*** Each element of the action plan could be adapted to work on a partnership basis. Ideas for initial partnership based activity are included in the Action Plan.

2. ***Develop a partnership-based strategy for countryside and land management activity.*** This would develop a single vision for the countryside in terms of the natural environment and land management and develop a framework for responding to the potentially huge changes that will result from the CAP reforms. The strategy should be developed in conjunction with all the key stakeholders in the County and operate as a sub-set of the Community Strategy (the Herefordshire Plan). Implications for existing strategies as well links to emerging strategies at regional and local level would need to be considered. These would include the Biodiversity Action Plan, AONB management plans, the Local Development Framework among others. It would also be important to establish strong links with the Natural England and this may provide the opportunity to work with them on developing their strategic links with Local Strategic Partnerships. The recent creation of 'rural hub' in Herefordshire could also help move this work forward.

3. ***Initiate 'futures' thinking with partners to respond to future demographic changes***. The changes that will happen over the next period, both in terms of a rapidly ageing population (including the out-migration of young people) and increasing population of migrant workers from (Eastern) Europe and elsewhere, present both opportunities and challenges. A co-ordinated approach with partners in responding to these demographic changes would help both the Council and its partners to grasp the opportunities presented by this new demography and to minimise its negative impact.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations and the details of the Action Plan are designed to put Herefordshire Council at the forefront of best practice in terms of 'rural proofing' at a local level. The suggested actions and mechanisms are built upon the planning and decision-making processes already in place and will kick start an improvement process that does not rely solely on bureaucratic procedures (although these will have their place). Also, although the recommendations take account of the current practice of the Council, they are built around a framework that could have a much wider

application. A similar framework could be used to embed other cross cutting themes (for example, sustainable development) into the Council's planning processes, and so add value to the overall improvement programme for the Council.

The rural nature of Herefordshire has shaped its past and will no doubt shape its future. For this reason "Thinking Rural" must be an essential ingredient of successful Council policy making and practice.

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DESK STUDY

LIST OF STRATEGIES AND SERVICE PLANS

Herefordshire Council Corporate Plan 2005-2008
Herefordshire Council Performance Management Framework
       April 2005
Herefordshire Children's Services Plan 2005-2008
Herefordshire Local Transport Plan. Annual Progress Report   July 2004
Parks and Countryside Service Plan 2005-6
Adult Services Division Service Plan 2005-6
Herefordshire's Education Development Plan 2002-2007
Strategic Housing Services Service Plan 2005-2006
Environment Directorate Service Plan 2005-2006
Cultural Service Plan 2005-2006
Herefordshire Council Community Youth Service Business Plan 2005-2006
Revenue and Benefits Services Service Plan 2005-2006
Library Strategy for Herefordshire 2005-2009

OTHER BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Herefordshire Economic Development Strategy 2005-2025
Herefordshire Economic Assessment 2005 -2007
Guidance on conducting equality impact assessments (Herefordshire Council)
State of Herefordshire Report
Selection of Quarterly Economic Reports
Audit of Crime, Disorder and Drugs within Herefordshire 2004
CPA 2005 - Key lines of enquiry - Audit Commission
Herefordshire Housing Strategy (draft) 2005-2008
Herefordshire Council Small Schools Policy

BEST PRACTICE PUBLICATIONS and CONTACTS WITH OTHER COUNCILS

Moira Mortimer, Beacon Co-ordinator, Lancashire County Council
Moira.mortimer@env.lancscc.gov.uk
01772 531653

Paul Martin, Cumbria County Council
01539 772180
"Thinking rural - your essential guide", product of Rural Matters, Action for
Cumbria, Cumbria County Council

Steve Kendall, Director, Steve Kendall Associates

Undertook work on rural proofing at a local level for Countryside Agency with 5 District Councils in the East Midlands - publication forthcoming.

Rural Proofing by Local Authorities: a feasibility study. Countryside Agency research notes - June 2003

Thinking Rural within Local Public Service Agreements. Report of key messages raised at seminar held 16th November 2004. IDeA Knowledge web-site.

Think Rural -a survey of rural proofing in Local Authorities. LGA and Countryside Agency - March 2004

Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy Rural Checklist. Countryside Agency - May 2002

Rural Proofing - policy makers' checklist. Countryside Agency - revised 2002

Spencer K., Rogers S., (2005) *Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England,* University of Birmingham (A report commissioned by the Countryside Agency in collaboration with the unitary local authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)

Entwistle T, Enticott G (2005) *Researching the Rural Dimensions of Local Public Service Agreements*. Countryside Agency

Northumberland Rural Strategy and Action Plan - Northumberland Strategic Partnership November 2003

Devon Rural Strategy - Devon Strategic Partnership July 2003

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES - for semi-structured interviews

Madeleine Spinks	Principal Research Officer
Sheila Morgan	Interim Home Care Team Manager
Antony Featherstone	Parks, Countryside, & Leisure DevelopmentManager
Susie Binns	Principal Benefits Manager
Andy Tector	Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards
Dave Nicholson	Forward Planning Manager
Peter Ding	Senior Learning Officer
Jon Dudley	Childrens Services Manager (Resources)
Jeremy Alder	Library Policy & Development Manager
Linda Beddis	Area Customer Services Manager South
Adrienne Davies	GIS Team Leader
George Salmon	Head of Policy & Resources
Richard Ball	Transportation Manager

Other Herefordshire Council Staff consulted

Martin Heuter-Russell   Trish Marsh

Glyn West   John Eades
Vinia Abesamis   Paul Haley
Philippa Lydford
Yulia Tarboth

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL   **ANNEX 2**

MEMBERSHIP OF PROJECT TEAM

Stephanie Canham   Head of Social Care (Adults)

Sue Griffiths,   Head of Performance Management

Julie Holmes   Policy and Community Directorate Head of Service

Geoff Hughes   Policy and Community Directorate Head of Service

Jane Jones   Director of Corporate and Customer Services (formerly Director of Policy and Community)

Henry Lewis   Head of Social Care (Children))

Steve Martin   Corporate Policy and Research Manager

George Salmon   Head of Policy and Resources (Education)

Ted St. George   Head of School Effectiveness

Andrew Tanner   Assistant County Treasurer

Andy Tector   Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards

Alison McLean   Independent Consultant

ANNEX 3

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL

ACTION PLAN

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL ACTION PLAN

IMPROVING THE EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION BASE

Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.	• Use new urban/rural definitions to analyse differences within County and produce clear maps to analyse differences	• Compare trends in Herefordshire with regional and national data (new State of Countryside report and WM regional observatory) • Map infrastructure issues. *Exemplar: access to mains water.*	• Include more geographic breakdown in State of Herefordshire report. • Establish quality of life indicators suitable for rural communities.
Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County	• Build rural proofing into consultation quality check • *Exemplar: Check % rural response to consultation for review of Herefordshire Plan; pilot examination of young people's responses for difference across County.* • Use Parish Plans to gauge rural communities aspirations	• Collect 'stories' of living and working in rural area - both positive and negative. to illustrate particular policy issues. • Collect information about why people move in and out of rural areas. • Make sure Citizen's Panel reflects rural population	• Analyse all consultations for differences between urban and rural areas (including existing data e.g. from User Satisfaction Survey). • Collect information about rural communities aspirations and expectations at village fetes, village events etc.
Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery accessibility, impact and outcomes of services across the County.	• *Exemplar: Prepare needs analysis for Children and Young People's Plan taking into account current levels of delivery across County.* • *Exemplar: Use data on differential needs to inform and develop extended schools programme.*	• Expand use of GIS to map delivery and impact of Council services. • Map quality of service provision • Use Accessibility Planning (DfT) to map access to services and respond to 'black spots' • Collect data on differential costs of delivery to rural/urban areas - pilot for one service.	• Develop and pilot simple GIS guide for service managers to map service delivery.

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership
Continue to build on Herefordshire Information and Research Network to share evidence base and to undertake joint consultations
Use Accessibility Assessment to gather evidence of variation of access to services

EMBEDDING A RURAL DIMENSION INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING, SERVICE PLANNING, SCRUTINY AND REVIEW

Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.	• Develop and include simple rural proofing checklist in service planning guidance, (including risk register). • Rural proof review of the Herefordshire Plan. • Make explicit how LAA will benefit rural areas (interdependency model) • *Exemplar: Rural proof new strategy for Adult and Community learning. to ensure rural needs addressed*	• Build on 'geographic location' in diversity impact assessments to draw out rural needs and responses. • Include statement of commitment to rural communities in corporate plan under Leadership and Vision. • *Exemplar: Develop Local Development Framework with strong links to new Herefordshire Plan.*	• Rural proof high level corporate plan indicators
Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision-making processes.	• Include rural implications in cabinet papers and briefings. • Encourage lead cabinet member to question rural implications of decisions. • Ensure contracts for service delivery meet the needs of rural communities - *Exemplar Rural proof new Home Care Contract*	• Embed rural considerations in Prince 2 and other project management mechanisms.	
Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.	• 'Flag' BVPIs that are insensitive or detrimental to rural needs.	• Develop separate targets to pick up geographical differences, including LPSA targets.	• Develop PIs specific to rural areas
Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.	• Use internal and external 'rural champions' as part of scrutiny process • Use IDeA checklist (IDeA 2004) in relation to Best Value and rural proofing.		
Plan response to future rural challenges and opportunities		• Initiate 'futures' thinking in relation to ageing population, CAP reform impacts, increase in migrant workers	

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership

Include results of Parish Plans in development of strategic and service plans - roll out inclusion in statutory planning guidance.

Include rural dimension in future Local Public Service Agreements

Develop partnership based Vision for the Countryside, linked to revised Herefordshire Plan and negotiate with Natural England to be exemplar for integration with LSP

BUILDING ON BEST PRACTICE IN RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF RURAL AREAS

Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by Septembver2007
Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location	*Exemplars:* • *Use new Kington Info Shop to delivery services of other agencies* • *Challenge 2 new mobile libraries to delivery other services.* • *Encourage collaboration between schools to delivery extended schools programme, building on the experience of existing clusters of schools*	*Exemplar:* • *Use Churches for wider community use*	• Develop strategic programme of investment into multi-use centres, including Info shops and 21st century village halls and apply to AWM for co-ordinated package of capital funding.
Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services	• Address shortfalls in access to broadband in most remote rural areas. *Exemplar: Library Service/Community Access points. Use volunteers and Community Transport to move people and books, co-locate with shops and schools, use any access to IT for ordering and renewals.*	• Consider needs of those excluded from IT use because of literacy or access to computers. *Exemplar: Support rural employers (e.g. with labour market issues)*	
Identify and copy best practice	• Arrange networking meeting with other rural councils working on rural proofing (Lancashire, Suffolk, Cumbria, Northumberland, S. Glos, N. Somerset etc) • Take to benchmarking club and IDeA • Embed rural dimension into implementing govt. programmes *Exemplars:* *Design Children's Centres to meet rural needs* *14-19 Curriculum - rural access to non vocational learning*	• Target the hardest to reach groups *Exemplar: support for schools with increased numbers of children with English as a second language* *Exemplar: info-shops equipped to act as first point of contact for migrant workers*	

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership
Continue to collaborate on co-location and joint delivery of services. Encourage partner organisations to embed rural proofing in service plans

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF STAFF AND MEMBERS TO "THINK RURAL"			
Key Activity Area	**Quick Wins** **Achieved by March 06**	**Medium Term** **Achieved by March 07**	**Long Term** **Achieved by Septembver2007**
• *Nominate rural ambassadors – both members and staff*	• Find Staff Ambassadors - preferably from all levels in the organisation . • Find Member Ambassadors - at least one to be part of scrutiny and review and one on cabinet *Need to make this attractive and fun! - space and time needed to be innovative and visionary.*	• Develop programme for ambassadors that will be rewarding for them (visiting other best practice) and inspiring for others.	
• *Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members*	• Include specific rural dimension in induction training for staff and members • Strengthen advice about 'geographic location' element in diversity impact assessment training. • Communicate evidence base to staff	• Include rural dimension in Leadership Development and Management Development programmes • Commission video case studies	
• *Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities*	• 'Flag' strategies and plans that have been rural proofed. • Collect best practice case studies, examine for critical success factors and disseminate. • Hold council meetings (management and member) in rural locations.	• Challenge service managers to find new ways of joint delivery • Introduce flexible working arrangements where this will increase ability to deliver to scattered community	• Encourage staff to 'give up' control of staff and services when this will facilitate better service.
• *Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural*	• Offer to be a pilot area for GOWM monitoring rural proofing at a local level. • Organise and run Think Rural Think Tank Conference including MPs, MEPs etc.	• Programme to be agreed by Herefordshire Thinks Rural Ambassadors	

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership
Include challenge to 'think rural' in Herefordshire Driver to embed rural proofing in Herefordshire Partnership activity. Disseminate partner organisations' best practice in relation to rural delivery.

INFLUENCING OTHERS TO "THINK RURAL"

Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by Septembver2007
Challenge national (and regional) government policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'	• Establish good links with GOWM and Commission for Rural Communities to log difficulties. • Focus on a few key issues for influencing campaign.	• Encourage managers and staff to register difficulties with government departments. • Establish easy to use system of logging impact of government policy and/or targets on rural delivery. • Join forces with other Local Authorities to make the case. • Use the evidence base to built the case	• Actions to involve the public in Herefordshire Thinks Rural
Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level	• "Get the region out of Birmingham" *Exemplar: Offer to host regional meetings in Herefordshire. Find opportunity for WM Regional Assembly to meet in/visit Herefordshire* • Make presentations to WM Rural Affairs Forum, AWM, WM Regional Assembly about Herefordshire Thinks Rural	• Analyse strengths and weaknesses of rural voice in the region - e.g. European agenda, Regional Spatial Strategy, Economic Development, Transport Strategy, Housing Strategy. • Work with rural champions working in regional bodies. • Develop focussed influencing plan.	• Implement focused influencing strategy
Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership	*Actions included in each part of Action Plan*	*Actions included in each part of Action Plan*	*Actions included in each part of Action Plan*

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership
Build on current strategic alliances to 'speak with one voice' on rural issues at a regional level wherever possible - including Herefordshire Partnership, Rural Regeneration Zone Board, Rural Housing Network, Regional Rural Affairs Forum.

MANAGE AND REVIEW THE THINKING RURAL ACTION PLAN	
Recommendations	**Next Steps**
Agree lead and support staff	• Chief Executive Management Team/Cabinet appoint corporate and member leads. • Corporate lead to identify staff to support the work and provide the 'engine room' for implementing the Action Plan.
Build actions into service and individual work programmes	• Herefordshire Thinks Rural to appear as a standing agenda item for Heads of Service Group. • Cabinet agrees actions to ensure strong member involvement including scrutiny.
Agree evaluation and review process	• Cabinet requests progress reports on Action Plan implementation (frequency to be decided). • Agree evaluation and review process as part of more detailed Action Plan
Conduct review and amend action plan	*To be agreed*

RURAL PROOFING CHECKLIST AND FRAMEWORK FOR ITS USE

Taken from Spencer K., Rogers S., (2005) Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England, Unversity of Birmingham

(Adapted from the Countryside Agency Rural Proofing Checklist for use by local authorities, from Caffyn, Dahlstrom, Rogers and Spencer, Rural proofing for local authorities, <u>Local Governance</u>, vol. 28, no. 4, 2002 pp. 273-286).

Note

Applying this checklist approach should not be done in isolation, it may be an added aid in relation to the more policy planning integrated approach put forward in the main body of this report.

Framework stages for checklist

Step 1   An evaluation of how significant the impacts of new or current policies may be on key rural issues.
Step 2   An analysis of options for action.
Step 3   An analysis of partners who need to participate, be involved or consulted.
Step 4   A statement of proposed actions.

<u>Step 1. The Checklist</u>

Each issue questions should be assessed against two criteria:
   a) does it have a significant or not significant impact on rural communities.
   b) does it have a positive or negative impact on rural communities.

Rural issues are identified below, others may be added by local authorities. Some of the example questions may be self-evident, and others may be added as appropriate.

   1) <u>Protecting/enhancing local facilities and shops</u>
       How does the policy affect rural facilities such as village shops, post offices, pubs, garages, other retail outlets, village halls, banks, churches and community enterprises? Can polices be amended to protect or enhance such facilities?
   2) <u>Maintaining/improving access to services</u>
       Does the policy impact on access to and maintenance of services for the rural population, particularly for less mobile groups such as the elderly?
   3) <u>Improving transport links and options</u>

Will the policy affect transport links and options for commuting, accessing services and recreation? Are different modes and uses of transport considered?

4) <u>Tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion</u>
Does the policy affect any disadvantaged groups e.g. elderly, people with disabilities, homeless people, unemployed, women or ethnic minorities? Does it have an impact on sources of information and advice, social services, health, community development and capacity building?

5) <u>Providing activities/facilities for young people</u>
Will the policy impact on young people and how?

6) <u>Improving employment opportunities</u>
Will the policy impact on employment opportunities and how?

7) <u>Strengthening/diversifying the rural economy</u>
Does the policy affect the rural economy? Will it affect market towns, business support, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, retail, credit sources, community enterprises, farmers markets, training, ICT or start-up premises?

8) <u>Provide affordable, quality rural housing</u>
Will the policy affect the affordability and quality of housing across all types of tenure? Does the policy relate to prices, registered social landlords, developers, planning policies, migration, second homes, the elderly or special needs? Does it enhance sustainable communities?

9) <u>Protecting/enhancing the local environment</u>
How does the policy affect the protection and/or enhancing of the local natural and built environment? How sustainable is this?

10) <u>Developing education and training opportunities/facilities</u>
Does the policy impact upon education and training? How does it affect schools, colleges, ICT, access via local facilities or through transport or distance learning?

11) <u>Promoting the use of and access to ICT</u>
Will the policy have an impact on the use of and access to ICT?

12) <u>Encouraging recreation and tourism</u>
Does the policy affect recreation and tourism? Will it have an impact on rights of way, access to the countryside, recreational activities, local heritage, culture, villages and market towns?

Step 2. Options analysis

The local authority should consider options for action arising from its checklist findings. Where an impact is negative and significant it may require remedial action. Where positive impacts are identified there may be scope for further capitalising on these. Affordability will be an issue, as will be possible working with other partners, seeking new funding or lobbying for action.

Step 3. Partner analysis

Where the options analysis indicates needs for consultation, liaison or joint working, the next step is to identify which partners/stakeholders to engage in the actions required or negotiated. Such groups could be other local authorities, government at regional levels, business groups, the voluntary and community sectors, local

communities and business. It would also be important here to identify whether the issue(s) is significant enough to be raised as part of the local strategic partnership process, or other partnership processes, in order to further encourage joined-up working.

Step 4. Proposed actions

Proposed actions could be a short summary of:
- actions to take
- who is responsible for each action
- a timetable for implementation of actions

Finally, it is important to take the rural proofing concept beyond policy formation, it should emphasise differential rural implications of a service plan on different communities, age groups and so on. Different approaches to service delivery may be appropriate and this may entail cost variations.

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HOUSING STRATEGY FOR HEREFORDSHIRE

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY:
SOCIAL CARE ADULTS AND HOUSING

CABINET   **1ST SEPTEMBER, 2005**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To consider and agree the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 - 2008, for submission to the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM).

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area in Herefordshire comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan.

Recommendations

THAT the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 - 2008 be approved, subject to any alterations required to achieve Fit for Purpose rating from GOWM.

Reasons

The Council is no longer required to submit an annual Housing Investment Strategy but is required to develop a Housing Strategy that is rated as 'Fit for Purpose' following assessment by the Government Office for the West Midlands

Considerations

1. The last Housing Investment Strategy for the period 2003 – 2006 was published in July 2002, prior to the Housing Stock Transfer which took place in November 2002. The publication of the strategy coincided with the introduction of the new 'Fit for Purpose' criteria and was therefore developed without the benefit of this newly emerging guidance. Subsequent consultations with the GOWM confirmed that the Housing Investment Strategy 2003 – 2006 had marginally failed to meet the new Fit for Purpose criteria.

2. The Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 – 2008 has been developed to encompass the requirements set out for achieving Fit for Purpose. In doing so appropriate consideration has been given to the evaluation of the challenges faced within Herefordshire, the relative priorities and the actions planned to achieve the agreed priorities. Appropriate regard has been given to the important role of partnership working to identify and deliver the priorities including reflection on the successes that have been achieved to date through the use of partnership working.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing, on (01432) 261902

3.   In developing the Housing Strategy, the Housing Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership co-sponsored a stakeholder event in March 2005 in partnership with Strategic Housing Services. The conference brought together a range of partners, stakeholders, users and statutory, voluntary and private representatives for the purpose of establishing the key themes and priorities for housing services in Herefordshire. A list of delegates is shown at Appendix 3 of the Strategy.

4.   The proposals for action agreed in consultation with our partners are set out within Sections 4 to 7 of the strategy and are brought together within a prioritised summary Action Plan at Section 9. The priorities for action over the three year period covered by the strategy are:-

    a. To achieve a more balanced housing market
    b. To address the increasing levels of homelessness in the County
    c. To ensure that vulnerable people needing housing linked to support have their needs met in all parts of the area
    d. To improve housing conditions in Herefordshire across all tenures

5.   The drafting of the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 – 2008 has been subject to consultation with officers of the GOWM with a view to ensuring the Strategy satisfies the Fit for Purpose criteria.

6.   A final consultation meeting was held with GOWM on 18th August, 2005 at which, subject to minor changes in the Resources and Action Plan sections of the Strategy being satisfactorily addressed, a recommendation to award Fit for Purpose rating would be made in early September 2005.

7.   Subject to any amendments required by Cabinet, this report proposes that any final alterations to the draft Strategy, required as a result of any concluding consultations with GOWM, may be agreed by the Cabinet Member.

Alternative Options

There are no alternative options.

Risk Management

The achievement of Fit for Purpose can contribute to a positive assessment of an Authority's housing service and will enable the Council to further assert its 'Excellent' rating for its Strategic Housing Service confirmed under the Regular Performance Assessment conducted by the Audit Commission in 2004.

Consultees

Consultation on the development of the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 – 2008 was undertaken in partnership with the Housing Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership and included the consultees listed in Appendix 3 of the Strategy.

Background Papers

None.

Housing Strategy for Herefordshire

2005-2008

FOREWORD

By Councillor O Barnett
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care
and Strategic Housing

I am pleased to introduce this Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 – 2008.

The strategy describes the housing issues that affect Herefordshire and sets out the priorities for action that have been agreed in consultation with our stakeholders and partners.

Much has been achieved since the last Housing Strategy.

- The Council successfully transferred its housing stock to a new local housing company, Herefordshire Housing Limited, in November 2002

- Choice-based lettings went live in Herefordshire in October 2002 under a partnership between the Council and the five largest Registered Social Landlords in the County

- The Council has developed a new Housing Renewal Policy under the Regulatory Reform Act powers, providing a range of discretionary grant assistance to help tackle property conditions and promote independence

- The Supporting People Programme went live on 1st April 2003 and currently funds the provision of housing-related support services to over 4000 people in the County

- The Council was successful in bidding for £4.8 million grant funding from the Department of Health towards the development of Extra Care housing in Hereford City. Work to develop 99 units of Extra Care accommodation is due to start on site in autumn of 2005

- Strategic Housing Services retained its 'Excellent' rating under the Regular Performance Assessment conducted by the Audit Commission in 2004

We face even more challenges as we enter the period covered by this new Housing Strategy and our success in partnership working will continue to be central to achieving our shared priorities:

- Tackling the increasing levels of homelessness within our County is a high priority area and will be improved with the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy with a very strong focus on driving forward the prevention of homelessness

- The shortage of affordable housing in the County guides us to use every opportunity to deliver homes to meet local needs

- There is a need to protect vulnerable people through the provision of appropriate housing and to support solutions, identified under the Supporting People Strategy, at a time when the funding is under review nationally

- Tackling the challenge to improve conditions in the private sector

This strategy is set within a period of yet more significant change in National, Regional, Sub-Regional and local policy terms. The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005 enables Herefordshire to further develop its strategic and partnership approaches in dealing with housing issues within the identified West Housing Market Area.

The Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005 – 2008 has therefore identified key actions for the next three years which aim to prioritise local issues as they affect the residents of Herefordshire but which also contribute to the delivery of wider Regional and National Strategies.

This Housing Strategy will be made available upon request in Braille and on audio-tape. Anyone who would like an explanation of the strategy, or any part of the strategy in a language other than English will be invited to a meeting along with a Council Officer and an interpreter.

For further details of this service or any other information provided in this document, contact Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing, 01432 261902

CONTENTS

SECTION ONE
CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

This Housing Strategy for Herefordshire sets out the key housing issues in the area that we aim to address over the three-year period from 2005 to 2008. It replaces the last Housing Strategy for 2003-2006, which was published in 2002. Sections 5-7 of this Strategy each contain reports on key achievements in the period 2003-2005.

Our strategies are based on detailed analysis of the housing market, housing need and housing conditions. Equally importantly, we have consulted widely with a range of organisations and have drawn on the public consultation undertaken to establish priorities for the Council's Corporate Plan. These consultation processes have influenced the priorities we have established and our options for addressing these issues.

This section of the Strategy provides an overview of the key challenges we face in seeking to improve the housing circumstances in Herefordshire and sets out the relative priority attached to addressing these different challenges. It is important to note that all the challenges identified will receive attention over the three year period.

Our top priority is *to achieve a more balanced housing market*, as set out in **Section 5.** In recent years, house prices in Herefordshire have increased substantially and in the more rural parts of the area, many first time buyers are priced out of the market. Lettings of social housing are diminishing, while demand for social housing and homelessness has increased substantially. We will devote resources to providing a range of types of affordable housing, including rental and shared ownership, with a substantial proportion of the programme aiming to meet local needs in villages. These needs are to be supported by planning requirements for affordable housing and by the development of a mix of tenures including low cost housing for sale to assist local people now priced out of the market. We will need considerable funding from the Housing Corporation to complement the use of Council and Housing Associations' funding to achieve this programme.

Our second priority is *to address the increasing levels of homelessness*, as set out in **Section 7.** The Homelessness Forum helped to develop our Homelessness Strategy and we are working in partnership with a range of organisations in implementing specific Strategy objectives, which are to be reviewed annually. We want to highlight two key issues in this Housing Strategy – firstly, the need to develop more high quality temporary accommodation for homeless people to avoid the use of bed and breakfast and secondly, the development of 'housing options' and homelessness prevention approaches to break the cycle of responding to homelessness only when crisis point is reached. The priorities outlined in Section 5 will also help address the issue of homelessness.

Our third priority is *to ensure that vulnerable people needing housing linked to support have their needs met in all parts of the area* - this is a particular challenge for a rural area with dispersed settlements like Herefordshire. In **Section 7** we set out the main priorities for additional supported housing, to be addressed in the Council's Capital Development Programme and the separate Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010. We will aim to build on our considerable success in attracting funding to support of our objectives, for example through Department of Health grants for the development of Extra Care schemes for older people. We also recognise that Herefordshire has a growing number of older people and that we need to develop appropriate housing options for this group.

Our final priority is *to improve housing conditions in Herefordshire across all tenures*, as set out in **Section 6.** All social housing in the county is now owned and managed by housing associations and they have extensive programmes to bring their housing up to the decent homes standard in the next few years.

For private housing, we need to undertake a new house condition survey to ascertain progress since the last survey reported in 2001. The last survey pointed to relatively high levels of unfitness, with particular problems in remote rural areas and in the private rented sector. A range of strategies will be used to address this issue with substantial levels of Council funding directed to this activity.

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SECTION TWO
STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Strategies for addressing the key housing issues facing Herefordshire cannot be pursued in isolation. It is critically important that the Housing Strategy is linked to other local strategies and to regional and national strategies together with policy directions for housing and social inclusion. The purpose of this section of the Housing Strategy is to set out these linkages.

National Housing Policy

In February 2003, the Government published a programme of action, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future,* which sets out the main national priorities and strategies for housing, linked to developing sustainable communities. In January 2005 the Government set out its Housing plans for the next five years in *Homes for All.* It is important that the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire fits in with these plans and contributes towards the achievement of national objectives. The links between national priorities and objectives in Herefordshire are set out in the table below.

National priorities	Herefordshire Housing Strategy
Increasing the supply of affordable housing in areas of shortage	A major priority in view of increasing demand and house price movements. Proposals for affordable rented, shared ownership, Homebuy and low cost market housing, supported by rigorous planning policies for affordable housing.
Ensuring that housing strategies contribute to sustainable communities, particularly at the neighbourhood level	Targeting resources to the most deprived neighbourhoods in the Housing Renewal Policy.
Achieving targets for decent homes in the social housing sector and for vulnerable households in the private sector	Housing Associations in Herefordshire have programmes to meet decent homes targets. Targets for the private sector will be implemented following the completion of the house condition survey and implementation of the new Health and Safety rating system.
Improved conditions and management in the private sector	Programme of work on housing conditions in the private sector, focus on private rented sector including HMO registration schemes and considering the potential for the licensing of private rented accommodation.
Greater choice for applicants for and tenants of social housing	Choice based lettings introduced for five main Housing Associations in 2002 in partnership with the Council. Improvements to these arrangements, expanded partnership and development of housing options approach proposed.
Tackling areas of low demand for housing	Not relevant in Herefordshire
Addressing the housing and support needs of vulnerable households	Proposals to increase supported housing capacity, using Supporting People funding and Council and Housing Corporation capital to build on our success to date. Proposals to increase high quality temporary accommodation to reduce the use of bed and breakfast for homeless families

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National priorities	Herefordshire Housing Strategy
Sustainable development and meeting housing needs in rural communities	Programmes to identify needs in rural communities including parish surveys. A proportion of the Council's Capital development programme will be targeted to provide and develop housing to meet local needs of households living in rural areas.

Other recent developments in the national policy and legislative frameworks as listed below will effect strategic directions for housing in Herefordshire in the coming years.

Housing Act 2004

A range of new powers and responsibilities are included in this legislation:
- Local authorities will have new powers to selectively licence private landlords. These powers are primarily aimed at regulating the activities of private landlords in declining neighbourhoods and we do not expect that they will be used much in Herefordshire
- Introduction of mandatory licensing of larger houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) - Herefordshire already has a HMO registration scheme with a broader application which we will need to integrate with the new licensing scheme
- Tightening the criteria for the *Right to Buy* scheme for social housing. In Herefordshire, tenants of three stock transfer associations have the right to buy and there has been serious erosion of the social housing stock as a result. We anticipate that the new rules will have a limited effect on the levels of activity
- New powers for the Housing Corporation to provide grants for affordable housing to companies other than Registered Social Landlords. The extent to which such companies will seek to provide housing with such grant assistance and the Housing Corporation's investment and regulation framework for this area of activity will need to be clarified. Herefordshire is well positioned to support initiatives arising from this new policy direction. However, the Council will seek to ensure that any housing which results from this policy meets high standards of construction and design
- The introduction of Home Information Packs to make buying and selling homes easier. There is potential for the Council's Strategic Housing Service to offer energy efficiency audits under these proposals
- The requirement to take into account the needs of travellers and gypsies in housing needs surveys. This will require collaborative work in Herefordshire between Strategic Housing, Planning and Environmental Health
- A new housing health and safety rating system

Reform of the planning system

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduces a series of detailed policy changes to speed up the planning system and to assist with the Government's aspiration of creating sustainable communities:
- The requirement for each region to have a Regional Planning Board
- The requirement for each Regional Planning Board to produce a Regional Spatial Strategy
- The replacement of the principle of planning obligations as set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 with planning contributions that can be either prescribed according to a set formula or negotiated.

Herefordshire Council is closely engaged with developing the national and regional approach to planning policy through officer representation on key regional and sub-regional groups.

The Barker Review – Delivering Stability: securing our future housing needs

The Government set up an enquiry into the supply and demand for new housing, led by the economist Kate Barker, with a view to developing proposals for a more stable housing market in the UK. The report was published in March 2004 and key findings include:

- The UK has experienced a long-term upward trend in real house prices, averaging 2.4% per annum over the last 30 years. This has created problems of affordability, most recently manifested in the house-price boom of the last few years. In addition, the volatility of the housing market has contributed to economic instability and has impacted on economic growth.
- In order to deliver a trend in real house prices of 1.8% per annum, an additional 70,000 houses each year in England might be required
- Additional investment building up to £1.2 to £1.6 billion per annum will be required to deliver additional affordable housing to meet projected future needs
- Proposals to introduce a planning gain supplement to capture a proportion of development gains for community benefit
- Proposals to combine Regional Planning and Regional Housing agencies to achieve a greater focus on housing outcomes at the regional level - currently the subject of consultation
- Proposals that the release of additional land for housing in Local Development Frameworks should be explicitly triggered by housing market signals
- Establishment of a Community Infrastructure Fund to help unlock some of the barriers to development

The implications of the Barker Review for areas like Herefordshire require careful consideration. The Review focuses mainly on areas in London and the South East for growth in the housing supply. However, it is clear that Herefordshire suffers from affordability problems which are unlikely to be addressed through a general increase in housing supply, given the rural nature of the area and constraints on land supply. Furthermore, inward migration from older affluent households would impact on the capacity for growth to assist local housing needs. The strategy in Herefordshire should focus particularly on increasing the supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of local people.

Regional Housing Strategy

Herefordshire is located in the West Midlands Region for housing strategy purposes. In 2003 the Government established Regional Housing Boards in each of the regions, one of which is the West Midlands Regional Housing Board. This is supported by the Regional Housing Partnership comprising local authorities, Housing Associations and other stakeholders who provide advice to and influence the priorities of the Regional Housing Board. The role of the Board is to analyse the housing circumstances in different parts of the region and to develop a strategy and investment plan to address housing issues that is consistent with the national plan. This approach recognises that housing markets differ between and within regions and that a coherent approach to improving housing circumstances is best pursued at a regional level.

The initial West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy to guide housing investment in the region for 2004-05 and 2005-06 was published in July 2003. Herefordshire has been pursuing policies reflected in 2003 Strategy in the context of the regional objectives, in particular:

- Focussing on affordable housing options in rural areas in contributing to a rural renaissance
- Promoting affordable housing throughout the area in the light of severe house price pressures

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- Improving the condition of the housing stock both in terms of affordable housing and addressing the high levels of unfitness evident in the more rural parts of the County
- Maximising opportunities for supported living in appropriate housing linked to support.

The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005 has now been published and it has developed five aims which reflect the extensive consultation and research undertaken throughout the region. The five aims are:

- Create mixed, balanced and inclusive communities
- Assist in the delivery of the Regional Spatial Strategy policies of Urban and Rural renaissance
- Influence the future development of new housing provision to facilitate and enhance the economic development of the region
- Address the variety of needs across a range of specific sectors of housing circumstances to see that the Government's Decent Homes standards are met in the municipal and social sectors and for those in vulnerable circumstances in the private sector
- Encourage development which improves the quality of the environment as a whole

The aims, which are consistent with the Regional Spatial Strategy, support a vision of creating a strong regional economy, which through the provision of pathways of housing choice enables people to live near their work in pleasant affordable homes to enhance diversity, address social inclusion and community cohesion, protect the vulnerable, whilst encouraging sustainable lifestyles.

To deliver against this vision, the Regional Housing Strategy has established a number of priorities for investment and strategic intent. Specifically, these are:

- Apply the principles of urban and rural renaissance
- Secure mixed and balanced communities
- Unite the efforts of the public and private sectors
- Facilitate economic change and development
- Secure decent homes and affordable homes
- Contribute to social inclusion
- Environmentally and technologically engaged

Herefordshire has been proactive in influencing and contributing to relevant research and policy development, not least through its membership and chairing of the Rural Housing Network. In particular, it is crucial that the housing circumstances of the remoter, rural parts of the region are fully recognised; that housing investment is directed towards those areas experiencing the most extreme affordability pressures.

A key aspect of the Regional Housing Strategy has been the establishment of 4 distinctive housing market areas which have resulted from specialist research into sub-regional housing markets. Herefordshire has been grouped within the West housing market area, alongside the rural authorities of Bridgnorth, Oswestry, Shrewsbury, North Shropshire and South Shropshire. Herefordshire is keen to work more closely with Shropshire authorities to explore common issues and is proposing to pilot a new approach to housing needs assessment as part of this process (see Page 17).

The significant issues for Herefordshire's Housing Strategy arising out of the Regional Housing Strategy relate to evidence of high demand and distinct affordability concerns. The strategy states that the principles of sustainability will lead to the majority of development focussing on larger market towns and larger rural settlements and that housing provision in more remote rural settlements may be appropriate as part of a broader range of initiatives and investments.

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Housing and the Council's Corporate Plan

Herefordshire Council gives considerable emphasis to strong corporate support for housing objectives. It recognises that having a healthy housing market with decent housing conditions, accessible to the whole community, is crucial to the well-being of Herefordshire residents and the future vitality of the area.

The Corporate Plan aligns the Council's key objectives and targets with the ten *ambitions* of the Herefordshire Partnership - see below. A new Corporate Plan for 2005-2008 has been agreed following extensive public consultation.

The Corporate Plan includes three key aims for housing for the period to 2008:
- Regularly identifying and responding to local accommodation needs
- Improving the condition of public and private housing
- Providing affordable and accessible accommodation

The Council has decided in this way to highlight those targets of the Herefordshire Partnership to which it, *as the Council*, has the greatest contribution to make. These targets are consistent with the proposals in this Housing Strategy. The Corporate Plan will be reviewed and updated annually for the following three years - it will be important to ensure that this process is consistent with the review process of the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

The Corporate Plan 2005–2008 sets out that the Council's top priorities include the objective to sustain vibrant and prosperous communities and one way to achieve this will be by providing more efficient, effective and customer-focussed services. The Annual Operating Plan sets out actions to be taken on a yearly basis and identifies the challenge of tackling, with partners, the growing problems of housing and homelessness.

The Herefordshire Plan

The Herefordshire Plan has been produced by the Herefordshire Partnership, which brings together a range of statutory, non-government and private sector organisations to co-ordinate services to the benefit of Herefordshire residents. The Plan was last revised in 2003 and is structured around 10 key ambitions, one of which is **to meet Herefordshire's accommodation needs.**

Each of the 10 ambitions has a partnership group, called an **ambition group** which works towards achieving that ambition. The Housing Ambition Group has established the following aims:

- Regularly identifying and responding to local accommodation needs
- Improving the condition of public and private housing
- Providing affordable and accessible housing
- Providing the best housing advice when and where it's needed
- Providing housing that is more energy efficient and which involves the use of more locally produced and sustainable materials
- Making full use of the existing housing stock.

The Housing Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership, along with Herefordshire Council, has adopted the Housing Strategy 2005-2008 as the basis for achieving the ambition **to meet Herefordshire accommodation needs**. This will be reflected in the next revision of the Herefordshire Plan in 2005. The Housing Ambition Group was closely involved in developing the Housing Strategy and co-sponsored an essential consultation

event in March 2005 - see Section 3. During the consultation event, the Ambition Group identified the following themes to explore further during the strategy period:

- Developing connected solutions to anti-social behaviour
- Developing practice in homelessness prevention
- Developing research capacity to ensure best practice
- Strengthening partnership work
- Continue to emphasise the importance of ecological sustainability in housing
- Ensure affordable housing remains at the top of the agenda and that planning gain is the highest priority in the context of the Herefordshire partnership
- Within the Herefordshire Partnership, take a leading role in securing a partnership approach to addressing the needs and aspirations of both gypsies and travellers and migrant and seasonal workers

These themes will inform a review of the Housing Ambition Group's aims outlined above.

Diversity strategies

Linked to the development of the new Corporate Plan, the Council is developing strategies across services to address the needs of specific groups in the community. The Strategic Housing Service has been prioritised for year 1 of this process. Home Point undertook an Equality Impact Assessment in 2004 and similar reviews will be carried out by other sections of Strategic Housing in 2005.

Community Safety and Drugs Partnership

The Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership has strong links with Strategic Housing on both an operational and strategic level. The Partnership implements its Crime Reduction Strategy through a range of groups and forums including the Domestic Violence Forum, the Anti-Social Behaviour Implementation Group and the Prolific and Priority Offenders Scheme. Housing is a fundamental issue to many of these groups, particularly where emergency and temporary accommodation is required, for example for victims of domestic violence. Victims and offenders are often unable to access other basic services without a fixed address so the need for accommodation is a priority for service providers. A number of the implementation groups have representation from the Housing Associations in Herefordshire, particularly the Anti-Social Behaviour Implementation Group. Support for the drug aims of the Partnership is provided through the Supporting People Strategy and the Drugs Intervention Programme which both focus on enabling people with drug problems to overcome them and live healthy and crime-free lives. Housing issues are addressed at a strategic level through Strategy Group meetings. These are attended by a representative of the RSL forum and the Director of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing who chairs the meeting.

Health and Social Care Strategies

As part of the Council's Directorate of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing, Strategic Housing Services work closely with other parts of the Directorate to ensure strong links with other social care agendas such as health needs and older people and also with the newly formed Children's Services Directorate.

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Other Local Strategies

A range of other local strategies are integral to the Housing Strategy and are included in other sections as follows:

Section 5	Unitary Development Plan	Under development:
	Empty Property Strategy	Travellers and Gypsies Strategy
	Market Towns strategies	Local Development Framework
Section 6	Housing Renewal Policy	
Section 7	Homelessness Strategy	Under development:
	Supporting People Strategy	Mental Health Housing Plan
	Learning Disability Housing Plan	Older Persons Strategy
	Older Persons Business Case	

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SECTION THREE
CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The housing agenda for Herefordshire represents a massive challenge. A range of agencies will work together in close partnership to address this challenge. This is reflected in the joint sponsorship of this Housing Strategy by Herefordshire Council and by the Housing Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership. Throughout this strategy we highlight the strong commitment to partnership working with key partners identified in each of the main strategic sections.

Partnerships must go beyond delivering services - important as this is. They will include working together to share information on housing needs, agree priorities and plan new services.

The various strands of this Housing Strategy have been strongly influenced by stakeholder consultation and development processes. Significant examples are:

- Work with other local authorities in the West Midlands and particularly through the Rural Housing Network
- The central role of the Housing Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership, which has adopted the Strategy and which has been closely involved in the housing elements of the emerging Unitary Development Plan (UDP)
- The RSL forum will continue to be been closely involved helping to establish the priorities for the Council's Capital development programme. Operational aspects are addressed through the Forum's Development and Housing Management sub-groups.
- The Landlords Forum is consulted on existing and developing services. The Empty Property Strategy was launched at the annual Landlords Fair with landlords having been involved on the editorial board
- Consultation with stakeholders in the development of the Housing Renewal Policy
- The Homelessness Forum and service users were involved in the development of the Homelessness Strategy
- The views of people with disabilities, family carers and housing/support providers assisted in the development of the Learning Disabilities Housing Plan 2003-2006 and will be involved in developing the Mental Health Housing Plan
- The Supported Housing Provider Forum contributes to the development of the Supporting People Strategy
- Cabinet Member briefings held weekly provide an opportunity for full consultation on emerging strategic and operational issues
- Briefing meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee involve systematic monitoring of the delivery of the Housing Strategy. The Scrutiny Committee, which includes voluntary sector representation, has also established Special Interest Groups to investigate specific issues, for example accommodation for people with mental health problems.

In developing this Strategy, the Housing Ambition Group and Strategic Housing Service co-sponsored a stakeholder consultation event in March 2005. The conference gathered together Councillors, residents groups, service users and statutory, voluntary and private sector representatives to help establish key themes and priorities for housing and services in Herefordshire. Detailed presentations were delivered to identify the issues to be addressed and a series of workshops offered the opportunity to debate and explore themes in order to develop proposals to address these issues. A list of delegates is shown at Appendix 3. The proposals for action from the consultation event have been incorporated in sections 4 to 7 of this Strategy and in the Action Plan at Section 9.

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Feedback mechanisms

Herefordshire Council adopts a range of mechanisms for obtaining feedback from customers of its housing services whether they are directly provided or contracted out. Examples are:

Private sector housing
HMO tenants satisfaction survey
HMO landlords satisfaction survey
Grants/renewal assistance customer satisfaction survey
Feedback from users on the Registered Contractors list

Enabling and Housing Needs
Empty properties - feedback form with information pack
Private Landlords Fair - annual survey
Low cost home ownership - customer satisfaction survey
Regular newsletter - feedback continually invited

Home Point
Annual customer satisfaction survey
Annual stakeholder feedback survey

Homelessness and Housing Advice
LPSA target - % of homeless households satisfied with their temporary accommodation
LPSA target - % of homeless households satisfied with their resettlement support

Feedback from stakeholders and service users contributes to service planning and delivery. Examples include:
- A resident's survey contributed to the development of the Housing Renewal Policy
- Private landlords were surveyed to improve our approaches to future engagement
- Landlords views on proposed national licencing shaped our approach to HMO licencing
- Homelessness Strategy development included a review of homelessness in Herefordshire and took on board the views of service users
- In July 2005 a workshop including stakeholders and service users was held to support the development of the Affordable Warmth Strategy

Performance

The Council collects and publishes information on the performance of its housing services, monitors trends and compares performance with other local authorities.   Performance against indicators is reported to every Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Details of recent performance are set out in Appendix 1.

Monitoring and Review of this Strategy

Six-monthly reports will be made to the Council's Scrutiny Committee and to the Housing Ambition Group on progress in implementing this strategy.

In May 2006 and May 2007, strategy supplements will be issued. These will contain:
- Information on policy and funding developments which impact on the strategy
- Updated information on housing needs, housing markets and housing conditions
- An updated Action Plan for the remainder of the period of the strategy.

A summary version of these supplements will be made available to service users.

During 2007-08 a comprehensive process of consultation and development will be put in place to produce a new strategy for 2008 onwards.

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SECTION FOUR
HOUSING NEEDS, MARKETS & CONDITIONS

A Housing Strategy must be based on the clear identification of needs, understanding of housing market trends and knowledge of housing conditions in all tenures.

The Strategic Housing Service of Herefordshire Council devotes considerable resources to research and analysis to inform the housing strategies of the Council and the Herefordshire Partnership. The Council employs a full-time Housing Market Research Officer and this has enabled us to develop an excellent understanding of the local and regional housing market. Home Point produces comprehensive data on homelessness trends and on applications and lettings. Additional research and analysis is undertaken by the Strategic Housing Service's dedicated Performance Improvement Officer.

A range of research and information has been assembled to inform this housing strategy and is summarised in this section. This data forms the basis of the analysis of key housing issues to be addressed over the three-year period of this Strategy.

1.   Demographic Information

The current estimate for the resident population of Herefordshire is 176,900 (86,200 males and 90,700 females). This represents a 10.3% increase on 1991 compared to an overall increase for England and Wales of 4.0%. Herefordshire is relatively sparsely populated at 0.8 people per hectare compared to an average of 3.4 for England and Wales. In 2001, only two local authorities in England had a lower population density: Northumberland (0.61) and Cumbria (0.72)

The *age structure* of this population, as compared to England and Wales, was:

	Resident population (percentage)	
	Herefordshire	**England and Wales**
0 to 15	18.9	19.7
16 to 74	71.7	72.7
75 and over	9.4	7.6

Source: ONS

Herefordshire has a higher number of people aged over 65 than the national average – 19.7% compared to 16.0%. Nationally, the number of people aged over 65 is predicted to grow by 10% by 2010; in Herefordshire, the predicted growth is 27%.

In terms of *ethnic groups*, 99.1% of Herefordshire's population are White, compared to 91.3% for England and Wales. In reality, the largest ethnic minority group in the county is probably gypsies and travellers but this category was not offered as an option on the census form. A caravan count is carried out twice a year - although we recognise that not all gypsies and travellers live in caravans. The most recent figures available for July 2004 showed 84 caravans in Herefordshire compared to 119 in July 2003. 50 were on permanent Council sites, 9 were on private authorised sites and the remainder is thought to be on unauthorised sites.   A report commissioned by Herefordshire Council from University College Chichester in September 2004 estimated 750 Romany travellers in the county.

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The *economic activity* of the Herefordshire population, as compared to England and Wales, was:

	Resident population aged 16 to 74 (percentage)	
Employed	63.4	60.6
Unemployed	2.7	3.4
Economically active full time student	1.9	2.6
Retired	16.1	13.6
Economically inactive student	2.9	4.7
Looking after home/family	6.2	6.5
Permanently sick or disabled	4.3	5.5
Other inactive	2.5	3.1

Source: ONS

Herefordshire has a higher proportion of people in employment and of retired people and lower proportions of unemployed people and students.

In terms of *household composition,* Herefordshire had 28.6% one person households, 38.7% married couple households, 7.8% cohabiting couple households, 8.2% lone parent households and 16.6% all other households.

The Quarterly Economic Report for August 2004 summarises the latest population forecasts through to 2011:

- Herefordshire's population is expected to increase by around 6000, an increase of 3.4% over 9 years which is the same rate of growth as expected for the national population over that time. However, Herefordshire's growth is expected to be more rapid in the early years of the forecast before slowing to match the overall growth rate in England and Wales
- Herefordshire's population of 0 to 17 years olds is expected to fall by 12.5% as compared to a fall of 5.5% overall for England and Wales
- Herefordshire's population of people aged 18 to 59 is expected to fall by 1.0% as compared to an increase of 2.3% overall for England and Wales
- Herefordshire's population of over 60's is expected to rise by 26.3% as compared to a rise of 16.1% overall for England and Wales

Herefordshire Council's Research Team used modelling software to estimate the growth in households in the county over the period 2002 to 2011. Parameters fed into the model came from census data, population projections, prevailing birth and death rates, Health Authority data (useful for tracing moves into and out of the county) and the likely number of homes to be built as identified in the emerging UDP. The conclusion was that 2980 of the planned housing growth of 3290 homes (91%) should be affordable.

2. Deprivation

On the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004, Herefordshire ranks between 192 and 209 out of 354 local authority areas in England (depending on the ranking method used), where 1 is the most deprived and 354 is the least. When Income Deprivation is considered, Herefordshire is the 114th most deprived local authority area. On the Employment Domain, the County ranks 120th. There are particular deprivation hot spots in parts of Hereford and Leominster.

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3. Tenure

The tenure of households in the 2001 census was:

	% Households	
	Herefordshire	England & Wales
Owned outright	36	29
Owned with a mortgage or loan	35	39
Shared ownership	0.86	0.64
Social rented	15	19
Private rented or other	13	12

Source: ONS

Herefordshire has a higher proportion of owner-occupied housing and a lower proportion of socially rented housing, which impacts on our ability to respond to current affordability trends associated with market pressures.

In Herefordshire as a whole, 38% of properties are in **Council Tax bands A and B**, but there is a great variation between urban and rural areas. In Hereford City, 60% of properties are in bands A and B although across the five market towns the proportion is 50% and in the rural parishes only 26% of properties are in these bands.

According to the 2001 census Herefordshire had 2.6% of homes vacant compared with 3.2% for England and Wales and 0.9% as second or holiday homes compared to 0.7%.

4. Housing Conditions

Social housing

The largest Housing Associations operating in Herefordshire have provided information on the 'decent homes' standard in relation to their stock:

- South Shropshire Housing Association owns 37 homes in Herefordshire, of which only 1 fails to comply with the standard
- Wyedean Housing Association owns 29 homes in Herefordshire, of which 4 fail to comply with the standard
- Elgar Housing Association owns 1162 homes in Herefordshire, of which 141 fail to meet the standard
- Bromford Housing Group has indicated that 97% of its homes reach the standard, but is unable to provide data on properties in Herefordshire specifically
- Herefordshire Housing Ltd has indicated that around 8% of its properties may fail to meet the standard.
- Marches Housing Association owns 2015 homes in Herefordshire, of which 98% are estimated to meet the standard

Private housing

Herefordshire Council published a comprehensive sample Private Sector Stock Condition Survey in 2001. This highlighted that there were 3650 unfit properties within the district - 6% of the private sector stock. Another 3600 properties were borderline unfit and the study identified that a £7.6 million investment would be required to alleviate unfitness and bring unfit properties up to an acceptable standard with a 30 year lifespan.

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The Council will commission a further survey during 2005 to monitor progress since 2001 and to gather information in relation to the new Health and Safety rating system and the decent homes targets for private housing. Following this survey, the Council intends to introduce a system of rolling sample surveys to ensure that information on housing conditions is updated annually. Preliminary calculations based on the 2001 House condition survey indicate that around 4900 vulnerable households were living in non-decent housing in the private sector at that time

5. Right to Buy

Affordable Homes - Losses and Gains
2000 - 2004

	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04
Losses	157	154	150	160
Gains	93	66	96	83
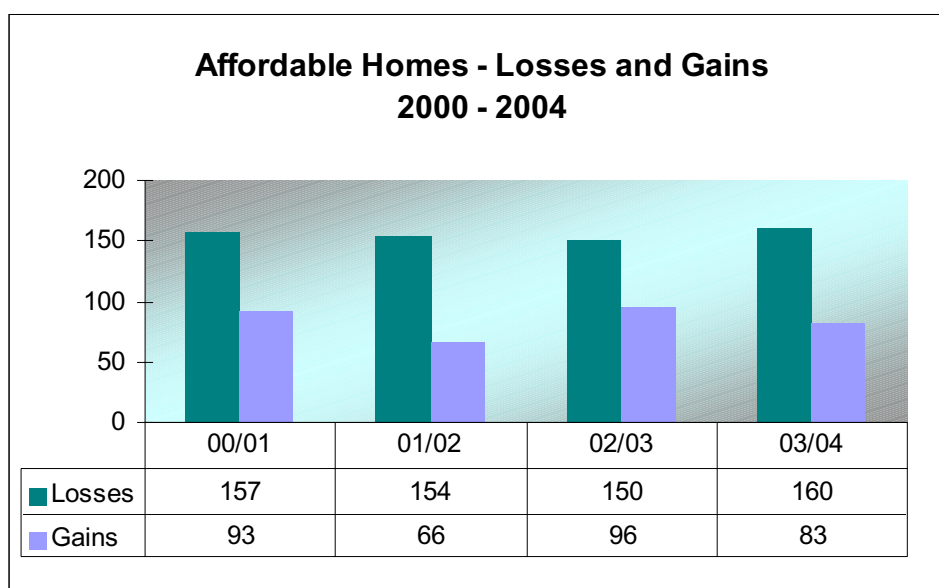
Source: HIP returns and data provided by RSLs

The Right-to-Buy legislation impacts upon the number of affordable homes in the county, reducing the total year by year. This chart shows the comparison between the number of homes lost through the Right-to-Buy scheme compared to the number of new affordable homes built or acquired during the same period. Since 2000, 283 homes in total have been sold under the scheme and this means that on average Herefordshire is losing 71 affordable homes per year.

6. Housing applicants

Herefordshire operates a choice-based lettings scheme and this is administered by Home Point which was launched in October 2002. The five largest housing associations in Herefordshire let their properties through the scheme: Bromford Housing Group, Elgar Housing Association, Herefordshire Housing Ltd, Marches Housing Association and St John Kemble Housing Association. Future direction on allocations policies and practices are set out in section 7.

There has been a considerable increase in the number of applicants registered with Home Point since its launch: 3200 in October 2002 to 7740 in March 2005. This has arisen partly from the increased transparency of the scheme and partly from the pressures on affordability from increasing house prices. The 7740 applications include 195 from under 18's and 1140 from over 60's.

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The relative housing needs of applicants are assessed and they are allocated to one of three priority bands:

Gold applicants	(high need)	2111
Silver applicants	(medium need)	3197
Bronze applicants	(low need)	2432

In March 2005 there were 252 priority status applicants within the Gold band - mainly homeless people who have overriding priority for lettings.

Of the 7740 applicants, 7055 (91%) are White with 135 (2%) from minority ethnic groups. A further 550 applicants (7%) either had data missing or chose not to answer this question on their application form.

The size of properties required by applicants is as follows:

Minimum number of bedrooms required	16-17	18-25	26-40	41-60	Over 60	Total
1 bedroom	151	1031	1144	1025	917	**4268**
2 bedroom	38	485	1007	569	201	**2300**
3 bedroom	5	73	671	323	20	**1092**
4 plus bedroom	1	1	51	25	2	**80**
Total	**195**	**1590**	**2873**	**1942**	**1140**	**7740**

55% of applicants require a minimum of one bedroom. However, there is a shortage of this size of properties especially for those under 60.

The number of properties advertised between October 2003 and September 2004 in different parts of Herefordshire is as follows:

Region	Oct-Dec 2003	Jan-Mar 2004	Apr-Jun 2004	Jul-Sep 2004	Total
Bromyard	5	9	11	25	**50**
Central Herefordshire	17	13	12	19	**61**
Golden Valley	7	7	6	11	**31**
Hereford City	96	103	88	88	**375**
Kingstone	12	8	7	10	**37**
Kington	4	8	10	8	**30**
Ledbury	13	16	35	36	**100**
Leominster	42	29	32	43	**146**
Ross-on-Wye	11	13	16	9	**49**
Weobley	3	10	8	11	**32**
Wigmore	0	6	2	0	**8**
Unknown	2	0	0	0	**2**
Total	212	222	227	260	**921**

991 properties were advertised in 2004-05 compared to 1035 for the previous year, reflecting a reduction in re-lets in affordable housing as the market tightens.

7.   Housing Needs

Herefordshire Council undertakes a rolling programme of housing needs surveys in its towns and villages. Since 2001, 22 such local needs surveys have been completed with a further 4 due for completion in 2005. Data from these surveys has been aggregated to provide an estimate of the distribution and levels of housing need in the County. The Herefordshire

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Housing Needs Survey 2004 suggests an overall need for 3763 new affordable homes in the next five years based on household formation:

- 1567 households in the rural parishes are estimated to need affordable housing, of which 1198 in their home parish and 369 elsewhere in the county
- 2196 households in Hereford City and the market towns are estimated to need affordable housing

As stated previously, it is estimated that 91% of new housing due to be provided within the UDP should be affordable. Distribution of this affordable housing will be as given in the UDP. As local development frameworks progress, Strategic Housing will work closely with Planning colleagues to reflect this level of need within the emerging document.

The Government has recently issued revised advice on housing needs research with an emphasis on an approach which allows data to be aggregated around housing markets rather than administrative boundaries. Herefordshire has proposed to develop and pilot a new approach, along with the other West Housing Market area authorities, for the West Midlands Rural Housing Network. Meetings with Planning staff will take place in 2005 following which the new approach will be piloted, reporting by March 2006.

The need for specialist and supported accommodation is considered within the Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010, but specific needs of people with learning disabilities will continue to be addressed within the update of the Learning Disabilities Housing Plan. The development of the Mental Health Housing Plan will more closely examine the housing needs of people experiencing mental health problems.

8. Homelessness

Local authorities have a duty to investigate the needs of homeless people and to provide temporary and permanent accommodation in certain circumstances. In Herefordshire, these services are currently contracted out to Herefordshire Housing Ltd although they will return to Council administration before 31 March 2006.

Homelessness in Herefordshire has been increasing dramatically in recent years:

	02/03	03/04	04/05
Applications	608	591	719
Acceptances	417	490	510
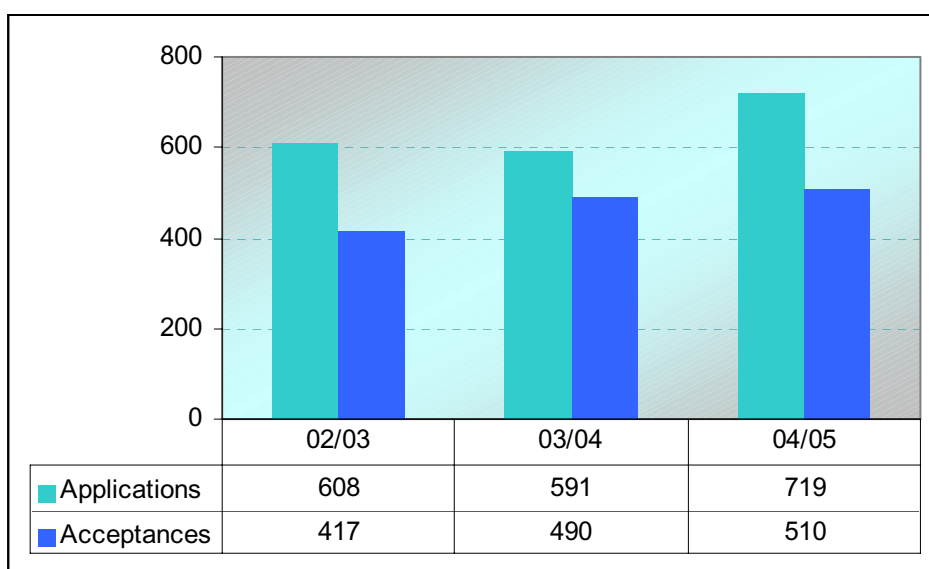
Source: P1E quarterly return to ODPM

This graph shows that, in the last three years:
- homelessness applications have risen by 18%
- homelessness acceptances have risen by 22%

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Compared to the whole of England and the West Midlands region, Herefordshire has a higher ratio of acceptances per 1000 households:

Total acceptances per 1000 households	
England	5.7
West Midlands	6.4
Herefordshire	6.8

Source: ODPM statistical release Jan – March 05

The three main causes of homelessness in Herefordshire are:

	England	West Mids	Herefordshire
Parents/relatives/friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	38%	36%	29%
Breakdown of relationship	20%	23%	30%
Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	13%	13%	19%

Source: ODPM statistical release Jan – March 05

Whilst Herefordshire echoes the national picture in terms of the three most common reasons for loss of last settled home, there is a very clear difference in the percentages within each of the three groups. Loss of accommodation with family or friends is lower than the regional and all-England figures, whereas breakdown of relationship and termination of private AST are significantly higher.

High house prices and low average incomes aligned with inward migration of older affluent households means a shortage of affordable housing and an according impact on homelessness. The inability to move homeless households into settled accommodation results in an increasing use of temporary accommodation.

Herefordshire has invested in high quality temporary supported accommodation but also recognises the increasing role of the prevention agenda in tackling homelessness.

9.   **House prices**

HM Land Registry collects data on house prices from all house sales in England and Wales and the data is published quarterly - the most recent figures were released on 11 May 2005 and cover the first quarter of 2005:

	Average house price	Annual % inflation
Herefordshire	**£196,434**	14%
West Midlands	£151,537	9.5%
England & Wales	£183,486	10%

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This graph shows how Herefordshire house prices have changed over the last four years, with a second line showing the average for England and Wales as a comparison.

Average Price of Property

Land Registry figures

──■── Hfds prices   ──◆── England & Wales prices
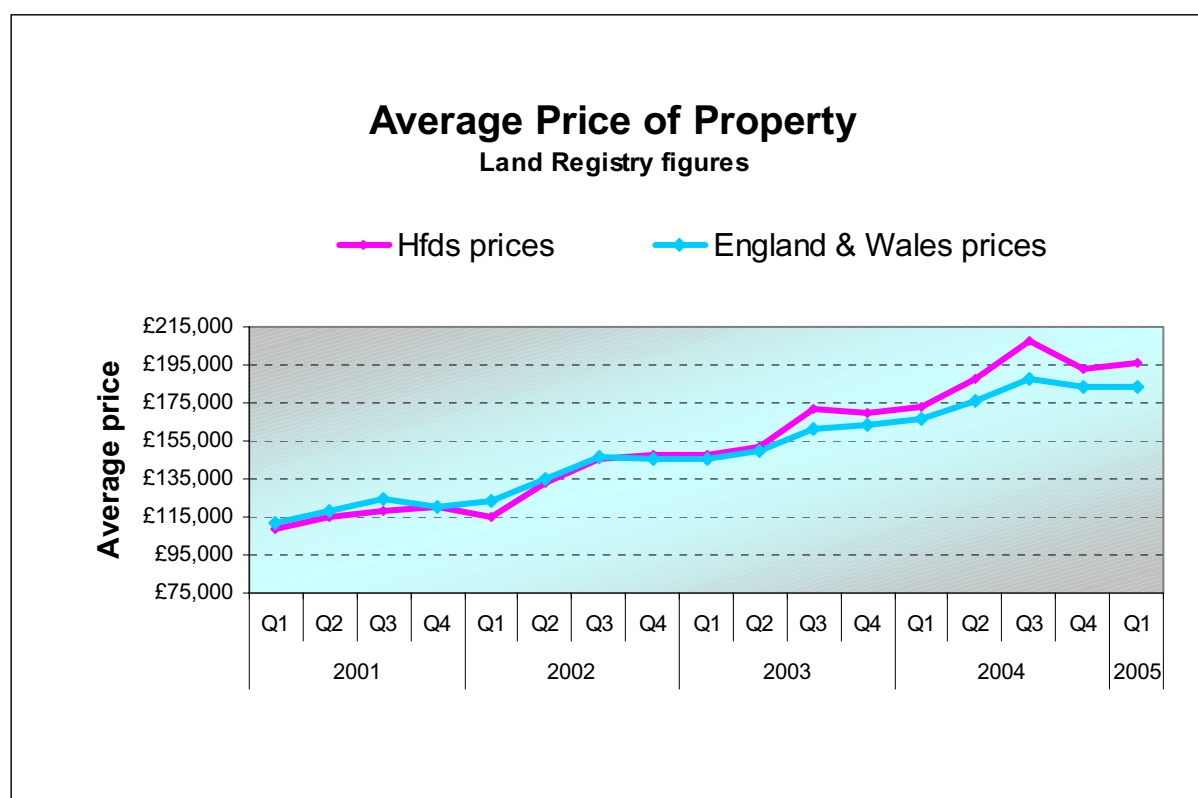
Average property prices March 2005

	Detached House	Semi-Detached House	Terraced House	Flat / Maisonette	Overall average price
Jan – Mar 04	£240,814	£147,477	£120,906	£92,694	£172,511
Oct - Dec 04	£269,882	£162,458	£135,154	£111,324	£193,095
Jan - Mar 05	£257,637	£174,837	£136,286	£114,428	£196,434
% change since previous quarter	-5%	7%	1%	3%	2%
Increase over the year	7%	19%	13%	23%	14%
Average for England & Wales Jan - Mar 2005	£288,791	£169,196	£141,728	£169,604	£183,486

All property types apart from detached houses showed some price rise since the previous quarter. This continues the recent trend where the slowing of price increases is more evident in expensive properties compared to cheaper properties.

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10.   Wages and incomes

Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2004, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, show:

- The median gross annual earnings in Herefordshire for 2004 were **£18,521** compared to £20,523 for the West Midlands region and £22,187 for England and Wales
- The median gross weekly pay rose by 10.6% in Herefordshire between 2003 and 2004 compared with a rise of 5.1% for the West Midlands region and 4.9% nationally over the same period
- Median earnings in Herefordshire rose to 91% of the regional average and 84% of the national average.
- Herefordshire ranks 13 out of 14 unitary authorities for median earnings in the West Midlands region

In Herefordshire:		
Average property price	**=**	**£ 196,434**
Median salary	**=**	**£ 18,521**
Ratio of house price to earnings	**=**	**10 : 1**

Key Action Points

- Pilot a new approach to housing need assessment based around housing market areas in partnership with West Housing Market Area authorities
- Commission private sector house condition survey and energy audit
- Develop rolling programme to update the house condition survey annually, with appropriate software
- Respond to the requirement to assess the housing needs of gypsies and travellers
- Continue rural housing needs assessments to inform opportunities through rural exception sites.
- Commission enhancements to Home Point reporting system to contribute to information on housing needs and demand
- Mapping of social housing supply and demand on the Geographic Information System (GIS)
- Explore potential partnerships linked to shared Housing Market Area opportunities

Key Partners

- West Housing Market area authorities
- Rural Housing Network
- Environmental Health & Trading Standards
- Planning Services
- Home Point
- Gypsy & Traveller Support Group

Further details of research and information sources are set out in Appendix 2.

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SECTION FIVE
ACHIEVE A BALANCED HOUSING MARKET

The top priority of the Herefordshire Housing Strategy is to achieve a balanced housing market. A balanced housing market is characterised by:

- An overall balance between supply and demand for housing, with reasonably stable house prices
- Choices of products, prices and tenures in a range of locations, to suit different types of households at different stages in their lives
- An adequate supply of different types of affordable housing
- Housing which contributes to community cohesion
- Housing which meets decent homes standards across the market

This section of the Housing Strategy is concerned with the provision of new housing in Herefordshire. It is crucial that planning and housing policies work together to ensure that:

- new housing provision meets current and future housing needs
- housing provision contributes to the sustainability of Herefordshire's city, towns and villages
- An appropriate proportion of all new housing meets specific needs and is affordable to local households who are unable to access the market
- Opportunities are taken to diversify the housing market

Issues, options and directions for the next three years

Housing supply

When Herefordshire was established as a unitary authority in 1998, it inherited four district-wide local plans from outgoing district councils, the Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan and the Hereford and Worcester Minerals Local Plan. The Council has now drafted a Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which is currently the subject of a Public Inquiry and should then be adopted in 2006.

In line with Regional Planning Guidance, the emerging Plan makes provision for the construction of 11,700 dwellings over the period 1996-2011, on sites identified as follows:

1996 - 2001	Anticipated dwellings from	2001 - 2006	2006 - 2011	Total
	2001 commitments	875	342	
	Windfalls	1365	1464	
	UDP allocations	1367	1294	
4993	**Total**	**3607**	**3100**	**11,700**

It is anticipated that around 6100 of these dwellings will be constructed on previously developed land (brownfield sites).

A three-tier housing location strategy has been adopted. 57% of new housing is to be provided in Hereford and the market towns, distributed as follows:

Hereford	3381	Ledbury	956
Leominster	972	Bromyard	480
Ross-on-Wye	674	Kington	275

26% will be built in the main villages (3044 dwellings) and 17% for rural housing needs in other areas (1918 dwellings - mainly on infill sites). In the smaller settlements, housing will be limited in size in an attempt to ensure that it meets the needs of local people on moderate incomes.

Affordable housing

As set out in section 4, it is evident that there is substantial need for additional affordable housing in Herefordshire. Housing market analysis shows this need has increased in the last two years as increasing numbers of households are finding it impossible to afford to buy properties.

The emerging UDP seeks to consolidate policies for affordable housing and ensure that a substantial proportion of new development meets this need. It states that *the provision of affordable housing will be sought through negotiations with developers of both allocated and windfall housing sites. Such housing should, wherever possible, be provided as a mix of affordable housing types, having regard to local needs and contribute to a mixed and balanced scheme overall in terms of dwelling size, type and affordability.*

On allocated and windfall sites above a defined threshold, a 35% proportion of affordable housing will be sought to meet the emerging UDP target of 2300 new affordable homes during the plan period. These site thresholds within the emerging UDP are:
- In Hereford and the market towns (excluding Kington) and other settlements above 3000 population - sites for 15 or more dwellings or more than 0.5 hectares
- Elsewhere in the County and in the main villages with less than 3000 population (including Kington) - sites for 6 or more dwellings or more than 0.2 hectares.

On allocated sites we anticipate that 652 of the 2360 dwellings to be built in Hereford and the market towns between 2001 to 2011 will be affordable; for the main villages, 103 affordable dwellings are anticipated out of a total of 301. The affordable housing yield on windfall sites will depend on how many of these sites exceed the relevant thresholds.

There is also provision for affordable housing to be developed in rural areas on land within or adjacent to settlements which would not normally be released for development. These are called *rural exception sites*.

Design and environmental sustainability

Supplementary Planning Guidance on Design and Development Requirements has been developed through the Herefordshire Partnership Housing Ambition Group and adopted by the Council in July 2004. The purpose of the guidance is to help secure high standards of layout and design from sustainable new developments, appropriate to their vicinity. The guidance includes checklists of key issues to be addressed in design including local context, general layout, health and safety and conservation of resources.

Affordable housing supplementary planning guidance

In order to address the difficulties of operating a range of policies for affordable housing inherited from the former district councils, Herefordshire Council has adopted updated Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the Provision of Affordable Housing. The Housing Ambition Group of Herefordshire Partnership was closely involved in developing this guidance. Affordable housing is defined as follows:

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Affordable housing is housing provided for rent or sale, at a price level which can be sustained by local people in housing need, where households are unable to access existing markets.

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

As a result of current market trends, it is appropriate that we find a balance of these two types of affordable housing within the affordable yield of the emerging UDP, while specific priorities will apply to some individual sites and locations. The SPG includes delivery of affordable housing through the planning system and defines affordability for low cost market, rented and shared ownership housing.

Success through Planning Gain

- 15 affordable homes to be provided in partnership with Persimmon and West Mercia Housing Group at Pentland Gardens, Hereford. 6 will be for rent and 9 for shared ownership
- 12 homes for rent and 12 for shared ownership will be provided in partnership with Lovells and Elgar Housing Association at Vine Tree Farm, Ross
- 6 Low Cost Market homes for sale at 46% discount will be provided at Weston Under Penyard
- 6 homes for rent and 6 for shared ownership are being built at Withington in partnership with Jennings Homes and Marches Housing Association
- The Council is currently involved in negotiating a further 297 affordable homes across the county at 8 different locations

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Market Towns Strategies

Strategies have been developed to address issues in the four market towns in Herefordshire - Leominster, Ledbury, Kington and Ross-on-Wye. These strategies include proposals for housing development and link to the Housing Strategy and the UDP.

Housing Association development programme

To supplement the provision of affordable housing through the Planning system, Herefordshire Council currently works closely with key Housing Associations as preferred development partners – Bromford Housing Group, Herefordshire Housing Ltd, Elgar, Marches, St John Kemble, Gloucestershire, Wyedean and South Shropshire Housing Associations. These RSLs work together with the Council through the Development Sub Group of the RSL Forum to plan and deliver a programme of rental, shared ownership and supported housing schemes to address the needs of the area. Between them, the Associations have expertise in the development and management of a range of housing schemes. The Council also works with specialist Housing Associations from time to time on

specific projects. These arrangements are to be reviewed in the light of the Housing Corporation's move towards long-term partnering with a limited number of Associations.

A provisional RSL development programme for 2004-05 to 2008-09 has been developed based on the priorities identified in the housing needs surveys, the Homelessness Strategy, the Supporting People Strategy and the Learning Disabilities Housing Plan. Details are as follows:

	NUMBERS OF DWELLINGS			
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
New build urban	35	10	36	30
New build (rural)	52	24	90*	42
Supported housing	12	115**	111	20+
Empty property	6	10	10	10
LCHO	40	54	54	50
Purchase and repair	5	0	0	5
Total	**150**	**213**	**301**	**157**

* includes regeneration proposals of 70 units
** includes 90 units of extra care housing for older people, funded by the Department of Health to be completed during 2007/08.

It should be stressed that the projects included in this programme are provisional and that funding sources have not been secured for the total programme. Anticipated funding sources are as follows:

	GRANT REQUIRED - £000s			
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Housing Corporation	4911	2566	6200	4910
Local authority	4168	3500	3500	3500
Department of Health	240	4600	2500	0
Total grant	**9,319**	**10,666**	**12,200**	**8,410**

Extra Care Housing Provision

Strategic Housing Services secured £4.6 million Department of Health funding to assist in the provision of a £14 million scheme to provide extra care housing in partnership with Elgar Housing Association and the Extra Care Charitable Trust.

The scheme is designed to help older people live more independently and to improve the health and well-being of the residents. It comprises a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom rented, shared ownership and market sale apartments and bungalows.

Architect's Drawing

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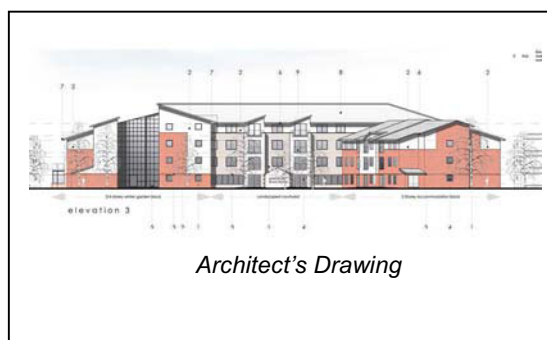
Affordable housing without grant

In addition to the grant-funded programme, the Council is increasingly negotiating affordable housing without grant. During 2003–2005, 22 units have been completed. For 2004-05, contributions totalling £731,160 have been agreed for offsite provision in relation to the development of three sites. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of units secured or being negotiated without grant and through the Planning system is:

Hereford City	278
Ross on Wye	77
Leominster	140
Rural	54
Total	**549**

Empty Property Strategy

The aim of the strategy is to highlight the issues of empty properties throughout the county and identify which mechanisms can be used to encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use to meet an identified housing need by:

- assessing the number and locality of empty properties
- understanding the causes of empty properties
- working in partnership with organisations and agencies to assist owners via housing schemes and grants
- promoting the options available to owners of empty properties
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Council's empty property service and schemes
- tackling weak areas of performance with detailed and specific targets

Gypsies and travellers

Herefordshire has a long tradition as one of the main areas of the country where gypsies and travellers live and work. The Council plans to develop a comprehensive strategy over the next 2-3 years to address the needs and aspirations of gypsies and travellers. This will involve the issue of sites for caravans and access to a range of services, particularly education. The proposed Strategy will respond to the new measures in the Housing Act 2004 which are to include gypsies and travellers in local housing needs assessment and the requirement to address their needs in Housing and Planning strategies.

Key achievements 2002-2004

- Secured over £4.8m Department of Health Funding for affordable housing for older people and those with learning disabilities living with older carers
- Provision of 21 self contained transitional units for single homeless people in Hereford City
- BVPI64 Top quartile 2003/4 for bringing empty properties back into use
- Utilised Home Point, choice based lettings in advertising Shared Ownership and low cost market housing options.
- Promoted Mortgage Rescue as a homelessness prevention measure
- Surveyed Private Rented landlords with regards to termination of tenancies in the private sector
- Provided transitional housing for people with mental health problems
- Implemented the SPG Provision of Affordable Housing 2001 (updated November 2004)
- Provided affordable housing through the planning system with no grant
- Expanded the Supported Housing for Young People Project (SHYPP) to Ross on Wye and Leominster
- Introduced Home Ownership options for those with Mental Health problems through Own Home (Advance)
- Introduced supported housing solutions and adapted properties through planning gain.
- Influenced the emerging UDP Housing Chapter

Key action points

- Work to promote affordable housing provision following adoption of Unitary Development Plan, following Public Inquiry
- Pursue affordable housing with Social Housing Grant for appropriate housing developments
- Pursue affordable housing without grant through planning gain
- Ensure that the housing association development programme is robust for the next three years
- Pursue funding bids to support the three-year housing associations development programme
- Investigate opportunities for home/work schemes, given high level of self-employment in Herefordshire
- Examine opportunities for projects involving Housing Corporation funding of private developers of social housing
- Review the Empty Property Strategy
- Provide a range of affordable housing options including rent/deposit scheme, private sector leasing scheme, key worker housing
- Develop strategy for affordable housing with other local authorities in the West housing market area
- Influence the Regional Housing Strategy to give priority to housing needs in areas with a shortage of affordable housing, like Herefordshire
- Identify a site for a demonstration project for Eco-homes/self build
- Investigate Housing Market Stress status
- Contribute housing perspective to the emerging Local Development Framework
- Investigate opportunities for intermediate market rental
- Develop annual reporting of the delivery of affordable housing against planning policy

- Investigate land banking in line with the development partnership arrangements
- Develop a strategy for improving the environment and tackling anti-social behaviour in social housing estates
- Develop Gypsies and Travellers Strategy in response to assessed needs
- Explore options for making the most efficient use of existing housing stock

Key partners

- Housing Corporation
- Housing Associations
- Private Developers/owners
- Private landlords
- Parish Councils
- Department of Health
- Supported housing providers
- Primary Care Trust
- Regional Housing Board and Regional Assembly
- Government Office for the West Midlands
- Environmental Health & Trading Standards
- Planning Services
- Home Point

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SECTION SIX
IMPROVING HOUSING CONDITIONS

This section looks at actions by the Council and its partners to improve housing conditions in Herefordshire. As indicated in section 4, the 2001 House Condition Survey shows that Herefordshire has a relatively serious problem of unfitness in the private sector and especially in some properties in the remoter rural areas.

Issues, options and directions for the next three years

Decent homes for social housing tenants

Information on Housing Associations' performance against the decent homes standard is set out in Section 4. The position will be reviewed annually.

Housing Renewal Policy

Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England & Wales) Order 2002, the Government required local authorities to develop and publish new housing renewal policies during 2003, in the light of greater flexibility around the use of grants and loans for housing improvement in the private sector. The Herefordshire Housing Renewal Policy 2003-2006 was published in April 2003. Parts I and II of the policy - the policy framework and priorities - will be reviewed in 2006 based on a three-year review cycle. Part III, concerned with the specific tools used to support housing renewal, is reviewed annually taking into account any changing local circumstances and feedback from users and stakeholders of the service.

The Policy identifies the key issues for private sector housing in Herefordshire as:

- an ageing population which will become more dependent upon local services
- rural isolation making it difficult for vulnerable groups to access services
- unfitness in rural areas
- a high level of borderline unfitness particularly in pre-1919 properties
- a high level of disrepair and a very high level of unfitness in the private rented sector
- low income levels and rising house prices making it difficult for young people to buy their home and for both young and old people to maintain sub-standard property
- fuel poverty, particularly amongst older people and low income households who tend to occupy the worst housing
- a large disparity in the ranking of wards in Herefordshire under the Multiple Deprivation Index
- an increasing pressure on budgets to provide adaptations for disabled people throughout all tenures to enable them to live independently in their own homes.

The Housing Renewal Policy proposes a range of actions to address these issues:

- Responding to complaints from private tenants, responding to referrals from agencies supporting vulnerable people and targeting a number of urban and rural wards which score highly on the deprivation index
- Helping homeowners take responsibility for the upkeep of their homes through inspections, the provision of advice and maintaining a list of approved contractors
- Ensuring that landlords keep privately rented housing in a reasonable state of repair and condition
- Providing financial assistance to homeowners who are least able to afford the upkeep of their properties and to stimulate investment from other sources
- Supporting the Home Improvement Agency Service in Herefordshire

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- Reviewing the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy annually
- Targeting assistance to the most vulnerable in the community by providing urgent repairs and adaptations
- Improving the energy efficiency in residential property

Resources for private sector renewal

The Council's Renewal Budget for 2005/06 is £1.3 million and we intend to achieve 100% spend of this budget, as in previous years. A similar level of investment is planned for each of the three years of this strategy.

This public funding is considerably enhanced by the investment of property owners from their own savings, or through borrowing or equity release schemes, often facilitated by the Home Improvement Agency (HIA). The HIA also provides assistance in accessing charitable funding for some people, for example where extensive work is involved. The current provider of the Home improvement Agency has given notice to withdraw the service by September 2005. This has provided an opportunity to review and reshape the service to meet the changing needs of older and disabled people in maintaining independent living.

Herefordshire Council also works in partnership with The Home Improvement Trust to offer home improvement and repair loans to homeowners aged 60 or over, or households with a disabled person of any age, under a scheme called Houseproud. Three types of loans are offered to suit the individual household's circumstances: capital release loans; interest only loans; and capital and interest repayment loans. The Council is working with other local authorities and the Houseproud scheme to develop loan products which can assist non-disabled households aged under 60.

You @ Home Partnership

The You@Home scheme provides a service to vulnerable people in their homes by carrying out essential or urgent works that have been identified and referred by health or other key workers. The service carries out necessary repairs quickly and efficiently at no cost to the occupier.

Eligible works under the scheme include:
- Measures to improve safety and security in the home
- Measures to improve heating and insulation
- Essential repairs and improvements
- Fast track minor adaptations
- Works to assist hospital discharge and prevent hospital admission

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Decent homes targets in the private sector

The Government has extended the decent homes targets for the social housing sector by introducing targets for vulnerable households in the private sector. Herefordshire's Housing Renewal Policy and range of housing renewal tools contained a significant element of targeting vulnerable people. Preliminary analysis indicates that in 2001, there were around 4900 vulnerable households in private sector non-decent housing. In the 2 years 2002 to 2004, the Council estimates that this number has been reduced by 3% through renewal activity. The Government has set a target of 65% of vulnerable households living in decent housing by 2006 and Herefordshire is currently at 63%. More up to date information will be collected in the new House Condition Survey planned for 2005, at which point specific targets will be set.

Neighbourhood renewal

Two of the lowest scoring wards under the index of multiple deprivation - Weobley and Belmont wards - have been selected for targeting of resources and a proportion of the housing renewal budget is set aside for this. Initiatives within these areas include special energy measures, environmental and security upgrading, maintenance advice and improving standards and tackling disrepair in a proactive way.

Area-based targeting was extended with the addition of two further wards in 2004/05 - Mortimer and Hereford Central.

Improving private rented housing

Although Herefordshire has a relatively small private rented sector, the evidence from the 2001 House Condition Survey indicates that there are high levels of unfitness and disrepair in that stock.

The Council is particularly active in working with private landlords to improve conditions with the use of enforcement action as necessary. The Council has published an enforcement policy framework which sets out clearly the standards expected. Customer surveys for 2002/03 indicated that 98% of tenants are satisfied with the enforcement service.

The Council estimates that there are around 300 houses in multiple occupation (HMO) in Herefordshire. The Council has run two HMO registration schemes since 1999 - one for Hereford City and one for other areas. These schemes involve regular inspections and enforcement of standards. The number of HMOs brought up to standard in recent years is:

2002-03	34
2003-04	38
2004-05	82

A new national licensing scheme for HMOs will be introduced as part of the implementation of the Housing Act 2004. The Council will align the existing HMO registration schemes with the licensing scheme, as well as taking on board the new Housing Health and Safety Rating system for assessing the impact of housing conditions on the occupiers or visitors to the property.

The Council is seeking to relaunch its accreditation scheme for private landlords to encourage good practice in management and maintenance of properties.

Energy efficiency

Improving the energy efficiency of housing is one of the central planks of the Housing Renewal Policy - for environmental reasons and to ensure that energy costs are minimised for householders, especially those on low incomes. Against a target of a 30% reduction in residential energy usage for the period 1996-2011, an actual reduction of 12.7% has been recorded after eight years - in line with average national performance. There is no standard methodology for calculating energy efficiency against the national target and all local authorities are using different methods to assess improvement, making true comparisons unreliable. A contractor based in Herefordshire installed basic energy efficiency measures in urban areas across all tenures, prior to the date from which baseline data was set under the Home Energy Conservation Act and against which all improvements are measured. The result is that rural properties now remain and these are more difficult and more expensive to improve. It is therefore increasingly difficult to demonstrate a significant improvement year on year. Through our success in attracting additional funding through the Energy Saving

Trust Innovation Project, we are now targeting the hard-to-heat housing sector, e.g. park homes and large detached rural properties.

Key elements of the strategy for energy efficiency in residential properties are:

- continue to implement the Special Energy Efficiency Scheme
- implement Energy Saving Trust Innovation Programme
- promoting and advising on Warm Front grants, Energy Saving Trust initiatives and supporting services provided by the Local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre
- incorporating energy efficiency works when other forms of assistance are provided
- implementing the fuel poverty strategy
- promoting the Health Through Warmth scheme in partnership with npower and the National Health Service.

Targeting Energy Efficiency

Since April 2002 Government has made it statutory for energy suppliers to invest in energy efficiency to meet a set energy saving target through their Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) programme.

In collaboration with Scottish Power the Herefordshire Council's Private Sector Housing 'Energy Efficiency' team have facilitated grants to 3500 dwellings from April 2002 to March 2004 using £1.189 million from the Local Authority renewal funding, £382K from the EEC programme and £579K from home owners private investment, totalling £2.150 million.

For the period April 2004 to March 2005 the Team targeted its programme to four wards that are deemed to be in the greatest need from Governments Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004. To date this has facilitated grants to over 500 dwellings using £75K of EEC funds.

Education and Energy Efficiency

One of the long-term goals is to set out a sustainable education package linking into the National Curriculum aimed at Key Stage Two children (7-11 year olds)

From inception to completion the project called 'MVM – EWISE' took two years to complete and involved collaboration between MVM Ltd, npower, Herefordshire Education Department and Environmental Sustainability Unit, Herefordshire Eco Schools, our Energy Efficiency Advice Centre and ourselves.

The initial capital cost of the project was £30K of which 10K was sought through sponsorship. Such was the success of the 'pilot' it has been decided that the project is to rolled out to all 83 Primary Schools in the County.

Now every year each school and child receives free educational training from the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre on environmental issues, climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy with free software and resources.

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Key achievements 2002-2004

- Launched You@Home "Repairs on Prescription Service" following award of Kick Start Funding
- Herefordshire's HECA Officer awarded West Midlands HECA Officer of the Year
- Renewal Policy launched and updated following review
- Launched House Proud loan scheme in partnership with Home Improvement Trust
- Improved 82 HMOs to Registration standard
- Domestic energy efficiency grants to 4000 private sector houses including access to £513k from Energy Suppliers funds.
- npower Health Through Warmth rural pilot
- Schools education and software project with £10k sponsorship
- Two Energy Savings Trust (EST) Innovations Feasibility Studies for energy efficiency and renewable energy
- EST Innovations Implementation Award for energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Health Through Warmth Community Fund
- DEFRA grant to develop formal Fuel Poverty Strategy with NEA (Fuel Poverty charity)
- Interest free loan scheme for energy efficiency and renewable energy measures

Key action points

- Annual monitoring of Housing Associations' progress in meeting decent homes targets
- Annual review of Part 3 of the housing assistance provided under the housing renewal policy
- Full review of Housing Renewal Policy (2006)
- Work with Home Improvement Trust to introduce loans for under 60's
- Set programme to achieve targets for decent homes for vulnerable people in the private sector following completion of the house condition survey
- Manage transition from the HMO registration schemes to HMO licensing
- Introduce Health and Safety rating system
- Re-launch landlords code of conduct (accreditation scheme)
- Continue to address energy efficiency targets
- Implement new Home Improvement Agency arrangements
- Develop Housing/Health links
- Develop a marketing and information strategy on home improvement and energy efficiency services
- Develop a register of adapted properties in all tenures

Key partners

- You @ home
- Health Through Warmth
- Energy agencies and Energy Advice Centre
- Occupational therapists and other health professionals
- Community Safety Partnership, Home safety Check and the Fire Service
- Home Improvement Trust
- Housing Associations
- Private landlords Forum
- Energy suppliers - npower, Scottish Power

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SECTION SEVEN
HOUSING CHOICE AND HOUSING SUPPORT
FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The second priority of this Housing Strategy is to improve the range of choice of accommodation for people in housing need and the range of accommodation and quality of services for vulnerable people who may need support on a short term or long term basis. Herefordshire has a strong record of partnership working to meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable groups. In this area, the Housing Strategy links closely with the Homelessness Strategy and the Supporting People Strategy.

Issues, options and directions for the next three years

Home Point

As set out in section 4, Home Point is the choice-based lettings system for affordable housing in Herefordshire, operated through a partnership with the Council and with a Management Board comprising representatives of the Council and the five participating Housing Associations. Launched as one of the national pilot schemes in October 2002, Home Point has been highly successful in clearly showing what affordable homes are available and enabling applicants to apply for the home they prefer. The number of applicants on Home Point's register has risen from 3200 at the start to nearly 7740 in March 2005.

There are a range of issues and related policy and operational initiatives planned for the next three years:

- One of the concerns with choice-based lettings is that vulnerable households may be disadvantaged in that applicants need to check properties being advertised and bid for them with some understanding of their chances of success. Home Point proposes to strengthen procedures in this area by contacting applicants who have not made any bids during the year. Home Point will continue to explore options for employing an Advocate worker who will liaise with vulnerable people and their support workers and/or relatives.
- Home Point wishes to extend its operations to take in lettings of all Housing Associations in Herefordshire. Depending on the national directions for choice-based lettings, Herefordshire would also be keen to explore the possibility of joining up with adjacent local authority areas in a sub-regional scheme.
- There is some concern from key partners about the number of homeless people with priority status being housed through the scheme. From October 2002 to September 2003, 296 priority card holders accepted offers out of a total of 756 acceptances (39%). For the twelve months to September 2004, the equivalent figures were 381 out of 770 (49%). This reflects the increase in the number of homeless people being accepted for rehousing and is in line with the experience of neighbouring rural authorities. However, Home Point partners recognise that giving priority card holders an unlimited period of time in which to bid for their preferred property gives them an unfair advantage and this also adds to pressures on temporary accommodation. Home Point partners now propose to limit the period in which priority status applicants are able to bid to 16 weeks. After this period, the Council may discharge its duty through the allocation of a property without a choice.
- The data retrieval systems are to be improved. Home Point already provides a comprehensive and informative set of data in its quarterly monitoring statistics, but the enhancements will include analysis of current tenure of applicants, current area

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of residence and information on income levels. There will also be greater analysis of applicants and lettings trends by ethnic origin.

- Home Point has developed the range of housing schemes it advertises to include shared ownership and low cost market sales and will further investigate opportunities to market other Council initiatives including rent deposit/guarantee schemes. The Home Point approach may also be used for lettings in the new Extra Care schemes currently being constructed, which will be a significant innovation.

- There is some concern that different Housing Associations operate different policies on the size of properties (number of bedrooms) that particular households qualify for. This can lead to confusion for applicants and policies need to be aligned.

- A further concern is that single people and childless couples under 60, who make up the largest group of applicants, have access to a relatively small pool of lettings. Consideration will be given to a more flexible approach to lettings to give these groups access to a larger range of options.

- Given the increasing number of applicants, there are large numbers of households on the register who have no realistic chance of obtaining affordable housing for a lengthy period. Home Point would like to develop its advisory services to help such households explore other options. This housing options approach is increasingly prevalent: development in Herefordshire will align Home Point and the homelessness prevention activities operated by Herefordshire Housing Ltd on behalf of the Council.

Homelessness

Herefordshire has a strong reputation for the quality and scope of its homelessness and housing advice services, with these services getting a 3 star rating from the Audit Commission in 2002. Since 2002 the services have been contracted out to Herefordshire Housing Ltd although they will return to Council administration before March 2006. In May 2005, Herefordshire Council's Cabinet considered a report on future arrangements for the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service. Key issues for the future of the service were:

- The need for more temporary accommodation in the short term to reduce the unacceptable reliance on B&B
- To meet the Government's target of reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010
- To restructure the service to allow staff to concentrate more effectively on homelessness prevention

Cabinet considered three options:

1. to operate the services in-house
2. to undertake a more comprehensive options appraisal
3. to contract out services to another provider through a formal tendering process

In the light of recent research on the provision of these services in stock-transfer authorities and given the urgency of addressing the issues set out above, Cabinet approved the option of operating the services in-house. A project plan has been established to achieve this by April 2006.

There are increasing pressures which require responses in both this Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy (see below). Herefordshire is seeing increasing numbers of applications and acceptances of homeless people associated with:

- less stable family circumstances and relationships leading to homelessness
- 16 and 17 year olds have been added to the priority needs groups
- increasing house prices forcing newly-forming households to live with friends/relatives or rent privately and become exposed to homelessness when these arrangements come to an end

- to a limited extent the transparency of the Home Point scheme may lead people to conclude that their only hope of being housed in a reasonable property in a reasonable time to present as homeless.

As required by the Homelessness Act 2002, Herefordshire Council in partnership with the Herefordshire Homelessness Forum undertook a Homelessness Review and published a Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008. The priorities for action in the Homelessness Strategy are:

- Reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless from the parental home
- Reduce the numbers of repeat homeless households
- Ensure young people leaving care do not become homeless
- Ensure that women and their children with more complex issues arising from exposure to domestic violence have access to appropriate housing and support
- Implement prevention measures to reduce terminations of Assured Shorthold Tenancies
- Ensure that the housing management practices of Housing Associations work to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness
- Ensure there is sufficient support available for people who are, or who may be, homeless
- Identify and reduce the numbers of rough sleepers in the county and *hidden homeless* households
- Ensure the provision of high quality homeless advice and more effective promotion of services aimed at homelessness prevention
- Address the employment and training needs of homeless people
- Reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation through the provision of alternative supported temporary accommodation
- Encourage agencies to work together more effectively

The Homelessness Strategy has a comprehensive Action Plan, which is to be monitored and reviewed annually by the Homelessness Forum.

There are two key issues which should be specifically highlighted in this Housing Strategy:

- There is an immediate and pressing need to develop alternative forms of temporary accommodation not just for families with children but for all households. Young single people are especially vulnerable in bed and breakfast. Agencies in Herefordshire have made significant progress in this direction. However, with increased levels of applications and increasing lengths of stay in temporary accommodation, there is an urgent need to develop more private leasing capacity.
- The *Homes for All* Plan from the Government sets a target of reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010. This will be particularly challenging in Herefordshire in view of the distinct shortage of affordable housing unless large reductions in homelessness acceptances are achieved through prevention activities. Herefordshire needs to combine its acknowledged high quality services to homeless people with equally effective activities to prevent homelessness and encourage households to consider other housing options. At present this type of work is swamped by the reactive casework associated with high levels of homeless applications. More emphasis must be given to homelessness prevention and other housing options work.

Pomona Place

Pomona Place opened in August 2004 and is one of the Council's key initiatives to address the growing problem of homelessness in Herefordshire.

The scheme was developed in partnership with Stonham Housing Association on the site of the former Wooldridge Court Hostel. There are 21 units of self-contained, furnished accommodation a communal lounge, IT training suite and laundry facilities.

The building is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Low level, housing-related support services provided by Stonham Project Workers are available to all tenants.

Stonham staff work with the Homeless Agency and Home Point to support tenants to move on to settled accommodation in a planned way.

Since the scheme opened, 50 homeless people have been provided with accommodation at Pomona Place. Over 20 people have been supported to move into settled housing.

Shelter "Homeless to Home"

Homeless to Home is one of the Council's key initiatives to address the growing problem of homelessness in Herefordshire.

Three Homeless to Home pilot schemes developed and provided by Shelter have achieved national recognition for their success in tenancy sustainment.

The efficacy of Shelter's approach has resulted in tenancy sustainment being achieved within an average of 9 months.

Homeless to Home will support approximately 70 homeless families per year in Herefordshire.

A local manager was recently appointed and the service will commence in Summer 2005.

Rough Sleepers

The need for a rough sleepers count was identified in the Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008. Following extensive consultation with parish councils, local police and homelessness support agencies, 33 potential locations were identified where rough sleepers may be found. The count was undertaken in April 2004. Despite Herefordshire having significant homelessness problems, no rough sleepers were officially found during the count although there was evidence to suggest that potentially three people were sleeping rough on that night.

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Supporting People

In April 2003, the Government introduced the Supporting People scheme to plan and fund housing linked to support services for vulnerable people. In Herefordshire, the Supporting People Partnership comprises the Council, the NHS Primary Care Trust and West Mercia Probation Service. The scheme is administered by Herefordshire Council.

The funding for Supporting People in Herefordshire is currently £7.4 million annually, which funds the delivery of services under 97 contracts through 43 providers. There are currently 2500 people in receipt of Supporting People services. Funding for 2005–06 was announced in November 2004 and amounts to £6.8 million. However, the announcement of the ODPM's Distribution Formula for Supporting People Grant in December 2004 has created severe difficulties for the local partnership. If implemented as it stands, the Distribution Formula will mean that Herefordshire will be the seventh most adversely affected authority in England, facing a loss of 25% of grant (£1.85 million) between 2005 and 2010 and over the long term a loss of at least 58% (£4.2 million). Herefordshire has pursued a robust approach to obtaining value for money from providers alongside rigorous service standards. The programme has set clear strategic priorities and revenue funding released through the Review process will be invested in priority services. However, the proposals in respect of the Distribution Formula mean that the local Supporting People Partnership will face very hard decisions over the coming years. Representations are being made through appropriate channels about the extreme nature of the redistribution proposed. The ODPM will also be asked for guidance on how Herefordshire can achieve national targets in a climate of drastically reduced funding and significant service contraction.

The Supporting People Strategy for 2005 to 2010 has been completed. Strategic priorities for 2005-06 - subject to funding - are:

- Single homeless people - intensively managed, temporary supported housing
- Young people leaving care - transitional supported accommodation
- People with a learning disability - move-on accommodation for people needing to live independently from older carers; shared ownership schemes, remodelling of a registered home to provide self-contained units of supported housing
- Older people - housing-related support service
- People with mental health problems - shared ownership housing
- Homeless people - pilot floating support scheme to prevent homelessness
- Travellers and gypsies - further development of Traveller Liaison scheme
- Young offenders - pilot supported lodgings scheme
- Future priorities for development include the expansion of services to victims of domestic violence

Older People

As indicated in Section 4, Herefordshire has a population with a higher proportion of older people than the national average and an increase in the numbers and proportion of older people is predicted for the future. This has implications for housing strategy and some of the key responses are:

- Commissioning 100 extra care units to be completed in 2007 developed through a combination of private, charitable, local authority and Department of Health funding
- A review of the range of sheltered housing capacity in Herefordshire operated by housing associations and other providers with a view to modernising provision
- Considerable focus on the needs of older people in private sector renewal
- Participation of Strategic Housing services in the development of the Older Persons Strategy

Learning Disability Housing Plan 2003-06

A specific plan has been developed to address the housing needs of people with learning disabilities. In this Housing Strategy, the plan is reflected through the Supporting People priorities and some of the projects in the Housing Associations' development programme.

The Plan proposes a series of actions structured around six key objectives:

- Increase opportunities for supported living arrangements
- Reduce the proportion of people living in residential care
- Meet the needs of people living with older carers
- Ensure accommodation needs of young people are fed into the planning system
- Provide information and advice for service users and families
- Ensure the quality of services is monitored and address where needed

Other plans

We will develop a Mental Health Housing Strategy and an Offenders Housing Strategy during 2005-06.

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Key achievements 2002-2004

- Launch of Home Point in October 2002
- Development of Pomona Place - supported temporary accommodation for homeless people
- Commissioning Shelter Homeless to Home scheme
- Six units of transitional accommodation for people with mental health difficulties at Etnam Street, Leominster
- Secured funding for the Extra Care housing scheme
- Robust review process for Supporting People schemes releasing funding for new priorities
- 2500 people assisted in Supporting People schemes
- Learning Disability Housing Plan

Key action points

- Introduce policy and operational changes to the Home Point scheme
- Implement the revised allocations policy
- Implement the Action Plan of the Homelessness Strategy
- Conduct review of the Homelessness Strategy
- Review temporary accommodation capacity for homeless people
- Develop specification and implement new homelessness and housing advice service, including *housing options* approach for housing advice and homelessness prevention
- Introduce Homelessness Prevention workers as part of the new service
- Implement the priorities from the Supporting People Strategy
- Implement the Action Plan from the Learning Disability Housing Plan
- Develop the Mental Health Housing Plan
- Review Sheltered Housing in Herefordshire and implement the outcomes of the Review
- Investigate the introduction of an education programme for homelessness prevention
- Develop the capacity for independent housing advice
- Develop additional crisis accommodation and sanctuary schemes for domestic violence victims
- Develop incentives for households in social housing to release larger homes
- Develop joint protocols for people leaving supported housing

Key partners

- ODPM
- Supporting People (Commissioning Body, Providers & Core Strategy Group)
- Home Point Partnership
- RSLs
- Homelessness Forum
- Shelter
- Women's Aid
- Extra Care Charitable Trust
- PCT
- Social Care (Adults)

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SECTION EIGHT
RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

Addressing the housing needs of the area is a major priority for Herefordshire Council and for the agencies involved in the Herefordshire Partnership. It is recognised that the scale of the housing problems to be addressed exceeds the Council's own financial capacity - hence the strong emphasis on partnerships which generate additional resources evidenced throughout this Strategy.

Outside the Council's own resources, key funding sources to address housing issues include:

- Central Government funding for the region, with recommendations developed by the West Midlands Regional Housing Board - these have been determined for 2005/06; priorities for 2006/07 onwards will be determined in the light of the new Regional Housing Strategy to be published in 2005
- Housing Corporation funding for housing associations and (following the Housing Act 2004) private developers delivering affordable housing. The Council's Capital development programme in Section 5 includes a substantial level of funding by the Housing Corporation and the Department of Health.
- Affordable housing achieved without grant funding through planning gain agreements (Section 5)
- Financial contributions in lieu of on site provision of affordable housing - currently standing at £567,000, with a further £164,000 anticipated
- Housing association funding invested in their housing stock to achieve the decent homes standard (Section 6)
- Personal savings and loans for home improvement invested by homeowners and private landlords, including loans secured through Houseproud (Section 6)
- Supporting People revenue funding for supported housing projects; linked to capital funds for these projects from the Council, Housing Corporation and Department of Health (Section 7)
- Partnership funding with energy suppliers for energy efficiency and affordable warmth initiatives. (Section 6)

Revenue spending

Whilst the revenue budget is a matter of determination locally by elected members, the budget is influenced significantly by central government. At a local level, the Council undertakes, through Cabinet, Budget Panel and Strategic Monitoring Committee, a rigorous examination of the Council's spending needs prior to the budget setting meeting of full Council in March of each year.

As part of the 2005/06 budget process, the Council carried out various consultation exercises with tax payers, including

- Council Tax Roadshows held in each market town and Hereford city
- Countywide Council Tax survey distributed to all households
- Direct consultation with a representative sample of over 500 households.

The total Strategic Housing budget for 2005/06 was set at £1,432,000. In June 2005 Cabinet also agreed to redirect £300,000 into the homelessness revenue budget. Furthermore, an improvement plan for homelessness was approved by Cabinet in July 2005 which incorporates Invest to Save options of £120,000.

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The Revenue budget and projections for the three years of the Strategy is shown below.

| Strategic Housing Service Area | 2003-04 | | 2004-05 | | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
	BUDGET £	ACTUAL £	BUDGET £	ACTUAL £	BUDGET £	PROPOSED BUDGET £	PROPOSED BUDGET £
ENABLING ACTIVITIES	207	222	285	294	279	282	287
PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING	326	411	322	212	274	279	283
HEAD OF STRATEGIC HOUSING	429	243	428	339	211	214	217
HOMELESSNESS	398	390	383	838	817	403	408
HOMEPOINT	-2	-3	0	-3	0	0	0
SUPPORTING PEOPLE	129	129	122	95	156	158	161
Total	1,487	1,392	1,540	1,775	1,737	1,336	1,356

1. Homelessness includes increase in Bed and Breakfast cost.
2. The overspend in 2004-05 was due to higher than expected Homelessness costs.
3. 2005-06 Homelessness Budget includes a one-off budget increase of £420,000
4. Strategic Housing contribution to Homepoint included within Homelessness.
5. Figures above exclude defered charges.

Capital spending

The Corporate Capital Strategy sets out the framework and mechanisms for the Councils allocation and use of capital funding. It is designed to maximise the use of resources to meet legal obligations and drive service improvements by reference to a number of strategies including the Herefordshire Plan, the Corporate Plan and the strategic plans for Education, Transport and Housing.

The Council has a Corporate Capital Strategy Group (CSG) responsible for strategic capital issues. Elected Members are involved at various stages of the capital strategy process, having input when assessing internal bids for prudential funding and reports are submitted to Cabinet, Strategic Monitoring Committee (SMC) and service-related Programme Panels at planning and monitoring stages. The CSG reports to Chief Executives Management Team and receives strategic guidance on an ongoing basis.

The Assistant County Treasurer chairs the CSG. The Head of ICT and the Head of Business Services (Social Care and Strategic Housing) together with the Property Services Manager are the members of the group. The group is supported by the Principal Financial Policy Manager and the Capital Accountant. The working group currently meets bi-monthly and is responsible to the Chief Executives Management Team for: -

• Developing and maintaining the Council's medium term corporate Capital Strategy.

• Developing the Council's annual capital programme including resource allocation, project selection and monitoring arrangements.

- Developing and maintaining the Council's medium term corporate Asset Management Plan.

- Developing and maintaining the Council's corporate property acquisitions and disposals policy.

- Promoting capital strategy and asset management issues throughout the Council

The Capital Strategy Group is specifically responsible for developing strategic recommendations to both the Chief Executives Management Team and to Cabinet on the allocation of capital resources to projects and service areas, including housing.

The Capital Programme for the three years covered by this strategy is shown below.

	Outturn 2003-04	Outturn 2004-05	Budget 2005-06	Estimate 2006-07	Estimate 2007-08	
Budgets:	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Private Sector Housing	1,544	1,411	1,305	1,160	1,160	
Disabled Facilities Grants - Discretionary	5	15	175	20	140	
Disabled Facilities Grants - Mandatory	375	482	525	525	525	
Rent allowance capitalisation	370					
Affordable Housing Grants	1,639	1,191	3,500	3,500	3,500	
Extra Care Housing Development			4,600	2,500		
Total Budget to be Financed	**3,933**	**3,099**	**10,105**	**7,705**	**5,325**	
Financed By:	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Supported Capital Expenditure - Revenue	1,533	2,072	2,080	774	581	*1*
Prudential Borrowing			180			*2*
Department of Health			4,600	2,500		*3*
Capital Receipts Reserve	2,202	461	2,690	4,116	4,429	*4*
Learning Disability Development Fund			240			
Disabled Facilities Grant	198	564	315	315	315	*5*
Total Financing	**3,933**	**3,097**	**10,105**	**7,705**	**5,325**	
Capital Receipts Reserve Position:	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
B/Fwd as at 1 April	(15,779)	(11,735)	(12,241)	(11,085)	(8,155)	
Capital Receipts expected - RTB		(1,358)	(698)	(668)	(638)	*6*
Capital Receipts applied	2,202	461	2,690	4,116	4,429	
Internal Transfers	1,842	391	-	-	-	
C/Fwd as at 31 March	**(11,735)**	**(12,241)**	**(10,249)**	**(6,801)**	**(3,010)**	

In addition, £567,160 financial contributions have been received from developers in lieu of on-site affordable housing, with a further £164,000 anticipated.

Assumptions made for the funding of Strategic Housing Capital Programme (corresponding with the numbers in the final column of the above table)

1. The West Midlands Regional Housing Board's *Strategy for allocating Single Regional Housing Pot* sets out the strategy for allocating housing funds in the future. Each authority will have to bid for funding and could in theory receive no allocation. A safety net is therefore provided to guarantee a minimum SCE of 40% in 2006-07 and 30% in 2007-08 of the 2005-06 HIP SCE allocation for each Authority. The minimum figure is shown in the table above. It is a significant risk to the viability of a longer term Strategic Housing capital programme should funding not be allocated to Herefordshire above these minimum levels.

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2. Strategic Housing may bid for internal funding from Herefordshire Council via the unsupported Prudential Borrowing mechanism. However Herefordshire Council's Capital Strategy is to use such funding for areas other than Housing, Transport and Education. It is therefore unlikely that Prudential Borrowing would be used to support Strategic Housing.

3. The Department of Health has committed to providing significant funding towards the development of Extra Care Housing. Only the sums committed are shown above.

4. The Strategic Housing capital programme is heavily reliant on using capital reserves. These capital reserves have resulted from historical Right to Buy receipts together with the significant receipt from the disposal of the housing stock and a share of on-going Right to Buy receipts. The Corporate Capital Strategy is to ringfence these receipts for use by Strategic Housing.

5. It is assumed that a similar level of Disabled Facilities Grant will be provided in future years. If this is not the case this will be funded from Strategic Housing capital reserves.

6. As part of the transfer of the Housing Stock to Herefordshire Housing Limited it was agreed that a share of future Right to Buy receipts would be paid to the Council each year until 2032. The receipts from this are subject to a formula based on the sale price and number of properties sold. Although property values are forecast to increase, the number of properties sold is expected to decrease and therefore the expected receipt will diminish over time.

SECTION NINE: ACTION PLAN

	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
Priority 1: Achieve a more balanced housing market					
1	High	Influence the Regional Housing Board to give priority to housing needs in areas with shortages of affordable housing such as Herefordshire	On-going	Head of Strategic Housing	Staff resources
2	High	Pursue affordable housing with Social Housing Grant appropriate housing developments	100 dwellings per year	Enabling Manager	Capital Reserves £10.5m over 3 years
3	High	Pursue affordable housing without grant through planning gain	05/06:40 dwellings 06/07 61 dwellings 07/08 231 dwellings	Enabling Manager	Developers funds
4	High	Ensure that the housing association development programme is robust for the next three years	Next programme April 2006, then review annually	Enabling Manager	Staff resources
5	High	Pursue funding bids to support the three-year housing associations development programme	Bids in November 2005 for 2006/08	Enabling Manager	ADP / Housing Corporation plus Capital reserves as identified in Action Point 2 above
6	High	Adopt Unitary Development Plan, including housing policies, following Public Inquiry	2006	Forward Planning Manager	Staff resources
7	Medium	Contribute housing perspective to the emerging Local Development Framework	2007/08	Head of Strategic Housing Enabling Manager	Staff resources
8	Medium	Develop strategy for affordable housing with other local authorities in the West housing market area	March 2006	Head of Strategic Housing	Revenue budget Staff resources
9	Medium	Seek to pilot new approach to housing need assessment in partnership with the West Housing Market Area Authorities	Pilot by March 2006 Implement in new housing needs assessments from April 2006 onwards	Enabling Manager	Revenue budget – Enabling
10	Medium	Investigate opportunities for intermediate market rental and increase role of private rented sector	2007/08	Enabling Manager	Staff resources

Priority 1: Achieve a more balanced housing market

	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
11	Medium	Examine opportunities for projects involving Housing Corporation funding of private developers of social housing	Investigate options with Housing Corporation and developers for November 2005 bids	Housing Ambition Group Head of Strategic Housing	ADP / Housing Corporation
12	Medium	Investigate land banking by housing associations, in line with the development partnership arrangements	Strategic directions by March 2006	Enabling Manager Development sub-group	Staff
13	Medium	Continue rural housing needs assessments to inform opportunities through rural exception sites.	5 per year	Enabling Manager	Revenue budget – Enabling
14	Medium	Investigate opportunities for home/work schemes, given high level of self-employment in Herefordshire	2006/07	Enabling Manager	
15	Medium	Commission enhancements to Home Point reporting system to contribute to information on housing needs and demand	November 2005	Home Point Manager	Capital Reserves
16	Medium	Investigate Housing Market Stress status	October 05	Head of Strategic Housing	Staff resources
17	Medium	Develop annual reporting of the delivery of affordable housing against planning policy	By April 2006 for report on 2005/06	Head of Strategic Housing Forward Planning Manager	Staff resources
18	Medium	Identify a site for a demonstration project for Eco-homes/self build	Start on site 2007/08	Enabling Manager	Staff resources
19	Low	Review the Empty Property Strategy	March 2006	Empty Property Officer	Revenue – Enabling Staff resources
20	Low	Map social housing supply and demand on GIS	Fully operational by March 2006	Enabling Manager	Revenue budget – Enabling
21	Low	Develop a strategy for improving the environment and tackling anti-social behaviour in social housing estates	Strategy directions and good practice guidance by March 2006	RSL Forum Housing Management sub-group	Staff resources

Priority 2: Address increasing levels of homelessness

	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
22	High	Develop specification and implement new in-house homelessness and housing advice service, including 'housing options' approach for housing advice and homelessness prevention	New service in place April 2006	Head of Strategic Housing Project Manager	Revenue budget – Homelessness (Net of Housing Benefit) 05/06 £420,000 06/07 £309,000 07/08 £318,270 Staff resources
23	High	Introduce new homelessness prevention workers as part of new service	April 2006	Head of Strategic Housing Project Manager	Revenue budget – Homelessness Prevention Fund included in Action Point 22 above
24	High	Implement the Action Plan of the Homelessness Strategy	Ongoing	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator	Revenue budget – Homelessness Staff resources £28,000
25	High	Conduct review of the Homelessness Strategy	by March 2006	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator	Staff resources as above
26	High	Introduce policy and operational changes to the Home Point scheme	November 2005	Home Point Manager	Staff resources
27	High	Implement the revised allocations policy	November 2005	Home Point Manager	Revenue budget – Home Point Capital Budget £40,000 Staff resources
28	High	Review temporary accommodation capacity for homeless people	by March 2006	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator	Staff resources
29	High	Reduce use of B&B for families with children to nil	March 2006	Head of Strategic Housing	Revenue budget – Homelessness Capital budget – Enabling: See Action Point 2.
30	High	Reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 10% per annum	30% by March 2008	Head of Strategic Housing	Staff resources Capital budget – development – see Action Point 2 Supporting People RSL capital Housing Corporation / ADP
31	Medium	Develop additional crisis accommodation and sanctuary schemes for domestic violence victims	with DV Forum by March 2006	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator	Supporting People Housing Capital development budget Capital budget – Private Sector
32	Medium	Support development of Housing Market Area joint working on homelessness	June 2006	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator	Staff resources
33	Medium	Develop the capacity for independent housing advice	Part of options appraisal for new service	Head of Strategic Housing Project Manager	Revenue budget – Homelessness

Priority 2: Address increasing levels of homelessness

	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
34	Medium	Develop incentives for households in social housing to release larger homes	March 2006	Enabling Manager	Capital budget – Enabling / Staff resources
35	Medium	Investigate the introduction of an education programme for homelessness prevention	December 2005	Head of Strategic Housing	Revenue budget – Homelessness / Staff resources

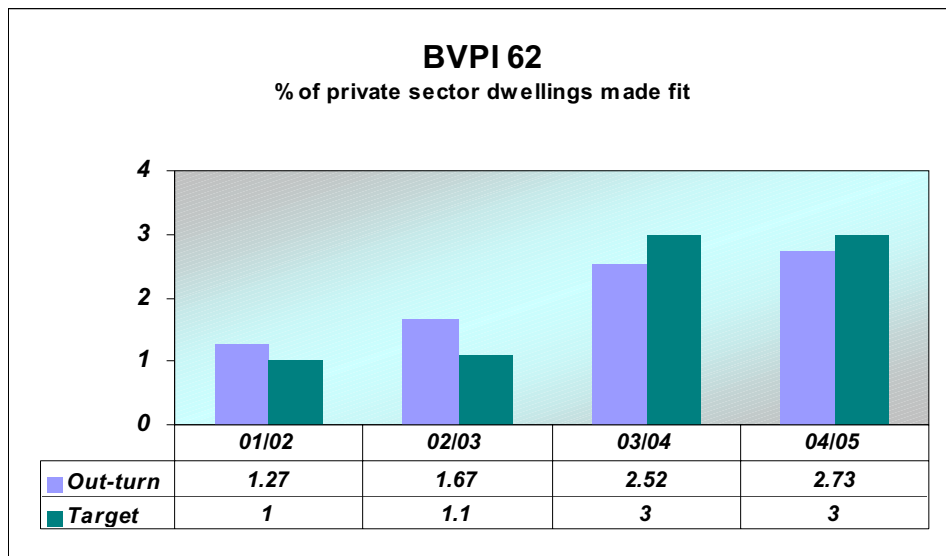## Priority 3: Ensure vulnerable people have their housing support needs met

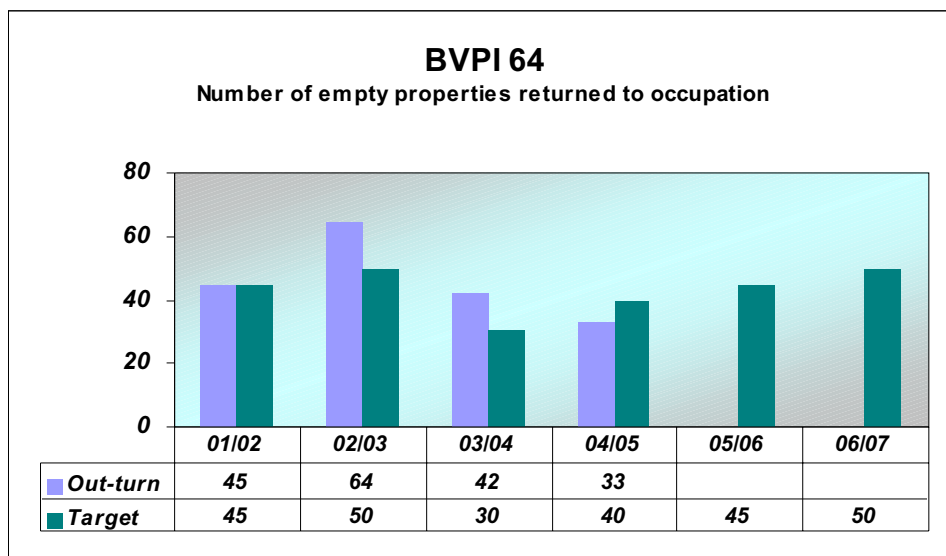|	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
36	High	Implement the priorities from the Supporting People Strategy	ongoing	Supporting People Manager	Supporting People Grant* / Capital budget – development – See Action Point 2
37	High	Continue to support opportunities for cross-authority co-operation under the Supporting People Framework	Common Service Development Plan in place by 2006	Supporting People Manager	Staff resources
38	High	Respond to the requirement to assess the housing needs of gypsies and travellers	Commission research by December 2005 Strategy in place by August 2006	Head of Strategic Housing & Enabling Manager	Revenue budget – Enabling 06/07 £15,000
39	Medium	Implement the Action Plan from the Learning Disability Housing Plan	ongoing	Development Officer – Learning Disability Services	Supporting People / Capital budget – development / Staff resources
40	Medium	Develop the Mental Health Housing Plan	December 2005	Service Manager – Mental Health	Supporting People / Capital budget – development / Staff resources
41	Medium	Review Sheltered Housing in Herefordshire and implement the outcomes of the Review	July 2005 onwards	Enabling Manager	Staff resources / Capital budget – development / Supporting People / RSL capital / Housing Corporation / ADP
42	Medium	Develop joint protocols for people leaving supported housing	March 2007	Supporting People Manager	Staff resources
43	Medium	Develop Housing/Health links	2005/06	Housing Ambition Group	Staff resources
44	Medium	Develop a register of adapted properties in all tenures	2006/07	Private Sector Housing Manager	Staff resources / RSL staff resources

*see Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

THE **HEREFORDSHIRE** partnership

Priority 4: Improve housing conditions across all tenures

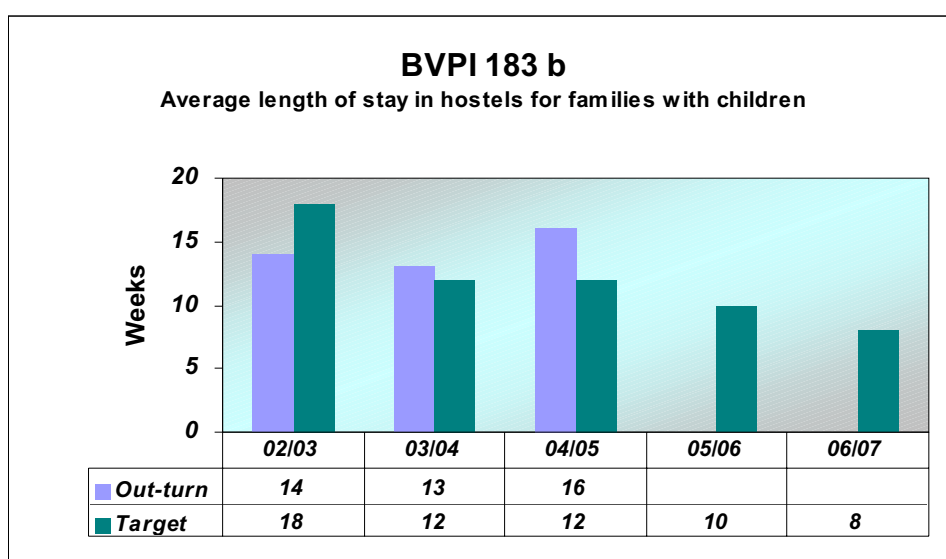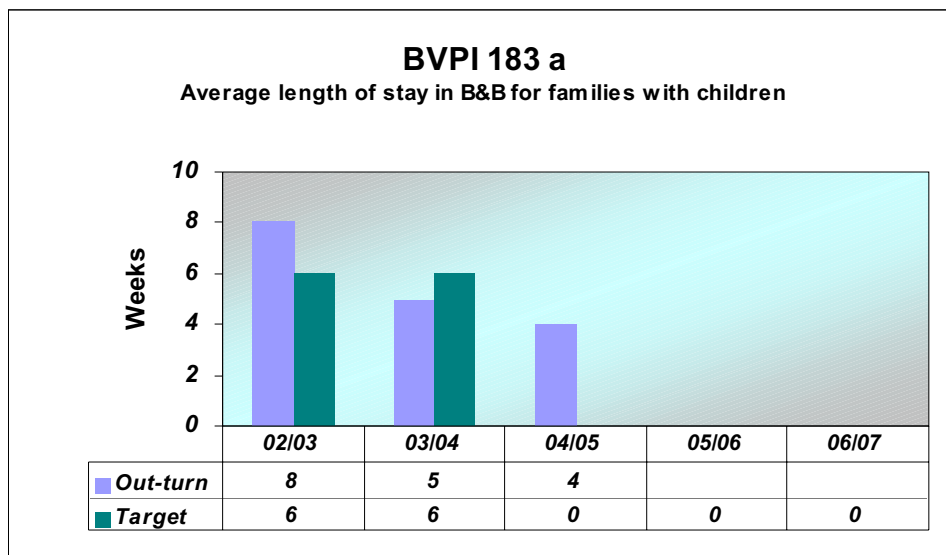|	Priority	Action	Target	Lead Officer	Resources
45	High	Set programme to achieve targets for decent homes for vulnerable people in the private sector	Annual targets set following completion of House Condition Survey	Private Sector Housing Manager	Regional Housing Board Capital budget – Private Sector £3.6m over 3 years
46	High	Manage transition from the HMO registration schemes to HMO licensing	Depends on commencement order	Private Sector Housing Manager	Revenue budget – Private Sector Housing Staff resources HMO Licence Fees
47	High	Introduce Health and Safety rating system	Depends on commencement order	Private Sector Housing Manager	Revenue budget – Private Sector Housing
48	High	Continue to address energy efficiency targets	Ongoing	HECA Officer	Revenue budget £25,000 pa Capital budget £400,000 pa
49	High	Implement new Home Improvement Agency arrangements	September 2005	Private Sector Housing Manager	Revenue budget – Private Sector Supporting People Grant Fee income
50	High	Commission private sector house condition survey and energy audit	Report available September 2005	Private Sector Housing Manager	Capital budget – Private Sector Housing £60,000
51	Medium	Monitor RSL's progress in meeting decent homes targets	April 2006 then annually	Performance Improvement Officer	Staff resources
52	Medium	Annual review of Part 3 of the housing assistance provided under the housing renewal policy	October 2005	Private Sector Housing Manager	Staff resources
53	Medium	Full review of Housing Renewal Policy (2006)	May 2006	Private Sector Housing Manager	Staff resources Revenue budget – Private Sector Housing
54	Medium	Work with Home Improvement Trust to introduce loans for under 60's	2006/07	Private Sector Housing Manager	Revenue budget – Private Sector Housing Home Improvement Trust Loans
55	Medium	Re-launch landlords code of conduct (accreditation scheme)	April 2006	Principal HMO & Enforcement Officer	Revenue budget – Private Sector Housing Staff resources
56	Medium	Develop rolling programme to update the house condition survey annually, with appropriate software		Private Sector Housing Manager	Capital and Revenue budgets – Private Sector Housing
57	Low	Develop a marketing strategy on home improvement and energy efficiency services	March 2006	Private Sector Housing Manager	Staff resources

STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

BVPI 62
% of private sector dwellings made fit

	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05
Out-turn	1.27	1.67	2.52	2.73
Target	1	1.1	3	3

The Authority has shown continuous improvement in this area of activity. Following the introduction of the Housing Act 2004 and the changes to the regulation of the private housing sector, this BVPI will be discontinued from April 2005. However, the Private Sector team will continue to monitor the improvements in activity here as a local performance indicator.

BVPI 64
Number of empty properties returned to occupation

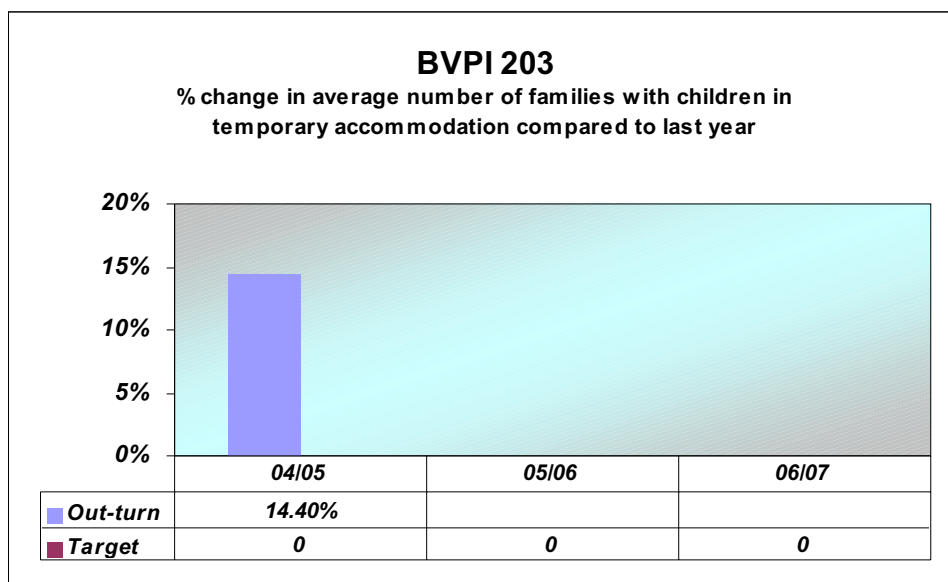|	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Out-turn	45	64	42	33		
Target	45	50	30	40	45	50

This indicator has been subject to changes in definition and denominator which prohibits year on year comparison of progress. However, we can see that in 2001-02 the Authority met its target and in 2002-03 a more challenging target was set which was exceeded by 28%. During 2002-03, the authority comfortably achieved performance that ranked within the top quartile of all English Authorities. During 2003-04 we introduced the Empty Property Strategy which focussed on targeting long-term empty properties back into habitable use. More complex and lengthy procedures to achieve results suggested a lower target would be appropriate, although this again was exceeded. A slow-down in progress is evident in 2004-05 as the implications of targeting long-term empty properties takes effect. Staff time has also been absorbed on developing alternative initiatives to improve the supply of affordable homes.

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BVPI 183 a

Average length of stay in B&B for families with children

	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Out-turn	8	5	4		
Target	6	6	0	0	0

BVPI 183 b

Average length of stay in hostels for families with children

	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Out-turn	14	13	16		
Target	18	12	12	10	8

These two indicators were introduced in 2002-03, the year in which our LSVT stock transfer took place and our statutory homelessness responsibilities were contracted out to the new company on an Agency basis. In view of the on-going and extreme shortage of affordable housing, there are real barriers to our ability to move homeless households into settled accommodation. This has presented a significant challenge in respect of our obligations to reduce the use of B&B accommodation. To facilitate necessary improvements, the Council has begun to implement a package of measures including:

- Review and redesign of homelessness services following their transfer back into Council administration
- A review of allocation procedures has been undertaken to enable the Council to discharge its duty by encouraging homeless households to access permanent accommodation pro-actively through Home Point.
- Commissioning a new *Homeless to Home* service in partnership with Shelter which will enable early intervention in the prevention of homelessness
- Commissioning a temporary supported housing scheme for single homeless people
- The re-modelling of the Staying Put agency service
- Improving the supply of settled accommodation for all homeless applicants by introducing Rent Deposit and Private Sector Leasing Schemes
- Appointment of a Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator planned for 2005-06

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BVPI 203

% change in average number of families with children in temporary accommodation compared to last year

	04/05	05/06	06/07
Out-turn	14.40%		
Target	0	0	0

This indicator was introduced in April 2004, reflecting the Government's determination to focus on improving the situation for families with children or a pregnant woman living in temporary accommodation. Set against rising levels of homelessness combined with a significant shortage of settled accommodation in the county, the Authority has been unable to meet its challenging target of a 0% increase in the use of temporary accommodation for this group.

BVPI 202
The number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the authority

This indicator was also introduced in April 2004. Strategic Housing Services carried out a 'rough sleepers' count in accordance with strict criteria defined by the ODPM and was pleased to find that there was no admissible evidence of rough sleeping in the County.
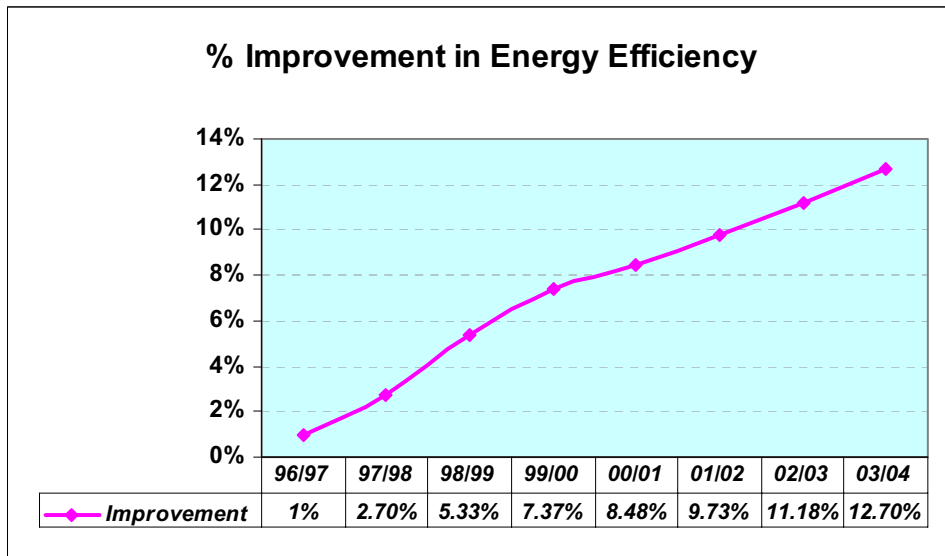
LPSA TARGET
1% or less of households will require repeat re-housing within a six month period, plus four special conditions:

1. **No households in B&B during the period 1 April 04 – 31 March 05**
2. **100% temporary accommodation units used during 1 April 04 – 31 March 05 meet the standards required under Part XI of the Housing Act 1985**
3. **95% of homeless households housed during the period express satisfaction with the accommodation**
4. **100% of homeless households housed during the period express satisfaction with resettlement support**

The Council entered into this challenging Local Public Services Agreement (LPSA) target for 04/05 which focused on repeat homelessness. From a baseline of 3.3% repeat homelessness in July 2003, there has been a dramatic reduction and the outturn for 04/05 is 0.4% - well within the target of not more than 1%. However the targets for the special conditions have not been met.

HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT
Under the Home Energy Conservation Act, the goal is to achieve an overall 30% reduction in domestic energy consumption between 1996 and 2011.

% Improvement in Energy Efficiency

	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04
Improvement	1%	2.70%	5.33%	7.37%	8.48%	9.73%	11.18%	12.70%

The rate of energy efficiency improvements across all sectors has increased steadily since the baseline was established in 1996.

HOMELESSNESS DETERMINATIONS
We have continued to use the former BVPI 67 as a local indicator for the purpose of monitoring the Homelessness Agency's performance on homelessness determinations – the % of homelessness applications processed within 33 working days.

% Homelessness Applications decided within 33 days

|	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05
%	67.8	86.7	85.7	87.6	85
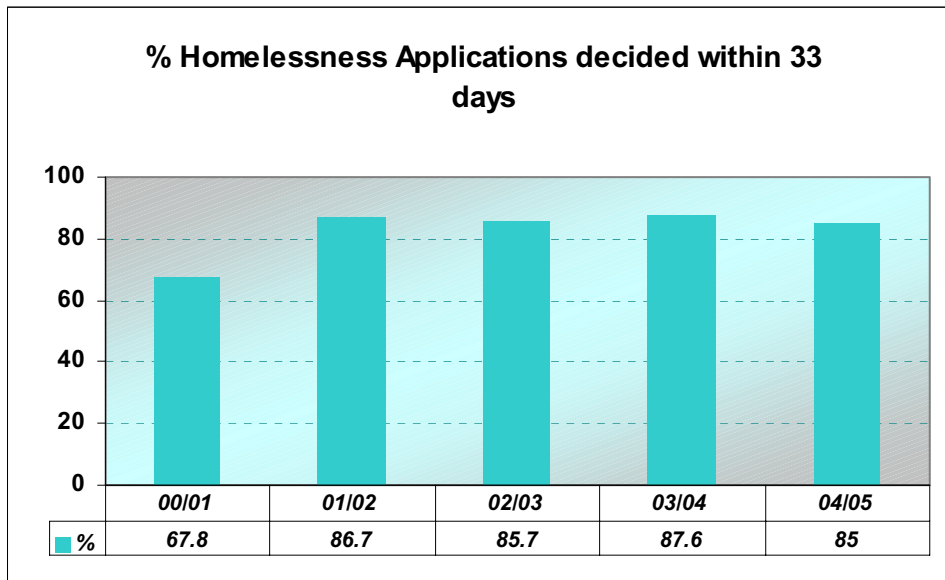
Despite a continuing upward trend in homelessness presentations, the Agency is currently processing 85% of applications within 33 days which reflects consistently good processing performance within a challenging area.

Corporate Performance Assessment

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local and national services for the public. They also act as a driving force for improvement in those services. During 2002, 03 and 04 Herefordshire has received a 'good' rating (on a scale of excellent/good/fair/weak/poor) for our overall performance when inspected by the Audit Commission.

Regular Performance Assessments of individual service areas are part of the inspection process and are used to build up a scorecard (graded from 1 – mainly weaknesses to 4 – mainly strengths) that contributes to the overall rating. In May 2004, Strategic Housing scored 4 (mainly strengths) for demonstrated improvement, strategic capacity to improve and quality of service. Housing performance scores amongst our New Unitaries Benchmark colleagues are good with Herefordshire being the highest-scoring authority.

CPA Scores for Housing 03 - 04
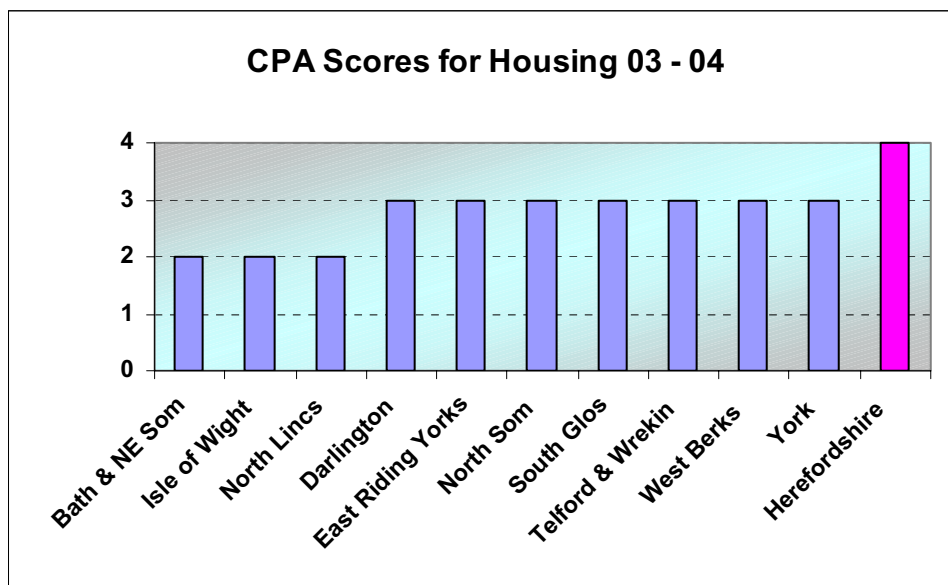
REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Barker Review – Delivering Stability: securing our future housing needs

Community Safety and Drugs Partnership Strategy

Gaine, Chris, University College Chichester, "Minority Ethnic People's Experiences in Herefordshire" September 2004, commissioned by Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire Council: Corporate Plan 2005 – 08
Draft Unitary Development Plan
Empty Property Strategy
Herefordshire Housing Needs Survey 2004
Homelessness Strategy 2003
Housing Renewal Policy
Learning Disability Housing Plan
Market Towns Strategy
Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2001
Supporting People Strategy 2005 – 2010

Herefordshire Plan 2003

Home Energy Conservation Act

Homes for All – ODPM 2005

P1E Quarterly Homelessness Returns to ODPM

Quarterly Economic Report, published by The Herefordshire Partnership, produced in February, May, August and November every year

Statistical Release - ODPM

Supplementary Planning Guidance – Design and Development Requirements

Supplementary Planning Guidance – Providing Affordable Housing

Sustainable Communities – Building for the Future, ODPM 2003

West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2021

Housing Strategy Consultation Event 31 March 2005

Delegates

Cllr Roger Phillips	Leader of the Council
Cllr Marcelle Lloyd-Hayes	Chair of Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Polly Andrews	Vice Chair of Scrutiny Committee
Mark Banks	Herefordshire Council
Chris Benjamin	Gloucestershire Housing Association
Chris Boote	Marches Housing Association
Jackie Boys	Diocese of Hereford
Jamie Burns	Home Point Herefordshire
Dave Carr	Anchor 'Staying Put'
John Cooper	Lifebuoy Charitable Trust
Stuart Davies	Herefordshire Council
Jenny Dereham	West Midlands Business Council
Pat Devereaux	Advance Housing & Support Ltd
Sgt Phil Edwards	West Mercia Police
Lorraine Fewtrell	Herefordshire Housing Ltd
Steve Forrest	West Midlands Regional Assembly
Margy Fowler	Hereford Primary Care Trust
Jan Frances	Herefordshire Women's Aid
Richard Gabb	Herefordshire Council
Ian Gardner	Herefordshire Council
John Gaynor	Herefordshire Council
Jo Hart	Herefordshire Council
Andrew Hasler	Herefordshire Council
Martin Heuter Russell	Herefordshire Council
Dave Hider	SHYPP
Sunita Hopkins	Shelter
Kay Hughes	Herefordshire Council
Claire Huyton	Elgar Housing Association
Julian Kent	Bromford Housing Group
Robert King	Herefordshire Council
Emma Kiteley	West Midlands Regional Assembly
Andrew Larkin	Consultant
Pauline Munday	Stonham Housing Association
PC Charles Naylor	West Mercia Police
Pam Pimpernell	West Mercia Probation Service
Steve Price	South Shropshire District Council
Claire Rawlings	Herefordshire Council
Sandy Rogers	Herefordshire Housing Ltd
Jim Russell	Herefordshire Housing Ltd
Anne Silley	Herefordshire Council
Adrian Soble	Herefordshire Council
John Sutton	Bromford Housing Group
Claire Thomas	West Mercia Housing Group
Jane Thomas	Herefordshire Council
Dorrell Townsend	Stonham Housing Association
John Walker	Shelter
Greg Warwick	Herefordshire Council
Bob Widdowson	CPRE Partnership and Chair of Housing Ambition Group

A full report on the Housing Strategy Consultation Event is available by contacting Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing on 01432 261902

GLOSSARY

AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
CSG	Capital Strategy Group
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant
EEC	European Economic Community
EST	Energy Savings Trust
GIS	Geographic Information System
HMA	Housing Market Area
HECA	Home Energy Conservation Act
HIA	Home Improvement Agency
HMOs	Houses in Multiple Occupation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LPSA	Local Public Services Agreement
NHS	National Health Service
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SCE	Supported Capital Expenditure
SMC	Strategic Monitoring Committee
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
UDP	Unitary Development Plan

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