

**WYRE FOREST
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

THE CABINET

A G E N D A

Date: Thursday 30th June 2005

Time: 6.00 p.m.

**Venue: Chaddesley Corbett Village Hall
Chaddesley Corbett
Nr. Kidderminster**

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

CABINET

The Cabinet Members and their responsibilities:-

Councillor S J M Clee	Leader, Strategic Overview & Direction
Councillor M J Hart	Deputy Leader, Commercial Services
Councillor Mrs M B Aston	Housing, Health and Rural Affairs
Councillor J-P Campion	Finance and Corporate Affairs
Councillor J W Dudley	Environment & Economic Regeneration
Councillor N J Desmond	Community & Leisure Services

SCRUTINY OF DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

The Council has one Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and five Policy and Scrutiny Panels, that have power to investigate policy issues and question members of the Cabinet who have special responsibility for a particular area of the Council's activities. The Cabinet also considers recommendations from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and five Policy and Scrutiny Panels.

In accordance with Part 4 of the Council's Constitution Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Standing Order B4 any item on this agenda may be scrutinised by the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee if it is "called in" by any three non-Cabinet Members and the Chairman of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Panel or by three members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and any member of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Panel.

The deadline for "calling in" Cabinet decisions is Tuesday 12th July 2005

Councillors wishing to "call in" a decision on this agenda should contact Mrs Diana Glendenning, Committee Officer, Telephone 01562-732763 or e-mail: diana.glendenning@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Urgent Key Decisions

If the Cabinet needs to take an urgent key decision, the consent of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Chairman must be obtained. If the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Chairman is unable to act the Chairman of the Council or in his/her absence the Vice-Chairman of the Council, must give consent. Such decisions will not be the subject to the call in procedure.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE

Code of Conduct - Members are reminded that under the Code of Conduct it is the responsibility of individual Members to declare any personal or personal and prejudicial interest in any item on this agenda. A Member who declares a personal interest may take part in the meeting and vote, unless the interest is also prejudicial. If the interest is prejudicial, as defined in the Code, the Member must leave the room. However, Members with a prejudicial interest can still participate if a prescribed exception applies or a dispensation has been granted.

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 - If any Member is two months or more in arrears with a Council Tax payment, they may not vote on any matter which might affect the calculation of the Council Tax, any limitation of it, its administration or related penalties or enforcement.

For further information: -

If you have any queries about this Agenda or require any details of background papers, further documents or information you should contact Diana Glendenning, Committee Officer. Telephone : 01562-732763, e-mail diana.glendenning@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

(MAP OF VENUE)

PART 1

Open to the Press and Public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, to invite Members to declare the existence and nature of any personal or personal and prejudicial interests in the following agenda items. Members should indicate the action they will be taking when the item is considered.

Members are also invited to make any declaration in relation to Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(See guidance note on cover.)

3. MINUTES

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the Cabinet held on the 25th May 2005. (Pages 1 - 6)

4. CALL INS - a verbal update will be given on any decisions which have been "called in" since the last meeting of the cabinet.

5. ITEMS REQUIRING URGENT ATTENTION

Any item which, in the opinion of the Chairman requires consideration at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

6. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

Stephen Clee

6.1 LEADERS ANNOUNCEMENTS

6.2. COMMUNITY STRATEGY - ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2004/2005

To consider a report from the Chief Executive that reports on the progress made by Wyre Forest Matters, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in the delivery of the Community Strategy in 2004/05. (Pages 7 - 10)

6.3. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN : 2005

To consider a report from the Chief Executive that recommends to Council that the Council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2005 be approved. (Pages 11 - 12)

7. FINANCE & CORPORATE AFFAIRS**John-Paul Campion****7.1. BENEFIT SERVICE - VISION AND OBJECTIVES - UPDATE**

To consider a report from the Head of Financial Services that seeks endorsement from Council of the Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service. (Pages 13 - 16)

7.2. HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS - DEBT POSITION AS AT 31ST MARCH 2005

To consider a report from the Head of Financial Services that informs the Cabinet of the Housing Benefit Overpayment debt position as at 31st March 2005. (Pages 17 - 21)

7.3. HOUSING BENEFITS - OVERPAYMENTS POLICY - UPDATE

To consider a report from the Head of Financial Services that asks Council to adopt an updated Housing Benefits - Overpayments Policy. (Pages 22 - 23)

8. COMMERCIAL SERVICES**Marcus Hart****8.1. CLEAN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ENVIRONMENT ACT**

To consider a report from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services that recommends to Council that delegated authority be given to the relevant Head of Service to implement and undertake enforcement action, where it is expedient, as specified in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. (Pages 24 - 26)

9. ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION**James Dudley****9.1. INTEGRATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM PLAN**

To consider a report from the Chief Executive that seeks approval from Council to the District Council's Integrated Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2005 - 2007. (Pages 27 - 36)

10. DECISIONS MADE BY AN INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER**10.1. REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2005 CONSULTATION**

To note a decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs regarding the Regional Housing Strategy 2005 Consultation. (Pages 37 - 57)

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AUDIT PANEL**11.1. Recommendations from the Audit Panel - 14th June 2005**

To consider recommendations from the Audit Panel on the Annual Report on the Council's Internal Control Environment. (Page 58)

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANELS

12.1. Recommendations from Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel - 20th June 2005

- (i) Budget Review Group (Pages 59 - 60)
- (ii) Review of Committee Section (Pages 61 - 62)

13. TO CONSIDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN COMMUNICATED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC:

To consider passing the following resolution:

"That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

PART 2

Not open to the Press and Public

15. MINUTES

To confirm as a correct record the Exempt minutes of the Cabinet held on the 25th May 2005. (Pages 63 - 64)

16. COMMUNITY & LEISURE SERVICES

Nathan Desmond

16.1. REFURBISHMENT OF THE CHANGING FACILITIES AT THE GLADES LEISURE CENTRE

To consider a report from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services that requests the Council to contribute to the refurbishment of the changing/health suite facilities at Wyre Forest Glades Leisure Centre. (Pages 65 - 69)

17. TO CONSIDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN COMMUNICATED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.

**Wyre Forest District Council
CABINET
Wednesday 25th May 2005
The Earl Baldwin Suite
Duke House
Clensmore Street, Kidderminster**

PRESENT Councillors: S J M Clee (Chairman), M J Hart (Vice-Chairman), Mrs M B Aston, J-P Campion, N J Desmond and J W Dudley.

OBSERVERS Councillors J W Ballinger, A J Buckley, Mrs I M Dolan, Mrs J Fairbrother-Millis, M A W Hazlewood, Mrs A T Hingley, M B Kelly and J A Shaw.

CAB.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

CAB.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

CAB.3 MINUTES

DECISION:

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on the 14th April 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.4 CALL INS

No decisions had been called in since the last Cabinet meeting.

CAB.5 ITEMS REQUIRING URGENT ATTENTION

HONORARY ALDERMAN

Further to the Decision at Council on the 18th May 2005 that agreed to the appointment of Honorary Aldermen (Council minute number CM.21 refers), a report was considered from the Head of Human Resources. Cabinet was asked to consider conferring the title of Honorary Alderman on Mrs Elizabeth Mills, MBE following receipt of an application from Councillor Mike Oborski.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: **To confer the title of Honorary Alderman on Mrs Elizabeth Mills, MBE in accordance with Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972.**

CAB.6 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader had no information to announce.

CAB.7 ICT (INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY) STRATEGY 2005 - 2008

A report was considered from the Head of Human Resources regarding the ICT Strategy. It was noted that the previous Strategy had been updated and supported the Divisional Business Plans and Corporate Plan.

DECISION: The Information and Communications Technology Strategy 2005 - 2008 as set out in a separate appendix to the report, be approved.

CAB.8 POST OF CONTAMINATED LAND ASSISTANT

A report was considered from the Head of Planning Health and Environment that sought approval for the post of Contaminated Land Assistant (Temporary) within the Environmental Health section to be placed on the permanent establishment.

Over the last 18 months over 850 contaminated land sites had been identified in Wyre Forest. However because of staff shortages and lack of appropriate computer software, work on identifying potentially contaminated sites only started in Autumn 2003, when the post of Contaminated Land Assistant (Temporary) was created using funding within existing budgets. So far only 56 sites had been visited. There were still over 700 sites to visit and inspect and more contaminated land sites were being identified as 'brownfield' sites were developed.

DECISION: The post of Contaminated Land Assistant (Temporary Post No.066) within the Environmental Health Section be made permanent with immediate effect.

CAB.9 APPOINTMENT OF PART-TIME FOOD AND SAFETY OFFICER

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that sought agreement to the appointment of a part-time Food and Safety Officer in the Planning, health and Environment Division, self-funded with income received from providing external food hygiene training.

It was noted that the Council was required by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to undertake annual food sampling at a rate of 1 per '000 capita of population i.e. Approximately 97 samples per annum in Wyre Forest. In August 2004 the Cabinet agreed to a 12-month trial period for a student to be employed in the post. The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs commented that the creation of the temporary post had been successful and the student - Sue Hanson had been doing a marvellous job..

DECISION: The part-time Food and Safety Officer post in the Planning, Health and Environment Division be made permanent from September 2005, subject to it continuing to be self-funding.

CAB.10 ODPM (OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER) HOMELESSNESS FUNDING 2005/06

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that proposed funding arrangements for the Council to utilise the ODPM's Priority Need Order Funding for 2005/06.

- DECISION:**
- 1. The proposed spend of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Priority Need Order Funding for 2005/06 be approved.**
 - 2. The Head of Planning, Health and Environment be given delegated authority in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs to switch funding between projects where necessary to ensure full take up.**

CAB.11 STRATEGIC RAIL AUTHORITY (SRA): CONSULTATION ON RAILWAYS FOR ALL STRATEGY

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that informed Members of the SRA's consultation on its Railways for all Strategy and the issues it raised.

DECISION:

- 1. The Schedule of Responses as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved as the District Council's formal response to the Strategic Rail Authority's consultation exercise on the Railways for All Strategy.**
- 2. The Head of Planning, Health and Environment be authorised to make the appropriate arrangements to submit the District Council's formal response to the Strategic Rail Authority by 14th June 2005.**

CAB.12 STRATEGIC RAIL AUTHORITY CONSULTATION - WEST MIDLANDS ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY

A report was considered from the Head of Planning, Health and Environment that informed Members of the key issues in the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) consultation on the West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy (WMRUS) and to seek authorisation for the submission of comments and representations.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Economic Regeneration stated that Kidderminster Station was the 17th most used station in the West Midlands and the third most used in Worcestershire. It had recently been upgraded and modernised. Approximately 926,000 users had used Kidderminster Station last year. The amount of people using rail travel to go to work had increased. It was hoped that rail links between Kidderminster and New Street, Birmingham reopened.

Members of the Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel had also had the opportunity to comment on the response as had Disability Action Wyre Forest.

DECISION:

- 1. The comments as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved as the District Council's response to the Strategic Rail Authority consultation on the West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy.**
- 2. The Head of Planning, Health and Environment be authorised to submit the District Council's representations to the Strategic Rail Authority by the 27th May 2005.**

CAB.13 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY

A report was considered from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services that recommended to Council that the Safeguarding Children Policy be approved and adopted.

Prior to the Policy being written it was noted that although some child protection procedures were in place in some Divisions that was no comprehensive corporate document. During the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004 it had been recommended that a corporate Child Protection Policy be developed.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

The Safeguarding Children Policy as set out in the separate appendix to the report be adopted.

CAB.14 BID FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A report was considered that outlined a decision that had been taken by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs regarding a bid for affordable housing at 11a Windmill Close, 12 Princess Way and 49 Hanstone Road.

DECISION:

The decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Rural Affairs regarding a bid for funding for Affordable Housing be noted.

CAB.15 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 15TH MARCH 2005

The Vice-Chairman of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel presented his Panel's recommendations from their meeting held on the 15th March 2005 with regard to arrangements for a Single Site.

The Council had made provision in its budget in February 2005 to employ consultants to make a business case for a single site before the site options were taken any further.

DECISION:

The following recommendations from the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel regarding a Single Site be noted:-

The following points form the basis of the consultants' brief with regard to Single Site:

- **How suitable are the Council's existing offices and depot for the servicing of future operational needs?**
- **What is the condition of the Council's existing offices and depot and what investment is required over the next 20 years?**
- **What are the life cycle costs associated with the Council's existing offices and depot and how do these compare with each of the Single Site options?**
- **What are the Council's options on lease renewals and alternative premises if lease renewal is not possible on existing offices?**
- **How will a move to new premises improve service delivery?**
- **What are the organisational benefits (efficiencies and savings) of moving to a single site?**
- **What is the space requirement for any new offices and depot and what should be built in for future flexibility?**
- **Investigate the cost options for the retention of Civic Hall or providing a replacement in Stourport.**

- **Develop the case for alternative planning permission on any sites that would potentially become surplus.**

CAB.16 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

DECISION:

Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of "exempt information" as defined in paragraphs 7 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

CAB.17 SUMMARY OF MINUTES

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items have been made as 'exempt information' as defined in paragraphs 7 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

Minutes

DECISION: The exempt minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on the 14th April 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

GRANT OF NEW LEASE TO WYRE FOREST CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU AT 21 - 23 NEW ROAD, KIDDERMINSTER

A report was considered from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services that advises Members of a request from Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau regarding lease arrangements.

STOURPORT COMMUNITY CENTRE

A report was considered from the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services regarding proposals relating to community facilities at Stourport Community Centre.

The meeting ended at 6.31 pm.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
30th JUNE 2005

Community Strategy – Annual Progress Report 2004/05

COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	OPEN
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Providing Community Leadership
KEY PRIORITY:	Community Strategy
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr. Stephen Clee
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Alison Braithwaite Ext.2781 alison.braithwaite@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	End of year Performance Reports (2004/05) – available in Members’ Group Rooms. A public inspection copy is available on request (see front cover for details).

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report on progress made by Wyre Forest Matters, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in the delivery of the Community Strategy in 2004/05.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to **DECIDE** that:

- 2.1 **The progress made and the added value achieved by Wyre Forest Matters (LSP) during 2004/05 in the implementation of the Community Strategy (2004-2014) be noted.**
- 2.2 **The Council continue to fully support Wyre Forest Matters in its role as Community Leader.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Wyre Forest Matters, the Local Strategic Partnership was established in March 2002 to develop and implement a Community Strategy for the Wyre Forest District.
- 3.2 The production and implementation of a Community Strategy is a statutory requirement placed on all Councils under the Local Government Act 2000 and should aim to improve the social, economic, health and environmental wellbeing of the area and its inhabitants.
- 3.3 A ten-year Community Strategy for the Wyre Forest District ‘*Helping to Transform your Life*’ (2004-2014) was launched in April 2004.

- 3.4 Over the first 12-months, the main aim of implementing the Community Strategy was to deliver a realistic and manageable programme of work, which would achieve some 'quick and visible wins' and enable greater community participation in the Partnership's activity.
- 3.5 Progress in the delivery of Partnership activity has been reported on a quarterly basis by the theme working groups, to the Wyre Forest Matters Strategic Board. The District Council's representatives on the Board are the Leader and the Chief Executive respectively.
- 3.6 On 9th March 2005, the Strategic Board noted the progress that had been made for the period 2004/05. ***Copies of the Partnership's end of year performance reports have been placed in Members' Group Rooms.***
- 3.7 In summary, some of the key achievements included:

Safer Communities Theme Working Group

- a) Targets for Domestic Burglary, Vehicle Crime and Violent Crime have all been exceeded;
- b) 93% of GPs in Wyre Forest are involved in Shared Care, which is the joint participation of drug workers and GPs in the delivery of care for patients with a drug misuse problem; and
- c) CCTV cameras have been installed in over 30 Wyre Forest District Licensed Taxis.

Better Environment Theme Working Group

- d) Securing £10,000 from the Environment Agency to deliver a series of activities to improve the environmental performance of businesses on the Stourport Road Corridor in Kidderminster;
- e) Piloting the countywide project to produce a habitat inventory of protected species in Wyre Forest; and
- f) Improving cycle parking facilities in Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley.

Improved Health and Wellbeing Theme Working Group

- g) A Support Services Roadshow for Older People was held in August 2004 – 36 organisations exhibited and over 300 older people attended;
- h) Wyre Forest Quit Smoking Targets have been exceeded;
- i) New Time 4U Service (sexual health advice service for young people) is now provided from the Advice Shop, Rifle Range, Kidderminster; and
- j) A Physical Activity Strategy is being developed.

Shared Prosperity Theme Working Group

- k) Supporting proposals to create a Business Improvement District at Sandy Lane Industrial Estate, Stourport-on-Severn;
- l) Inputting into the development of the emerging Kidderminster Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy; and
- m) Supporting the District Council's and Business Link's New Business Start Up Service, including the provision of start up grants to qualifying businesses.

Greater Learning and Participation Theme Working Group

- n) Protocols have been drafted to support the sharing of facilities that partners have available e.g. meeting rooms;
- o) Learning venues across the Wyre Forest District have been mapped; and
- p) A leaflet detailing the evidential benefits to potential learners on 'what is in it for them' has been developed and distributed to partners for circulation.

3.8 It should also be noted that Wyre Forest Matters developed and submitted the successful Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Bid for Oldington and Foley Park.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The Wyre Forest Matters Strategic Board need to build on the achievements of 2004/05. However in order to maximise the 'added value' that can be achieved it has been agreed that a more targeted geographical approach at Ward level should be adopted for 2005/06.

4.2 Over 100 organisations and groups from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors are currently engaged in the delivery of the Community Strategy and it is important that the Partnership maintains this level of commitment from partners if it is to continue to succeed.

4.3 Through the five theme working groups, the Council is actively involved in supporting the delivery of the Community Strategy. In the medium to long term this should support service delivery in a number of key areas through the pooling of resources, to achieve shared goals.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Community Strategy seeks to redirect and pool, existing resources from the mainstream budgets of partner organisations. This approach should help to build sustainability and the ownership of Partnership activities rather than rely on time limited funds from central government.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal implications are set out in paragraph 3.2.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 There are no risk management issues in connection, with this report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 The Community Strategy must remain up to date and relevant, as the district develops and circumstances change. Regular monitoring of performance should help the Partnership to achieve this and to also take into account the changing expectations of local people.

9. CONSULTEES

9.1 Corporate Management Team.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- End of year Performance Reports (2004/05) – available in Members' Group Rooms.
- Helping to Transform Your Life (2004-2014) – A Community Strategy for the Wyre Forest District (available on the Council's website and Intranet).

08.06.05

WYRE FOREST MATTERS THEMED DELIVERY PLANS

PERFORMANCE OF ACTIONS 04/05

POSITION STATEMENT – MARCH 2005

A Better Environment
Shared Prosperity
Improved Health and Wellbeing
Safer Communities
Greater Learning and Participation

KEY FOR PROGRESS

✓ Outcome Achieved


 On Target



 Caution

 Below Target


 Not Achieved







A BETTER ENVIRONMENT







MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
JANUARY					
Better Environment	<p>Improve the provision and promotion of sustainable transport</p> <p>BE8) Secure cycle stands for short term parking in identified areas of the District.</p>	WCC WFDC	A number of new secure cycle stands for short term parking have been installed at a number of locations throughout the district, including the SVR, Bewdley, Load Street Car Park, Bewdley and Duke House, Kidderminster.	✓	
FEBRUARY					
	<p>Protect and Enhance Our Natural and Built Environment</p> <p>BE10) To identify needs and locations of species identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan.</p>	WCC WFDC Wildlife Trust	Wyre Forest has been selected as the pilot area for a new habitat inventory for the county. Aerial photographs have been taken and an ecologist has begun the long process of identifying the habitats important for supporting protected species.		
	<p>Promote effective and minimal use of natural resources</p> <p>BE3) Identify current and forthcoming environmental legislation affecting business.</p>	Env Agency WFDC	£10,000 has been secured through a partnership agreement between the Environment Agency, Wyre Forest District Council; Bishops Wood Environmental Education Centre and the WEEAC to carryout a project to engage businesses on the Stourport Road Corridor in Kidderminster to improve their environmental performance.	✓	





MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
MARCH					
A Better Environment	Protect and Enhance Our Natural and Built Environment BE13) To continue to preserve archaeology of recognised importance in the District.	WCC WFDC	WFDC have submitted a bid to DEFRA for funding to enable them to prepare an archaeological survey of the Rifle Range Nature Reserve. Currently waiting for a response from DEFRA. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust have also joined the Better Environment Group.		
	Promote effective and minimal use of natural resources BE3) Identify current and forthcoming environmental legislation affecting business.	Env. Agency	The Engaging Businesses in improving their environmental performance site visits are underway. Businesses on the Stourport Road, Kidderminster are now receiving expert on site advice from a trained Envirowise Advisor.		
	Improve the provision and promotion of sustainable transport BE7 d) To improve the Kidderminster Park and Ride Bus Service including safety measures, marketing and promotion.	WFDC	The Sustainable Transport Sub Group have identified an illuminated shelter, improved waiting area and an information board at the Stadium Close Park 'n' Ride as a priority for 2005/6. They are now working with Wyre Forest District Council to secure funding for this project.	Information not available at time of printing.	







Shared Prosperity



MARCH					
Shared Prosperity	<u>Support Business Development & Investment</u>				
	SP 4e) Hold at least one Chamber of Commerce Wyre Forest "Business Day" to showcase the range of business services available locally.	WFDC/ Chamber of Commerce	Business day scheduled for end 2005 – date to be confirmed		

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Shared Prosperity	SP 2a) Share WFDC's annual Employment Land Availability Study with relevant landowners producing an Assessment Paper regarding availability and marketability.	WFDC	Planning Division updated Planning position regarding planning applications Economic Development section written to relevant landowners requesting advise as to any proposals for their sites – awaiting responses		
	SP 5b) District Council to publish and provide relevant information, links and services in electronic format and regularly update its Web site.	WFDC	Relevant information is available on Web site including appropriate links. WFDC to review WEB site and contents Spring 05		
	Open a Pilot TIC in Stourport-on-Severn	WFDC	Original target to open for 2005 season will not be achieved as MTI Implementation Plan not yet drafted. Also requirement to identify premises and more recently issues regarding Worcestershire Hub and the "sharing" of its services.		
	SP3a) Undertake a dialogue with the leaders of the Environment Well being and Community Safety Theme Groups to identify relevant business areas, facilities and centres and to agree a phased programme of action.	WFDC/ West Mercia Constabulary	Initial meeting held October to scope issues. WFDC Street Scene section to advise as to how issues sit with existing business plan. Ongoing dialogue		
	SP3 b) Begin to assess the feasibility of establishing a Business Improvement District within the area	WFDC	WFDC Cabinet approved proposals to work up a BID at Sandy Lane Industrial Estate Stourport – November 2004. Pilot BIDS are ongoing – their development will lead future legislation scheduled for Spring 2005.		
	SP2 c) In partnership with others outline a development brief for the former British Sugar Site	WFDC	Discussions ongoing with Local Planning Authority regarding proposals to draft any "Supplementary Planning Document". Site is the subject of Kidderminster Regeneration Strategy and potential County Council LTP 2 study into new road link between Stourport Road and A449		





MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Shared Prosperity	SP4 b) Continue to promote and provide the planned business start up courses through Business Link and Kidderminster College	WFDC	Progress and review meeting between College and WFDC held January 2005 Joint networking evening with business start ups and Kidderminster College planned for April 2005		
	SP4a) Review the criteria by which the District Council assesses its "new business start up" grant (and its success rate) whilst continuing to provide the funding.	WFDC	Review part of Business Links application for ESF funding - desire for more "Entrepreneurs" businesses. Bid scheduled for approval January 2005		Issues over the definition of Entrepreneurs"
	SP1 a) Collate appropriate database of Wyre Forest based companies utilising existing information sources. Consider the options to produce Directory of Wyre Forest District Businesses in hard copy and/or electronic format.	WFDC	Assess appropriate database sources and liaise with other Local Authorities to identify most suitable electronic format. Significant number of Web databases – consideration being given to worth and benefit of local directory. March 05.		
	SP 5 c) Embrace the emerging Central Technology Belt inputting into its activities for the benefit of local economic development	WFDC	Appointed consultants for Kidderminster Regeneration Strategy to report on local input and impact by March 2005		
	<u>Promote and Market the District's diverse economy</u> SP7 b) Continue existing District and County promotional activity	WFDC	Promotional leaflet for Kidderminster (town centre and environs) to be distributed regionally to 05/06. Taken out advertising in relevant property related journals.		
	SP6 a) Finalise draft brief to full service marketing organisation for the promotion of Kidderminster town centre	WFDC	Partner members met with responsibility for maintenance of town centre public realm August. Issues identified. Promotion for Spring 2005		




MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Shared Prosperity	SP 7 a) Produce District Tourism Plan based on the Regional and County Strategies to include: training needs of industry employees, increasing the provision and registration of accommodation.	WFDC	Plan to be incorporated into WFDC integrated Economic and Tourism Strategy March 2005		
	SP7 b) Continue existing District and County promotional activity including publishing the accommodation guide, producing leaflets and information.	WFDC	Proposals to develop a County Destination Management Partnership (DMP) across County. Consultants appointed January 05 to advise on feasibility and structure. Meetings ongoing for draft Plan March 2005		
	<u>Connecting people to economic opportunity</u> SP9 a) Identify the representative from the business community in order to actively engage in the Oldington & Foley Park Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Project.	WFDC	Shared Prosperity lead consulted on Draft Pathfinder Business Plan October 2004. Liasing with Co ordinator regarding strategic fit with emerging Kidderminster Regeneration Strategy. Economic theme identified in Pathfinder Delivery Plan launched February 2005.		
	SP 9b) Determine appropriate business representation on the group facilitating the development of the Worcestershire wide Credit Union and within it a Wyre Forest District focussed group.	WFDC	Financial Services Authority approved to a new Countywide organisation October 2004. Awaiting formal launch Spring 2005		





MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Shared Prosperity	<p>SP12b) Identify, develop, submit, implement, co ordinate and monitor relevant regeneration and funding initiatives with a range of agencies, partners, organisations and businesses to ensure strong partnership working and promote Economic Prosperity in accordance with the Council's Corporate Plan</p>	WFDC	<p>Stourport-on-Severn Market Towns Initiative: Strategic Action Plan approved August 2004. Implementation Plan being drafted March/April 2005 for adoption May 2005</p> <p>Opportunity Bewdley Market Towns Initiative: Projects ongoing including Business Premises Grant, Business Support, Park and Ride, Development of Bewdley's "Local Distinctiveness".</p> <p>Kidderminster Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy: Appointed consultants October 2004 to undertake a "reality check" and economic impact assessment. Report to Shared Prosperity Theme Group February 2005. Presentation to WFDC, AWM and GOWM Spring 2005.</p> <p>Sandy Lane Business Association: Liasing with Association and British Business Parks over a range of improvement proposals including highway improvements and community safety issues – key projects to be embraced within Stourport-on-Severn Market Town Initiative – see above</p>	   	Implementation Plan to be drafted following with appointment of Programme Manager – target for January /Feb 05
	<p>SP12 a) Develop and implement a Strategic Funding Plan to maximise the District Council's effectiveness in bidding for external resources for relevant regeneration initiatives</p>	WFDC	Following launch of WFDC "External Funding Working Group" a strategy to be scheduled for approval in March /April 2005.		
	<p>SP 10 a) Produce needs assessment, assess the potential, feasibility and appropriate locations of areas that would benefit from a community enterprise project</p>	WFDC/WCC	Part of Countywide research into Social Enterprise. County proposals developing March 2005		

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Shared Prosperity	SP9 c) Actively engage in the work of the Horsefair and Broadwaters Community Safety Partnership with the aim of bringing about economic benefit to the immediate locality and wider district	WFDC	Proposal to LSP Board to make Horsefair/ Broadwaters the key cross cutting geographical area for the whole Community Strategy. Initial meeting held in February 05 with Chair of Horsefair and Broadwaters Community Safety Partnership. Presentation to Partnership due 18 th March 2005		
	SP11 a) a) Support the District's carpet manufacturing industry by engaging local employers, representatives and relevant agencies in a series of relevant and appropriate measure that address local needs and bring about benefit to the local economy.	WFDC/ Kidderminster College	Funding identified at LSC to fund study into national carpet industry skills academy / heritage centre. Consultants appointed December 2004. Draft report February 2005.		





IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Improved Health and Wellbeing	<u>Supporting Children and Families</u> HW8 c) Effective involvement of young people from the beginning of planning services, building on local and national good practice models (commence work).	Children's and Young people Strategic Partnership/ WFPCT/WFDC	Clear direction and performance measures to be agreed with partners- (work commenced). Agreed performance measures demonstrate improvements- through e.g. annual returns.		
	HW9 a) Implement action plan to increase awareness of availability and use of leisure services and evaluate effectiveness of the plans (commence work).	WFDC	Mapping exercise in place to support improved service provision. Physical Activity Strategy produced by April 2005- work commenced in April 2004.		Strategy Planning Group in early stages of development. April deadline may not be met.
	HW12 a) Increase sexual health service available to young people (6 more pharmacists to provide EOC April-June)	WFPCT	(6 more pharmacists to provide EOC April-June).		New time 4u service also now offered from the Advice Shop, Rifle Range
	HW11 a) Through partnership agencies strengthen the work to prepare young people for leaving schools (ongoing).	Children's and Young people Strategic Partnership	3 Life Skills training courses and after schools services being made available- ongoing work. Detailed targets to be agreed by July 2004.		<i>Alison Reece to add</i>

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Improved Health and Wellbeing	<u>Engaging Communities and Individuals</u> HW2 c) Support Services Roadshows to older people.	Older People's Forum	Roadshows improve the awareness of older people of available services and thus increase access. Launch Event held in Town Hall on 12 August - 36 organisations exhibited and over 300 older people attended.		Showcase event booked for Thursday 11 August at Kidderminster Town Hall.
	<u>Tackling the determinants of ill health</u> HW22 a) Launch Affordable Warmth Strategy.	WFDC	Strategy launched in April 2004.	✓	
	<u>Preventing illness and providing effective treatment and care</u> HW17 a) Disability Forum training for social services and NHS Staff.	Social Services and Acute Trust	Training complete.	✓	
	HW13 a) Wyre Forest Health Mapping Exercise and target setting across health and well-being theme action plans (commencing).	WFPCT	Baseline data identified and targets set for the Improving health and wellbeing theme. Draft survey produced by April 2004. Survey completion date to be agreed.		Lifestyle survey has been delayed- this is currently taking place- targets will need to be developed in 2005
	HW19 Implement Smoking Cessation service developments.	WFPCT	Updated smoking cessation action to be completed by July 2004. Targets achieved on a quarterly basis.	✓	Wyre Forest Quit Smoking Targets have been exceeded
	<u>Tackling determinants of ill health</u> HW25 a) Establish baseline position of systems and programmes to support local recruitment and to enable staff to work across local partner's organisations where appropriate.	WFPCT	Meeting of partners has taken place to map current programmes and to agree an action plan/way forward.		Start of a process that needs a detailed action plan. No further development at this stage- there is potential to develop this work as part of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder.
	HW26 b) Agencies working together towards improvements in joint strategic planning and service provision (in relation to vulnerable people Workshop in May to start process).	WFPCT / Social Services	A workshop will take place to agree key action that will improve the strategic planning process of services for vulnerable people in May/June. Action agreed will feed into the commissioning round for 2004/5	✓	

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Improved Health and Wellbeing	Preventing illness and providing effective treatment and care HW14 a) Establish an effective and sustainable model of providing a one-stop service (make connections with Worcestershire Hub).	WFPCT / Worcs Hub	Meeting has taken place in May with Worcestershire Hub to agree how health information can become part of the one stop service.		No further work has been undertaken by the Health and Well-being Group to date
	HW18 a) Feed into Patient and Transport group - Countywide.	Bus Quality Partnership	Relationship between the BQP and Health and Wellbeing theme groups is strengthened. Theme group agrees the focus of their action from the overall BQP action plan.		
	Preventing illness and providing effective treatment and care NW16 b) Develop a strategy to implement the recommendations of the National report 'Reducing Obesity and Preventing Obesity - everything must change' (start process).	PCT Health and Wellbeing Group	Detailed targets to be set in 2004 based on national guidance, the current audit if current local initiatives and establishment of baseline data.		District wide strategy to be led by Redditch & Bromsgrove PCT. First meeting of county groups has just taken place- also the Public Health White paper will inform this development.
	HW25 b) Identify / action plan for implementation in 2005/6- (to increase recruitment of local people).	LSC, PCT WFDC, WCC Connexions KC, Chamber of Commerce Not for Profit Sector, Nexus	Action plan for 2005/06 developed by March 2005.		Meeting still to be held to draft Action Plan. No progress made to date.



SAFER COMMUNITIES



MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Safer Communities	SC1. Drugs and Alcohol.	Wyre Forest PCT	The Community Safety Partnership's final year of its three year work programme commenced on 1st April 2004. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor on six monthly basis the Wyre Forest Night Stop and Mediation Scheme. Siting of Used Needle and Syringe Bins now that consultation has been completed. Continue vulnerable young peoples group – 8 weekly sessions per group. Contribute to the West Midlands Health and Lifestyle Survey being undertaken by the West Midlands Public Health Observatory – to be completed by Aug 04. 	   	Public Health Observatory is now unable to incorporate the drugs questions we require. A separate drugs survey has been undertaken.



MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Safer Communities	SC2. Violent Crime / Domestic Violence.	Wyre Forest PCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain Domestic Violence Helpline being operational 24 hours. Specialist Training for frontline staff by April 05 to be provided by Worcestershire Domestic Violence Forum and Wyre Forest Women's Aid. Support National and Countywide campaigns. 		
	SC3. Violent Crime and Hate Crime.	Wyre Forest PCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Community Safety Partners to have equality and diversity policies in place by April 05. Increase the reporting of race / hate crimes. 		
	SC4. To reassure the community that they are safe in Wyre Forest.	West Mercia Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 New Neighbourhood Watch Schemes opened by April 05. 2 Further Urban Safety Initiatives in place by April 05. Ringmaster system being used to full potential including email broadcasts by April 05. Increase by a further 10% in recruitment of active Special Constables by April 05. 		
	SC5. To reduce theft of and from motor vehicles by improving car park security and raising awareness of vehicle security in car parks as well as residential areas in Wyre Forest.	West Mercia Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 800 more vehicle crime packs intelligently distributed by April 05. A further 130 vulnerable vehicle scheme packs to be delivered by April 05. 3 car parks achieve secure car park status by April 05. Continue with intelligence led patrols – introduce summer and autumn plans. 		Police currently working with a number of car park operators, however unlikely that 3 will be achieved by April 05.

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Safer Communities	SC6. Vulnerable Communities.	Wyre Forest District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and Development Workers to report progress in target wards (O&FP) and (H/B) by Oct 04. • Young people's worker employed in target wards by Oct 04. • CCTV system in Kidderminster Town Centre to be running by December 2004. • Expand WFDC's summer hotspot work programme within vulnerable communities. 	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	Deadline of December was not met due to installation issues. Scheme was up and running by first week in February 05.

GREATER LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Learning & Participation	<u>Maximise residents potential personal development and fulfilment through engagement with learning and cultural activity</u> GLP1 a) Map participation and learning venues across WF.	WFLLP	75% of wards mapped by March 2005.		Patti Rookes has already made good progress with this activity and it is ahead of schedule.
	<u>Maximise residents potential personal development and fulfilment through engagement with learning and cultural activity</u> GLP2 a) Identify non-school venues where literacy and numeracy support is provided and which ones it is not available at and share best practice.	WFLLP	10 venues to share best practice by Dec 04.		Venues identified, process for sharing of best practice part way through planning. Update on progress still to be confirmed as member unable to attend last meeting.
	GLP4 b) Develop a briefing / fact sheet that explains in simple language the evidential benefits to potential learners on what is in it for them (increased earning potential, increased employability, etc). Distribute among partners for use as reference when meeting residents.	WFDC	Availability of leaflets to all partners by July 04.	✓	Production and distribution of the initial run completed.

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Learning & Participation	<p><u>Increase employers awareness, involvement and contribution to the benefits of workforce development</u></p> <p>GLP9 a) Encourage larger employers to sponsor local community learning activities.</p>	WFLLP	6 sponsorships to be identified by Oct 04.		Discussions with employers identified from the Dec promotion activity are progressing.
	<p><u>Maximise residents potential personal development and fulfilment through engagement with learning and cultural activity</u></p> <p>GLP4 a) Promote flexible learning opportunities within schools and community to encourage top up qualifications.</p>	KC	Increase by 20 year on year.	✓	Computacoach has been very active within the community. New community IT opportunity in Wribbenhall School opens soon.
	<p><u>Create a collaborative learning infrastructure that will provide better transport links, childcare provision and support to improve accessible learning opportunities for all ages</u></p> <p>GLP5. a) Plan out structure for a web-based information point and collate cultural / arts / exhibitions / learning opportunities and information within an electronic repository.</p>	WFDC	Common District wide collation point by July 04.	✓	New contact at WFDC to be identified to help move this forward.
	<p><u>Increase employers awareness, involvement and contribution to the benefits of workforce development</u></p> <p>GLP9. c) Develop a briefing / fact sheet that explains in simple language the evidential benefits to employer's bottom line of investing in training and qualifications for their workforce. Distribute among partners for use as reference when meeting employers.</p>	WFDC	Information leaflet available and distributed to partners July 04.	✓	Production and distribution of the initial run completed.
	<p><u>Maximise residents potential personal development and fulfilment through engagement with learning and cultural activity</u></p> <p>GLP1. g) Identify and target diverse non-related events that we can piggyback, and at which display boards can be displayed / promoted.</p>	WF Arts Forum	18 events by April 2005.		Significant number of opportunities identified. Ray Harrowing collating information.

MONTH / THEME	ACTIONS	LEAD AGENCY	OUTCOME(S) & TIMESCALE	STATUS OF PROGRESS	COMMENTS
Learning & Participation	<p><u>Create a collaborative learning infrastructure that will provide better transport links, childcare provision and support to improve accessible learning opportunities for all ages</u></p> <p>GLP8. c) Establish a repository of anonymised successful bids for funding / grants, etc made by partners to facilitate sharing of best practice to increase funding levels within the partnership.</p>	OFPCN	12 bids by Sept 04.		Significant number of bids identified. Ellen Green collating information. Target will be met but timescale was too ambitious.
	<p><u>Create a collaborative learning infrastructure that will provide better transport links, childcare provision and support to improve accessible learning opportunities for all ages</u></p> <p>GLP7. a) Develop a range of collectively agreed protocols to enable sharing of facilities.</p>	OFPCN	Agreed protocols by November 2004.	✓	Outline in place, detail to go to next working group meeting.
	<p><u>Increase employers awareness, involvement and contribution to the benefits of workforce development</u></p> <p>GLP10. a) Share / promote existing best practice in Numeracy and Literacy provision with employer's, community groups, schools and WF Matters members.</p>	WFLLP	200 key groups by January 2005.		Update on progress still to be confirmed as member unable to attend last meeting

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
THURSDAY 30 JUNE 2005

Best Value Performance Plan: 2005

COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Internal Organisational Theme
CORPORATE PLAN THEME	Improving Corporacy and Performance
KEY PRIORITY	Organisational Performance
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Stephen Clee (Leader of the Council)
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Walter Delin, Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER	Peter Jones, Corporate Performance Advisor (Ext 2723)
APPENDICES	None

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To approve the Council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2005.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 2.1 The Best Value Performance Plan for 2005 be approved.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Local Government Act 1999 requires Councils to produce and publish an annual Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP).

4 KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The contents of the Plan are prescribed and must include the following:
- A summary of the Council's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement
 - Arrangements for addressing improvement priorities, particularly those identified under Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), and the outcomes expected.
 - Best Value Performance Indicators: results for 2004/05 and targets for 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08.

- 4.2 The 2005 BVPP is available on the Council's intranet and, when authorised by Council, will be published on the website. Copies have also been placed in Members' group rooms.
- 4.3 It is audited by external auditor KPMG who will report on whether it complies with statutory requirements in their Annual Audit and Inspection Letter in December 2005.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6 LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Failure to agree and publish a BVPP would result in an adverse audit report.

8. CONSULTEES

- 8.1 Cabinet; Corporate Management Team

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 Local Government Act 1999.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
30TH JUNE 2005

Benefits Service – Vision and Objectives – Update

AN OPEN ITEM	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	
CORPORATE THEME:	Delivering Quality Services
KEY PRIORITY:	Improving Customer Services
STRATEGY:	Benefits Service
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor John-Paul Campion
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Financial Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Joan Hill Extension No. 2102 Joan.hill@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDIX 1	Benefits Service – Vision and Objectives

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek endorsement of the Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service.

2. Recommendation

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

The Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service, attached as Appendix 1, be endorsed.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Council on the 16th July 2003 endorsed the Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service.
- 3.2 The Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service have been reviewed to ensure in line with best practice including consultations with stakeholders of the service. This consultation has included direct communications with landlords as well as distribution to service users and inclusion on the Council's web-site.
- 3.3 The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have published new Performance Standards in April 2005 replacing previous versions. These standards define the Benefits Service into four areas of Claims administration; Security; User focus & Resource Management. Each area having enablers and performance measures.

- 3.4 There are 65 enablers. Each of the 4 themes contains a number of enablers that set out a strategy, policy, procedure or practice that should be in place in every authority. Local authorities are asked to undertake an annual self-assessment against these enablers and submit the data to the DWP.
- 3.5 In all there are 19 performance measures which include the 10 statutory Best Value Performance Indicators. Performance measures are included for the three themes of Claims administration, Security and User focus. These are volume based and authorities are asked to provide data quarterly to the DWP.
- 3.6 In addition to the Enablers and Performance Measures the DWP have published Good Practice. This good practice includes members annually endorsing policies and objectives relating to the Benefits Service.
- 3.7 The Council has adopted a Corporate Plan for 2003 – 2008 with a vision “Building a Better Future” underpinned by values which influence work and planning of the authority which is at the centre piece of the corporate planning framework. This plan covers eight themes that define strategic aims and priorities, which demonstrate that the Council has a clear sense of purpose and direction. The Benefit service has been aligned to the theme of Delivering Quality Services.
- 3.8 The Financial Services Divisional Service Business Plan states how the Division will work towards the Council’s strategic aims and priorities to deliver the Corporate Plan. The Divisional Plans are produced annually reported to members and provide direction and more detailed aims and objectives, all within a specific and measurable time-scale. Sectional Service plans as appropriate translates the Corporate and Divisional plans into more specific objectives, targets and actions.
- 3.9 This Vision and related objectives are included within the Financial Services Divisional Service Business Plan for the Benefits Service.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications associated within this report.

5. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is a requirement that this authority administers Housing and Council Tax Benefits in accordance with legislation and DWP requirements.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Council endorsed the Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service in July 2003. A review of the Vision and Objectives has been undertaken including consultations with stakeholders and only minor changes have been made. In accordance with good practice recommended by the Department of Work & Pensions members are requested to reaffirm the endorsement of the Vision and Objectives of the Benefits Service.

8. CONSULTEES

- 8.1 CMT
Various stakeholders including service users, landlords and external partner agencies.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 CM 101 Council 16th July 2003 – Benefits Service – Vision and Objectives
Department of Work & Pensions – Performance Standards

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

BENEFITS SERVICE – VISION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION:

To provide an effective and secure Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit service, within available resources.

This vision is a commitment of the authority to provide a service that is:

- Customer-focused, modern and efficient
- Speedy and accurate
- Secure, reducing the risks of fraud and error
- Supporting claimants to live in decent housing

In so doing, the service will:

- Be accessible to everyone in the community
- Ensure claimants receive the benefit to which they are entitled
- Minimise barriers to work
- Recover overpayments
- Reduce the levels of fraud and error while investigating fraud and taking appropriate action
- Encourage good performance within the authority

OBJECTIVES:

To meet over time, within available resources, the full range of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Performance Standards set by the Department of Work and Pensions.

The service strives to seek continuous improvement by way of efficiency savings and value-for-money improvements in line with Best Value and Gershon principles including working in partnership with external agencies.

The service has an objective to minimise the time taken to process all benefit claims and thereby ensure that a backlog situation is not created.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
30TH JUNE 2005

HOUSING BENEFITS OVERPAYMENTS
DEBT POSITION AS AT 31ST MARCH 2005

AN OPEN ITEM	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	
CORPORATE THEME:	Improving Corporacy & Performance
KEY PRIORITY:	Financial and Asset Management
STRATEGY:	Write Off of Uncollectable Debts
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor John-Paul Campion
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Financial Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Joan Hill Extension No. 2102 Joan.hill@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDIX 1	Housing Benefits Overpayments Debt position as at 31 st March 2005

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of the Housing Benefit Overpayment debt position as at 31st March 2005, summary attached as an Appendix, together with details of the targets that have been set for recovery.

2. Recommendation

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE:

The Housing Benefits overpayment debt level, age of debt and performance against targets as at the 31st March 2005, as detailed in the Appendix to the report, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Executive on the 8th January 2004 agreed the following:
- the Benefits overpayment debt level and age of debt be reported to the Executive on a six monthly basis;
 - the targets set for the recovery of overpayments be noted and be kept under review by the Head of Financial Services; and
 - the targets set for the reduction of inactive debt be kept under review by the Head of Financial Services.

- 3.2 The Benefits section actively pursues all overpayments with a request for write-off in accordance with Council procedures as a last resort. It should be noted that records of all outstanding overpayments are retained even when written off, in the event of benefit award or other change of circumstances, which would enable recovery in the future. Therefore by definition a target of zero has been set for the number and amount of inactive benefit overpayment debt.
- 3.3 A breakdown of the recovery action instigated on debts more than three months old at 31st March 2005 is shown in Appendix 1 together with the comparable breakdown as at 30th September 2004; 31st March 2004 and 30th September 2003. Performance against target for 2004/05 and targets for 2005/06 are also included.
- 3.4 A target has been set to forward debts for legal action within 6 weeks of the debt being returned from the Debt Collecting Agency. This target is currently being met. Performance against this target will continue to be monitored and the target reviewed.
- 3.5 The Benefits section has procedures and controls in place to ensure all overpayment debts are recovered on a cost-effective basis.
- 3.6 It should be noted that the legislation requires:
- (a) under Section 6 of the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations that once an invoice for a recoverable housing benefit overpayment debt has been issued no further action can be taken by the Council until at least 28 days has lapsed; and
 - (b) a maximum level is given for the amount that the Council may deduct for the recovery of an overpayment debt from ongoing housing benefit payments.
- 3.7 The benefit overpayment position is continuously changing for example as claimant's circumstances change and should be considered alongside the total housing benefit paid out in 2004/05 revised estimate of some £15.9 million. The debt outstanding as at 31st March 2005 of £450,546 represents 2.8% of the total housing benefit paid in 2004/05. The forecasted expenditure for housing benefit for the current financial year is £16.7 million.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications associated within this report. The costs of recovery of Housing Benefit overpayment debts are within existing budgets.

5. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is a statutory requirement that this authority administers Housing and Council Tax Benefits in accordance with legislation and DWP requirements.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The Housing Benefits overpayment debts are closely monitored and action is taken to recover monies as speedily and efficiently as possible.

8. CONSULTEES

8.1 None

9. Background Papers

9.1 18th May 2004 – Executive – Housing Benefits Overpayments policy
Department of Work & Pensions – Performance Standards

J.Hill/26.05.05

Benefit Overpayment Debt Position as at 31st March 2005

<u>Benefit Overpayment Debt Position as at 31st March 2005</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding at 31st March 2005</u>
Debt balance brought forward to 31 st March 2005	360,506	80%
• Recovered through on-going benefit	257,174	
• Recovered through on-going benefit	103,332	

APPENDIX 1
(CONTINUED)

Benefit Overpayment Debt Position as at 31st March 2005

	<u>£</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding over 3 months old at 31.03.05</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding over 3 months old at 30.9.04</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding over 3 months old at 31.3.04.</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding over 3 months old at 30.9.03</u>	<u>% of Debts outstanding over 3 months old Target 2004/05 & 2005/06</u>
Analysis of Debt Outstanding at 31st March 2005 more than three months old						
Agreements to Pay (including £129,425 from ongoing)	258,827	71.6	61.4	60.1	76.5	70.0
With Debt Collection Agency for Action	51,031	14.1	13.3	13.6	14.7	10.0
With Legal Services for Action	19,797	5.5	7.3	3.6	3.0	2.0
With Benefits Services for Action (see note below)	31,890	8.8	18.0	22.7	5.8	18.0
TOTAL – debts raised before 1st January 2005 (i.e. more than three months old)	£361,545	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note – This category includes inactive debt i.e. those debts where contact had been made with the debtor but circumstances changed, payments ceased and contact now lost. The category also includes cases for example, moving onto/off benefit and cases being considered for write-off under the Council procedures. All debts are actively pursued and recovered by the Benefits section.



**HOUSING BENEFITS
OVERPAYMENTS POLICY**

JUNE 2005

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING BENEFITS OVERPAYMENTS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Housing Benefits overpayments are established through the review of the entitlement to Benefit or in some instances the correction of an error or from the set aside of an original benefit determination.
- 1.2 An overpayment can be described as an amount of benefit which has been paid but to which there was no entitlement under the regulations. This can relate to both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, however this document will deal only with Housing Benefit overpayments. Council Tax Benefit overpayments are recovered through Council Tax bills.
- 1.3 They can occur for various reasons including claimants or landlords not giving the correct notification of change of circumstances or providing incorrect information to support a claim and delays or mistakes by the Authority.
- 1.4 The Authority receives subsidy from the Government in respect of certain types of overpayment and, therefore, it is important that overpayments are correctly classified.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 It is essential that Wyre Forest District Council demonstrates that it undertakes the administration and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments efficiently and effectively and by doing so it
 - reduces the losses to public funds
 - provides revenue for the Authority and helps reduce the loss from overpayments.
 - deters fraud and error
 - demonstrates the Authority's commitment to accuracy and provision of a quality service to customers.
- 2.2 The aims of this policy are:
 - to be a guide to all staff involved, and
 - to set out a clear debt recovery strategy.
- 2.3 The policy will be published on the Council's website and subject to regular monitoring to ensure it remains in accordance with the approved vision for the Benefits Service.
- 2.4 At six monthly intervals, the Benefit Section will report to the Cabinet the Benefit Overpayment Debt Position. The report will analyse the debts between less than and more than 3 months old, for those debts more than 3 months a detailed position is reported of the action being taken and against target.

2.5 In line with the National BVPI's the Benefit Section will set annual targets to improve the level of recovery with the objective of reaching and maintaining recovery action equal to or greater than the top quartile BVPI for the recovery of overpayments to ensure continuous improvement. The performance is reported six monthly to the Cabinet.

3. **Scope**

3.1 This policy applies to all Council employees involved in the Benefits Service.

4. **Staffing**

4.1 The Authority has a

- Benefits Team consisting of 1 Benefit Manager, 1 Principal Benefit Officer, 5 Senior Benefit Assessors, 18 full-time equivalent Benefit Assessors, 4 Benefit Assistants, 2 Customer Service Assistants, 2 Visiting Officers and a Part-time Accounts Assessor, and an
- Investigations Team consisting of 1 Principal Fraud Investigator, 2 Senior Fraud Investigation Officers and a Part-time Administration Assistant.

4.2 The recovery of overpayments from on-going benefit is undertaken by the Benefits Assessors and the recovery of Sundry Debtor Invoices is undertaken by the Control Team comprising a Senior Benefit Assessor and 2 Benefit Assessors.

5. **Identification of Overpayments and Decisions on Recoverability**

5.1 Accurate and prompt identification of an overpayment is important in order to

- ensure that the incorrect payment of Benefit is discontinued
- maximise the chances of the successful recovery of the overpayment
- reduce the number of complaints and appeals.

5.2 In order to identify overpayments promptly the Section uses a Remote Access Terminal linked to the Benefits Agency. Details of cessation of Income Support and Income Based Jobseekers Allowance are downloaded on a daily basis.

5.3 Where possible, incoming mail which advises of a change in circumstances is identified and prioritised, with the aim to action it within eight days. It is important to establish the correct effective date of the change. If the date is not included in the original notification an attempt to contact the customer by phone will be made. If this is not successful the change in circumstances is cancelled from the date that the notification is received. A letter is then sent to the customer requesting the correct date and any necessary amendments will be made when this is received.

5.4 Overpayments are identified by the Benefits Officers and they will establish the cause of the overpayment, whether it is recoverable and from whom it should be recovered.

- 5.5 Correct decision making on whether or not there is an overpayment and whether it is recoverable is essential because
- there are consequences for the rights of claimants and other affected persons
 - the decision can affect the finances of the Authority if it is not recoverable
 - decisions made and the reasons for them can provide an indication of the levels of fraud and error against inefficiency.
- 5.6 An overpayment is recoverable generally unless it is due to an official error. However, the overpayment is recoverable where the claimant or someone acting on their behalf, or the person to whom the payment was made, could reasonably have been expected to realise that an overpayment was taking place at the time of payment or upon receipt of any notification relating to the payment.
- 5.7 An official error does not include circumstances where the claimant, or someone acting on their behalf, or the person to whom the payment was made, caused or materially contributed to the error. These circumstances are classed as claimant error, claimant fraud or third party error and are recoverable.
- 5.8 Whether a recoverable overpayment is recovered is at the discretion of the Council and regard should be given to the individual circumstances when deciding whether recovery is appropriate.
- 5.9 If a Benefit Officer is in any doubt as to whether an overpayment is recoverable such cases should be referred to the Principal Benefit Officer.
- 5.10 When the overpayment is calculated on the Benefits System the system is set to automatically note as to whether it arose as a result of an error by the customer or the Authority. If there is any fraud involved then the system must be updated to indicate this.
- 5.11 The calculation of a recoverable overpayment is arrived at by deducting the amount of benefit that should have been paid, over the period in question, from the amount of benefit actually paid. Consideration is given to any uncashed or returned cheques or underpayment of benefit and customers are given the opportunity to provide evidence of any possible underlying benefit entitlement.
- 5.12 If an overpayment is deemed irrecoverable it is to be authorised on the Claimant Information Sheet by either the Principal Benefit Officer or Benefit Manager.
6. **Who to Recover the Overpayment from?**
- 6.1 A recoverable overpayment can be recovered from the customer or from the person who received the payment - e.g. a landlord who has been paid direct (case law has shown that recovery can be sought from the landlord, if he has been paid direct even if the landlord did not contribute to or have knowledge of the overpayment). In coming to a decision as to who recovery will be sought from all relevant factors will be taken into account and it should be noted that such a decision can be the subject of an appeal.
- 6.2 If an overpayment has occurred due to a misrepresentation or failure to disclose a relevant fact by the customer, someone acting on their behalf or the landlord (or agent) the overpayment can be recovered from that person.

6.3 If an overpayment has been made to a deceased person recovery can be sought from their estate.

7. **Notification of an Overpayment**

7.1 The Housing Benefit regulations state that any person affected by a decision relating to an overpayment must be notified in writing e.g. if recovery is to be from a landlord, a notification must be sent to the claimant and the landlord. A notification of the decision is sent out immediately stating clearly the reasons for the overpayment (and why it is recoverable) and advising the customer of the rights of appeal/review.

7.2 All notifications are checked by the Benefit Assessors to ensure that they are accurate prior to despatch.

7.3 As an aid to staff when the notification is produced a note should be made on the Claimant Information Sheet (within Comino) as to the reasons for the overpayment, classification of overpayment and decision on recoverability.

7.4 In the event of a request for a review or appeal, legal challenge, complaint or civil proceedings it is possible for a copy of the notification to be obtained from Comino system.

8. **Recovery of the Overpayment from On-going Benefit**

8.1 Where there is still entitlement to Housing Benefit the overpayment can be recovered from the on-going Benefit and this will be arranged by the Benefits Assessors.

8.2. The rate of recovery from on-going Benefit will take into account individual circumstances.

8.3 DWP circulars state the maximum rate per week of recovery from on-going Benefit, however, this can be increased with the consent of the debtor. The Benefit Section will continue to increase this rate in accordance with future Up-rating Circulars. If the debtor is working the amount recovered from on-going benefit can be increased by calculating 50% of the disregarded part of the income.

8.4 Where the overpayment is to be recovered from on-going Benefit details of this are shown on the notification letter. If the debtor is still in receipt of Housing Benefit but there is not sufficient in payment to enable the maximum DWP recovery rate the Authority will reduce the rate of recovery per week.

8.5 In cases where a fraud has been identified and the debtor, as a result of an investigation, has admitted knowing intent the recovery rate will be the maximum allowed by the DWP.

8.6 It should be noted that recovery from on-going Benefit is counted as recovery from the claimant and not the landlord. Consequently the landlord is not a person affected and cannot apply for a revision of the decision or appeal it. The claimant must make up the shortfall in the Housing Benefit in order to avoid any rent arrears. If a rent arrears situation develops the landlord should pursue recovery on that basis.

9. **Recovery of an Overpayment, where there is no On-going Benefit**

9.1 Where there is no on-going Benefit the Control Team will decide from whom the debt will be recovered. Recovery will be from the landlord in accordance with Regulations. After 28 days has elapsed the debt will be referred to the Sundry Debtors system, an account is created for the debtor and an invoice is produced. This 28 day period is to allow for a new claim being received and helps prevent unnecessary invoices being produced. It also allows the customer time to appeal against a decision.

9.2 The Invoice will request payment within 28 days. If customers are unable to pay alternative arrangements can be made.

9.3 Methods of Payment

9.3.1 Several options for payment are available and the Council can accept payment of an overpayment by the following means:

- Cheque
- Cash
- Debit Card
- Standing Order
- Credit Card (there is a small percentage charge)

9.4 Non-payment

9.4.1 If there is no further benefit entitlement and no arrangement has been made with the debtor a Reminder Notice will be issued after 21 days of issue of the invoice. The letter states what action will be taken if the debt is not paid within the specified time.

9.4.2 If full payment is not made within 28 days of the invoice being sent appropriate action will be taken to recover the debt i.e. forwarded to the appointed Council's Debt Collecting Agency or fast track court action.

9.4.3 If the debt is forwarded to the Debt Collecting Agency, they will take action to recover the debt either in full or in instalments. The Agency will pay Wyre Forest District Council all monies collected within the month and invoice the Authority in respect of their costs against those collections. Where the Agency have been unable to secure repayment on any of the debt within 90 days, they will return the case to the Authority for further action to be considered.

9.4.4 If the debt is not paid and no arrangements to pay have been made approaching the Benefits Agency to make deductions from Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance or State Retirement Pension will be considered. The Benefits Agency will have to be satisfied that the overpayment occurred as a result of false information being given or a failure to disclose a material fact by, or on behalf of, the claimant (or by another person to whom a payment of Housing Benefit has been made). The person must be receiving a sufficient amount of one or more Benefits in order for the deductions to be made.

- 9.4.5 In addition consideration will be given to taking legal action ensuring that it is cost effective to do so in terms of the age and amount of the debt.
- 9.4.6 If the customer is no longer within the Council's area but is in receipt of Housing Benefit at another Authority a request can be made for the debt to be recovered from that Benefit.
- 9.4.7 If correspondence is returned undelivered and marked Gone Away, or similar and a forwarding address is not already known efforts will be made to find a new address for the customer. Benefit records will be checked and the landlord or agent of the property will be contacted. If a new address is found the system is amended to show the revised details and recovery will recommence at whatever stage it had reached when contact was lost.
- 9.4.8 As a last resort the debt will be written off in accordance with Council's procedures.

There are various reasons for a debt being passed for write-off including:

- The overpayment is not recoverable, including where the overpayment has arisen as a result of an official error and the customer could not reasonably have been expected to realise the overpayment was occurring.
- The amount outstanding is not economical to pursue (less than £5)
- The customer is deceased and there are insufficient funds with which to discharge the debt
- The customer cannot be traced.
- All recovery options, including legal action, have been exhausted with no result.

- 9.4.9 In the first four examples the case should be referred to the Benefits Manager for a decision to be made. In the last example the case should be prepared for write-off (i.e. a report written of the action taken on the case). Reference should be made to the Council's Financial Procedure Rules detailed in the Constitution for the amount of debt which is currently :

- less than £1250 the report to be passed to the Head of Financial Services for a decision, and
- for amounts greater than £1250, referred to members for the decision.

In all cases, the overpayment will be actioned as per the decision made by members or relevant Officer i.e. to be written off or put for further action.

- 9.5 If agreed for write-off then the case will be actioned on the computer system, the claimant file information sheet will be noted accordingly and the case closed. If further action is required then the case will be actioned accordingly.

- 9.5.1 Any debts written off will be monitored on a monthly basis to identify if:
- the claimant (having moved out of the area) returns to the Wyre Forest District
 - the claimant commences claiming Housing Benefit again.
 - In either case, then the overpayment will be resurrected and (providing it was not deemed to be non-recoverable) recovery will be either sought from on-going benefit or by means of a further Invoice where the claimant has not re-applied for benefit.

9.6 Arrangements to Pay

- 9.6.1 If a debt cannot be paid in full, instalments can be arranged on a weekly or monthly basis.

- 9.6.2 In the first instance the minimum repayment that is acceptable is the maximum level set by the DWP for recovery through ongoing benefit. Ideally attempts are made to recover the debts within a year, each case being considered on its own merits. Confirmation of the arrangement is sent in the form of a letter, showing the relevant instalments and dates for payment.
- 9.6.3 If any arrangement payment is not received reminder and final notices will be issued.
- 9.6 Where payment has not been made in accordance with an arrangement the debt will be pursued as for non payment of the debt.

June 2005

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
30TH JUNE 2005

Housing Benefits – Overpayments Policy – Update

AN OPEN ITEM	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	
CORPORATE THEME:	Delivering Quality Services
KEY PRIORITY:	Improving Customer Services
STRATEGY:	Benefits service
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor John-Paul Campion
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Financial Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Joan Hill Extension No. 2102 Joan.hill@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDIX	Housing Benefits - Overpayments policy June 2005 A copy of the Policy has been placed in Party Group Rooms and a public inspection copy is available on request.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To propose an updated Housing Benefits - Overpayments Policy for adoption by the Council.

2. Recommendation

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council:

The Housing Benefits - Overpayments Policy –June 2005, be adopted by the Council.

3. Background

- 3.1 The current Housing Benefits – Overpayments policy was approved by Council on the 19th May 2004 minute CM.750 refers. It was agreed that the policy would be subject to regular monitoring and updates to ensure it remains in accordance with the vision for the Benefits service.
- 3.2 The policy has been reviewed to ensure that it is in accordance with current best practice and the requirements of the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) Performance Standards. The relevant Performance Standard is Overpayments – Managing debt.

3.3 The areas updated are those detailing the reporting to members of the Overpayment position at six monthly intervals, the setting of annual recovery targets and write-off procedures.

3.4 The Benefit section has procedures and controls in place to ensure all overpayments debts are recovered on a cost-effective basis. The section has in place an on-line policy and procedure manual to which all members of the section have access and the policy is on the Council's web-site.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 It is a statutory requirement that this authority administers Housing and Council Tax Benefits in accordance with legislation and DWP requirements.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 An agreed Council policy and procedures for employees which is readily available enables debts to be monitored and recovered in accordance with agreed protocols.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The Housing Benefits – Overpayments policy has been updated in accordance with best practice and DWP requirements.

8. CONSULTEES

8.1 Corporate Management Team

9. Background Papers

9.1 Department of Work and Pensions – Performance Standards
18th May 2004 – Executive – Housing Benefits Overpayments policy

J.Hill/24.05.05

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

30th JUNE 2005

Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act

COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	A Beautiful OPEN Environment
CORPORATE PLAN THEMES:	Managing the Local Environment
KEY PRIORITY:	Enforcement
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Marcus Hart
RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS:	Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services, and Head of Planning, health & Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Andrew Dickens 01562 732900
APPENDICES & BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Summary of The Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 Clean Neighbourhood & Environment Act 2005 – available for viewing on HMSO website

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend to Council that delegated authority is given to the relevant Head of Service to implement and undertake enforcement action, where it is expedient, as specified in the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** that:-

- 2.1 The Scheme of Delegation to Officers be amended to give delegated powers to the Head of Cultural, Leisure & Commercial Services and the Head of Planning, Health & Environment to take any required action, including the issuing of fixed price penalty notices, under the provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005.
- 2.2 That the Head of Legal & Democratic Services be authorised to take legal proceedings where necessary against persons failing to comply with the provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 is the result of a wide ranging consultation process between Government and local authorities over the inadequacies and difficulties of enforcement under such Acts as the Environmental Protection Act, Dog Fouling of Land Act and Highways Acts.

The Act gives greater powers to local authorities to tackle environmental crime and anti social behaviour and gives them greater flexibility in the issuing of Fixed Price Penalty Notices, the setting of fines and the retention and reuse of monies for environmental and related enforcement and improvement services.

A summary of the main points of the Act which is a legal briefing prepared by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services is available in Group rooms and on the Council's intranet and website.

- 3.2 The Act received Royal Assent on 7th April 2005 and has a phased introduction with initially some elements of the Act being enforceable from 7th June 2005 but with the main elements of the Act coming into force on 7th April 2006.

4. BENEFITS OF THE ACT

- 4.1 There are substantial benefits of the Act to local authorities and Officers currently engaged in enforcement and environmental monitoring activities. The key changes include:-

- Makes it an offence under certain circumstances to make vehicles available for sale on the highway (7th June 2005)
- Makes it an offence to repair vehicles in the nature of a business on the highway (7th June 2005)
- Gives power to require names and addresses of offenders for all Fixed Price Penalty Notices (immediate effect)
- Gives the ability for the Council to set the level of the fixed price penalty notices
- Gives greater powers to deal with abandoned cars
- Clarifies that discarding cigarette ends and chewing gum and like products in other than a designated bin is an offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be subject to Fixed Price Penalty Notices (7th June 2005)
- Simplifies the issuing of Street Litter Control Notices and gives the Council greater power in dealing with litter on private land
- Allows the issuing of Fixed Price Penalty Notices for graffiti and fly posting (7th April 2006)
- Gives greater power to deal with the transportation and flytipping of commercial waste (7th June 2005)

- Allows Fixed Price Penalty Notices to be issued for non control of dogs (7th April 2006)
- Gives greater powers to deal with noise nuisance from burglar alarms etc (7th April 2006)
- Gives a greater emphasis to crime reduction strategies and allows controlled access to pathways and alleyways (7th April 2006)

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 If the Council takes the stance that enforcement should be through the existing trained officers within Cultural, Leisure & Commercial Services and Planning, Health & Environment, there are no additional financial implications of adopting the Act.
- 5.2 However, given the increased powers, if the Council wish to fully implement and enforce the Act on a regular basis, they should consider a service option for increased resources for dedicated Enforcement Officers in order to gain the full benefit of the greater powers and responsibilities given to local authorities to tackle environmental crime and anti social behaviour.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council has an Enforcement Policy which is consistent with the adoption of the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 and the legal implications are covered in the Legal Briefing 83 produced by legal & Democratic Services and available in Group rooms and on the Council's intranet and website.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are clearly risks with officers taking greater enforcement action against the public and these will be assessed through Risk Assessments

8. CONSULTEES

CMT

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 available for viewing on the website of HM Stationery Officer

Legal Briefing 83 – Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005 available on the Council's intranet and website

AD/JHL
03 June 2005

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

30TH JUNE 2005

Integrated Economic Development and Tourism Plan

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Shared Prosperity
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Promoting Economic Prosperity
CORPORATE PLAN KEY PRIORITY:	Regeneration
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor James Dudley
HEAD OF SERVICE:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Steve Singleton Ext. 2752 steve.singleton@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDIX:	Appendix 1 – Summary of Plan attached to this report. A copy of the full draft Plan has been placed in Party Group Rooms and a public inspection copy is available on request (see front cover for details)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To obtain approval to the District Council's Integrated Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2005 – 2007.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 1.2 **The District Council's Integrated Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2005 – 2007 be approved.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The District Council's role in Economic Development and Tourism is one of promoter, facilitator, enabler, planner, advocate and evaluator in partnership with the private and public sectors and other community leaders at District, County and Regional levels.

- 3.2 Developed around the Vision that *“the Wyre Forest District has a thriving and sustainable economy, offering its residents, businesses, investors and visitors a diverse, dynamic and competitive business and employment base and a high quality lifestyle for all”*, the Plan links the “Shared Prosperity” Theme and Key Priorities expressed in the District’s Community Strategy with the Worcestershire Economic Strategy and the Council’s Corporate Plan and draws synergy between them.
- 3.3 Whilst the main Priorities and Objectives are strategic and for the “medium to long term” in nature, the Plan itself has a relatively short time frame. This is due to emerging proposals for a Countywide “Destination Management Partnership” (DMP) – a proposed joint private/public sector structure being proposed to deliver the future tourism services throughout Worcestershire from 2007. It is anticipated that the proposals for the DMP will be the subject of a report to Cabinet towards the end of the year.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Plan (a summary of which is attached to this report at Appendix 1) identifies the key Economic Development and Tourism challenges faced by the district including:
- 4.1.2 A manufacturing sector which is expected to decline in future years;
 - 4.1.3 The shortage of quality and “budget” price hotel accommodation
 - 4.1.4 The high proportion of local jobs that pay relatively low wages
 - 4.1.5 The high proportion of the local population that is employed in lower skilled, lower order occupations;
 - 4.1.6 The shortage of readily available and quality employment land.
- 4.2 The Plan also identifies a number of future economic trends including:-
- 4.2.1 The population aged between 0 and 19 is expected to decline between 2004 and 2015; however, the size of the population aged over 60 is likely to increase.
 - 4.2.2 The share of manufacturing employment in the district is expected to decline between 2005 and 2015; however, the share of employment for the distribution, hotels and catering and ‘other services’ sectors is likely to increase.
 - 4.2.3 Self employment levels are expected to increase by 1.8% between 2005 and 2015, with increases in self employment forecasted in the distribution and catering, transport and communications and ‘other services’ sectors. Self-employment levels in manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying, and banking, finance and insurance are expected to decrease.
 - 4.2.4 The net rate of out-commuting from the district is likely to decrease between 2005 and 2015.

- 4.2.5 The rate of unemployment is likely to increase significantly between 2004 and 2006 but then decrease once again between 2006 and 2015.
- 4.3 The Plan also includes an Economic Development and Tourism Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis.
- 4.4 Four Key Priorities are identified as below, each of which has its own set of Objectives and Actions:-

A. Business Development & Advice

To provide support for new and existing businesses; develop suitable business sites and premises, improve connections to modern information and communications technologies.

B. Regeneration

To promote and market the District, train and motivate individuals, support excluded individuals and local communities, assess sectors “at risk” and/or promote alternatives, maximise available economic regeneration funding.

C. Support, develop and promote the Visitor Economy

To research, develop and promote existing attractions and accommodation providers, provide Tourist Information, liaise with relevant local and regional agencies, partnerships and private sector organisations.

D. Town Centres

To develop and support partnership working with public and private sector stakeholders and external funding providers to promote and attract visitors into the town centres and where appropriate attract inward investors.

- 4.5 The specific Actions identified within this Plan are as set out in the Strategy and Performance Unit’s Business Plan 2005/06 (Economic Development and Tourism Section)

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The approval of this report and the Plan should not, in itself, make the Council liable for any financial commitments other than approved within existing budgets.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The adoption of the Plan accords with the priorities of the Wyre Forest Community Strategy and of the District Council.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There are no immediate risk management issues arising from this report. In the longer term, there may be capacity issues to address regarding project managing the delivery of the Plan and its component parts.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Plan identifies the key issues affecting Economic Development & Tourism in the District and sets out specific actions aimed at bringing about improvements and benefits to the area.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 CMT
9.2 Cabinet Member for Environment and Economic Regeneration
9.3 Shared Prosperity Theme Group of Local Strategic Partnership
9.4 Wyre Forest Business Forum
9.5 WFDC Tourism Officer

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None

7th June 2005

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM PLAN 2005 – 2007
Summary Paper**

1. Introduction

1.1 The District Council has a key role in co-ordinating and guiding the activities of all those involved or interested in making sure the district is an excellent place to live, work, visit and invest in.

1.2 This District Council Economic Development and Tourism Plan: -

- promotes a shared understanding of the main economic development and tourism issues affecting the district
- recognises the wider economic picture and identifies how the District's needs relate to the Sub Region and Region and related plans and actions.
- provides a framework so that organisations are able to make their plans and activities fit with the Plan
- is a mechanism for prioritising resources and obtaining funding
- provides a tool for measuring progress in meeting specified targets.

1.3 The Plan has a relatively short time frame (2005 - 2007) as it recognises the emerging County "Destination Management Partnership" (DMP) – the proposed joint private/public sector structure being proposed to deliver the future tourism services throughout Worcestershire from 2007.

2. Economic Development and Tourism Challenges

2.1 The District faces a number of challenges, which are threatening the long-term vitality of the economy. For example:

- The district and particular Kidderminster has a significantly large manufacturing sector, (including carpet manufacturing), which is expected to decline in future years;
- Although the retail sector (within Kidderminster in particular) has expanded, the growth of other service sector industries has been relatively slow;
- There is a shortage of quality and "budget" price hotel accommodation for visitors and business travellers.
- A high proportion of local jobs pay relatively low wages;
- A high proportion of the local population is employed in lower skilled, lower order occupations;

- The district has a relatively low skilled labour force and a high proportion of the local workforce do not possess the necessary skills to work in expanding 'higher order' service industries or higher value added manufacturing industries;
- There are areas with significant pockets of deprivation (most notably the Oldington and Foley Park and Broadwaters wards) that are experiencing a number of socio-economic problems;
- There are a number of high-profile tourist attractions in the district. However Kidderminster town centre in particular has yet to capitalise fully on the proximity of these attractions;
- There is a shortage of readily available and quality employment land. There are however a number of former industrial sites not being used, but which could become key employment sites and key income generating uses in the longer-term;
- The road network is relatively poor and major roads experience some significant levels of traffic congestion.
- Kidderminster in particular has a relatively low quantity of people living within its town centre and in addition, the town's 'evening economy' is significantly underdeveloped;
- The key strengths and opportunities that the area offers have not been marketed and promoted sufficiently.

3. Future Economic Trends

- The population aged between 0 and 19 is expected to decline between 2004 and 2015; however, the size of the population aged over 60 is likely to increase.
- Economic activity rates are expected to increase between 2004 and 2015.
- Overall levels of Gross Value Added (GVA) are expected to increase with the manufacturing, transport and communications, and distribution and catering sectors all experiencing significant increases.

GVA measures the total value of final goods and services produced in a year in the geographical area under consideration, less the taxes on those products but including the subsidies on these products, and also excludes the role of intermediate products and sale of second hand goods, and is normally expressed at constant prices, after deducting the effects of inflation

- The share of manufacturing employment in the district is expected to decline between 2004 and 2015; however, the share of employment for the distribution, hotels and catering and 'other services' sectors is likely to increase.
- The share of GVA of the manufacturing sector is likely to decrease between 2004 and 2015; however, the share of GVA for the transport and communications and 'other services' sectors is likely to increase.
- Self employment levels are expected to increase by 1.8% between 2004 and 2015, with increases in self employment forecasted in the distribution and catering, transport and communications and 'other services' sectors. Self-employment levels in manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying, and banking, finance and insurance are expected to decrease.

- The net rate of out-commuting from the district is likely to decrease between 2004 and 2015.
- The rate of unemployment is likely to increase significantly between 2004 and 2006 but then decrease once again between 2006 and 2015.
- The district is home to the most deprived ward in Worcestershire and has a number of other areas that experience high levels of poverty, poor health, social exclusion and low educational attainment.
- Tourism and the rapid development of the retail sector particularly in Kidderminster is a vital part of the district's economy. But this has implications in that the sectors usually offer relatively low wages and they are vulnerable to downturns in the economy.

4. Economic Development & Tourism SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy
- WFDC Corporate Plan
- Kidderminster Economic Development and Regeneration Strategy
- Council adopted External Funding Strategy
- Adopted Local Plan (January 2004)
- Diversifying economic/business base
- Private sector investment into Kidderminster's Weavers Wharf and Crossley Park
- Headquarter location to several leading companies and agencies
- Geographically centrally located within the country
- Good quality environment in which to live, work and holiday
- Relatively affordable house prices;
- Established and nationally recognised tourist and day visitor attractions;
- Well developed training, business support and education infrastructure;
- Kidderminster College Town centre location
- High quality sports and leisure facilities
- River and/or canal side in all three towns and some outlying rural areas
- Market town status in Stourport and Bewdley

Weaknesses

- Educational attainment and skill levels are below average
- Lower than average household incomes
- High unmet demand for 'affordable housing'
- Localised areas with a poor built environment
- Traditional and manufacturing industry is in decline

- No established 'hi-tech' areas or science parks
- Shortage of readily available industrial and commercial development sites
- Road and transport infrastructure is relatively poor
- Shortage of multi-modal connections (e.g. rail and bus);
- Key corridors/gateways are uninviting
- Shortage of quality overnight accommodation for business and tourist visitors
- No "big name" hotels
- Kidderminster:
 - Limited coach parking for visitor / day trip market in Kidderminster town centre
 - Limited "long stay" parking in town centre
 - No "identity"
 - Evening economy underdeveloped
 - Geographical 'hot spots' of deprivation with higher than average unemployment
 - Shortage of strategic external funding
 - Limited overnight accommodation
- Stourport:
 - Peak season traffic congestion
 - No TIC facilities
 - Poor public WC facilities
 - Limited heritage interpretation
 - Poor promotion and limited choice of "quality" eating establishments at higher end of market
- Bewdley :
 - Poor signage (especially to car parks)
 - Limited activities to make a meaningful day visit
 - Limited use of riverside and events
 - QE II Gardens, "hidden"
 - Lack of tea shops and availability of early evening food
 - Shortage of overnight accommodation

Threats

- Competition from other regions and areas for grant aid, resources and jobs
- Competition from other areas with tourism
- Growing level of international competition and weak domestic market forcing the decline of the area's carpet and some other manufacturing industries;

- Prolonged shortage of public sector finance

Opportunities

- Oldington and Foley Park ward, Kidderminster has 'Enterprise Area' status
- Neighbourhood Renewal funding awarded to Oldington and Foley Park ward, Kidderminster
- Former British Sugar site and the Stourport Road Employment Corridor, Kidderminster
- 'KTC 3' site in Worcester Street, Kidderminster
- Weavers Wharf development and town centre enhancements in Kidderminster
- Green Street Business Centre, Kidderminster
- Capitalise on visitors going to and coming from Kidderminster's (and the Wyre Forest District's) established tourist attractions
- Capitalise on reputation and history of carpet industry
- Peak time Kidderminster direct rail link to (am) & from (pm) London
- Expansion of New Road (Kidderminster) car park
- Rivers and canals
- Stourport Canal Basins
- "STC4" site Bridge St Stourport
- Stourport Riverside Meadows
- Business Improvement District proposals in Sandy Lane Industrial Estate, Stourport and Kidderminster Town Centre
- Bewdley Museum and QE II Gardens
- Chiltern Railways to obtain rail franchise
- Opportunity Bewdley Local Distinctiveness project

7. Key Priorities & Objectives

A. Business Development & Advice

1. To establish enhance and maintain the District as a recognised area of business growth that attracts inward investment and generates high quality jobs.
2. To establish, enhance and maintain accessible, attractive and safe employment areas in which to work and visit.
3. To research, develop, provide and promote appropriate business support and opportunities.
4. To support the provision of and access to all elements of technology and an Information Communications Technology infrastructure to all businesses

B. Regeneration

1. To create a skilled, trained and motivated workforce to meet the demands of existing and future businesses, ensuring that education and training providers offer and deliver appropriate courses.
2. To promote and market the District as a high quality residential and business location, building on the strengths of each of the three towns and the rural hinterland.
3. To identify economic activities that may be at risk with a view to developing them and/or promoting alternatives for the workforce.
4. To maximise the provision and use of all sources of available economic regeneration funding.
5. To support excluded people and local communities by addressing neighbourhood renewal, equal opportunities, financial empowerment and work/life balance.
6. To encourage and support community enterprises.

C. Support, develop and promote the Visitor Economy

- 1 To promote and market the District as a high quality visitor and short stay destination to encourage greater visitor numbers, business tourism, longer stay visitors and increased spend in the local economy.
- 2 To research all relevant policies and undertake appropriate surveys to raise awareness and improve visitor expectation and experience.
- 3 To improve the delivery of Tourist information through the Tourist Information Centre, electronic and hard copy media
- 4 To work with and regularly network with the private sector accommodation and attraction providers and support agencies to raise quality standards, improve the performance of business and appeal to visitors.
- 5 To improve the local tourism infrastructure, signage and accessibility to improve visitor experience and satisfaction.
- 6 To develop the sub regional "Worcestershire Destination Partnership" and partake in relevant local and sub regional partnerships utilising external funding where possible, to influence the local tourism product.

D. Town Centres

1. To develop and support a re structured Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership working with stakeholders, including the Local Planning Authority to produce a Strategy to take the town forward
2. To support and develop the Market Towns Initiative and other external funding opportunities in Stourport on Severn.
3. To support and develop the Market Towns Initiative, Rural Regeneration Zone and other external funding opportunities in Bewdley.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
DECISION NOTICE

COUNCILLOR MRS M B ASTON

CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOUSING, HEALTH
AND RURAL AFFAIRS

SCRUTINY OF DECISIONS OF INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBERS

Decision No 2008 In accordance with Part 4 of the Council's Constitution Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Standing Order B4, any item on this decision notice may be scrutinised by the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee if it is 'called in' by any three non-Cabinet Members and the Chairman of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Panel, or by three members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and any member of the relevant Policy and Scrutiny Panel.

The deadline for 'calling in' this decision is

Councillors wishing to 'call in' a decision on this notice should contact Heather Jones, Acting Scrutiny Officer, on 01562-732733, e-mail: Heather.Jones@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Reason for Decision: *To ensure that WFDC fully contributes its views to the development of the forthcoming Regional Housing Strategy*

Note to Originating Officer

If this decision is not called in by the date specified above, the agreed action may be taken after that date. You will be notified of any call-in.

Response to the draft West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy (RHS)

South Housing Market Area Working Group

This response is made on behalf of the South HMA Working Group, comprising representatives of the following organisations:

Bromsgrove DC
Malvern Hills DC
Redditch BC
Stratford on Avon DC
Warwick DC
Warwickshire County Council
Worcester City Council
Wychavon DC
Wyre Forest DC
Worcestershire County Council

Bromford Housing Group
Festival Housing Group
Heart of England Housing Group
Rooftop Housing Group
West Mercia Housing Group
Worcester Community Housing

Lead Authority contacts:

Colin Davis
Strategic Director
Malvern Hills DC
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Malvern
WR14 3AF

Peter Newman
Housing Strategy
Warwick DC
PO Box 2175
Riverside House
Milverton Hill
Leamington Spa
CV32 5QE

1. INTRODUCTION

This response follows the structure of the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). Page and paragraph references to the RHS are included where appropriate.

The first section addresses points made in the Introduction to the RHS, and offers some general comments on the document as a whole.

General comments

The Group welcomes the publication of the revised RHS, and its recognition of the issues facing the South HMA. We also welcome the depth of research that supports the RHS but wish to emphasise that the data needs to be updated regularly, and perhaps annually, in order to maintain the currency of information that will drive and refine policy and resource allocation over time.

In particular we support the emphasis given to tackling problems of affordability. Many elements of the strategy will assist our members in pursuing the planning and housing policies required to address the problems facing the sub-region.

However, we are concerned that despite recognising affordability as “The Big Issue” the RHS does not adequately address the lack of affordable homes across the South HMA, or make the case for delivering more. It also appears unbalanced in its presentation. The Big Issue is said to be affordability and yet a far greater proportion of the document is devoted to other issues, such as the needs of BME communities. The needs of young people and newly forming households, gentrification of rural villages and action to address changing needs of older people occupying larger homes are not given sufficient weight in the discussion around affordability.

The second key issue is the continuing trend of out-migration from the Major Urban Areas to the shire districts. This severely impacts on affordability in South HMA, due to increased competition for homes to buy, and also increases pressure on the social housing stock. The Regional Spatial Strategy will not arrest this trend in the short term. Moreover, the ability of the districts to respond will be undermined if there are disparities between housing needs figures generated regionally and those arising from local and sub-regional assessments (based on forthcoming ODPM guidance).

The RHB should allocate research funding to address this issue, and a debate is needed within the region.

Planned joint work by Warwick and Stratford Districts could provide an opportunity to pilot the new Local Housing Assessment model, and it could potentially be extended to cover the whole of SHMA if funding were made available.

We welcome the Strategy’s recognition of the pressures generated in the SHMA by migration flows from within and outside the West Midlands, and the priority consequently given to meeting locally-generated needs.

However, we are concerned that the RHS appears not to provide a strong enough basis for lobbying on behalf of the West Midlands Region for the additional resources required from Government to fully address the problems identified. The document should be

SHMA response to the draft West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy

seen as a significant tool to advocate and promote the investment needs of the region. As such it would benefit from a style edit to reduce its length, and to eliminate the worst instances of impenetrable and bureaucratic language which make it unnecessarily difficult to understand (for example, see the second point in the Policy box following 4.86).

We are concerned at the implicit assumption recurring throughout the RHS that local authorities are not doing their best with the resources available to them. It is not clear what evidence this assumption is based on. There should be a definite review mechanism and timescale for the RHB to assess whether or not this is an issue, and to actively seek additional funding “if the problem remains” (1.64).

It is misleading to state that “The WMRSS at no point prevents sufficient affordable housing being built to meet local needs, even in the most rural of settings” (1.62). The Allocations Strategy (10.2) underlines our concerns on this point.

Housing needs have been assessed in line with guidance, and the continuing impact of out-migration from the conurbation in the short term is neglected. It is known that the current housing numbers allocated in the RSS do not reflect the extent of identified housing need at the local level, including concealed households. This is demonstrated in the table below, and must be given a higher profile when the partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy takes place.

TABLE 1 – Housing needs in South HMA

Figures correct at March 2005

Authority	General needs (families)	General needs (single)	Older people	Older people (single)	Transfer applicants	Waiting list total	Forecast annual shortfall of affordable homes
Bromsgrove	1373	N/A	253	315	N/A	2029	418
Malvern Hills	375	395	81	16	557	1841	550
Redditch	862	744	330	271	734	2339	N/A
Stratford	1055	929	126	326	501	3012	583
Warwick	915	1261	102	218	450	2278	831
Worcester	1171	1082	168	173	693	2594	239
Wychavon	1109	1095	211	388	936	3332	303
Wyre Forest	1849	N/A	781	N/A	598	2630	334

The table gives some indication of the extent of unmet housing need in the South HMA, However, local housing needs studies show that taking waiting list figures alone tends to understate these needs. For example, Warwick DC’s 1998 study estimated that 79.6% of need was unregistered. For Wychavon DC the equivalent figure is 60.9%.

There is therefore an urgent need to resolve issues around the conduct of housing need assessments to a common agreed methodology and at the appropriate level (region/HMA/district). Unless this is dealt with quickly LHA’s may be reluctant to commit resources to such assessments until a clear direction is established.

2. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Regional Spatial Strategy has not adequately identified the need for additional affordable housing. The RHS should provide a stronger policy lead on the importance of planning for local needs first, to facilitate the development of robust policies at local level. This is particularly true for rural developments that need to be tailored to meet defined local need but are difficult in practice to deliver.

Local authorities are undertaking initiatives to release under-occupied homes, for example by offering incentives to their own tenants (Point 3 – Policy box following 2.22). What we need is access to the funding required to provide suitable alternative accommodation which meets their aspirations. This is especially problematic for older tenants occupying family homes, who often require bungalows.

The RHS should more actively promote shared ownership for older people (who may be asset rich, but cash poor), allowing them to release equity in their properties and to better afford more suitable housing, and the higher service costs often associated with it.

We would like to see some resources from the research budget devoted to quantifying the aspirations of those people who are under-occupying private sector homes.

A long term strategy for Supporting People is required, which includes widening its scope to include assistance for elderly owner occupiers (2.21). It is important that local authorities are supported in their efforts to do this, as inappropriate housing has a significant impact on health/social care needs.

The RHS' focus on the HIP funding route offers little assistance to the predominantly debt-free authorities in the SHMA. Additional resources are needed to re-model existing unsatisfactory accommodation for older people, and to provide new homes which meet their aspirations. Funding should be ringfenced for this purpose. A dedicated bid round could encourage innovation and encourage sub-regional working.

The need to concentrate provision for older people in local centres (2.22) is reflected in the settlement hierarchy embodied in local development plans. The RHS should not be overly-prescriptive about the means of meeting these needs in rural areas.

The Economy (p.29)

The Rover closure is an example of an unforeseen economic shock resulting from international economic restructuring. Similar events can be anticipated, as an unavoidable consequence of the expected shift from manufacturing to services. The need to respond to events of this kind should form part of the strategic case for housing investment in the Region.

The Regional Spatial Strategy refers to “emerging” hi-tech corridors – in fact these are already well-established. Bromsgrove, Malvern and Worcester provide examples of how success in attracting high-tech employment through the Central Technology Belt forces up house prices and worsens affordability problems for local people. These effects must be adequately addressed in the allocations strategy for the Regional Single Housing Pot if we are to benefit from joined-up strategic approaches.

SHMA response to the draft West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy

3. THE WEST MIDLANDS REGION AND ITS FOUR HOUSING MARKET AREAS

Demographic and housing patterns (South HMA)

The historical pattern of out-migration from the conurbation is rightly acknowledged as being unsustainable (3.24). However, notwithstanding the impact of the Regional Spatial Strategy, this pattern can be expected to continue in the short to medium term (3.32 and 3.33). It remains a key market driver within the South HMA. Further work could also be done to assess the potential impact on migration and commuting from any improvements in transportation infrastructure in the South HMA.

The impact on housing needs of growth in the BME population appears significant. However, it may be overstated: for example, in Malvern Hills many overseas students are accommodated on-campus in educational institutions like Abbey International College.

Of equal importance to affordability is that new housing should be targeted to meet locally-generated needs.

We welcome the RHS' recognition that local needs must be the priority use of housing land resources, and the support of the RHS for radical planning policies (Policy box following 3.34).

Some SHMA authorities are committed to utilising CPO powers, and would welcome assistance in doing so where this is appropriate. However, there are both political and practical barriers to using this approach, especially in rural areas where the properties involved are likely to be in reasonable condition, and it is difficult to demonstrate on appeal that there are no other suitable sites in that location.

While continuing private development is recognised as essential to support the Region's economic growth strategy, it should be acknowledged that this will continue to attract in-migrants to the South HMA. Private developments are also necessary to achieve sufficient new affordable homes – 100% affordable developments cannot be the whole solution as the necessary levels of Social Housing Grant are unlikely to be available and owners may not release the necessary land if profit margins are restricted.

Lack of suitable "pathways of choice" may also inhibit the delivery of Regional Economic Strategy objectives. We agree that shared ownership homes should be retained in perpetuity, and that it is desirable to restrict buyers' right to staircase to full ownership; but this is not normally possible where SHG is involved.

Where such restrictions do apply, it may limit the availability of mortgage funding for shared ownership. The RHB should engage the financial institutions in finding alternative mechanisms for restricting equity participation (and/or for lowering the costs of entry to home ownership) in ways which do not deter lenders.

New forms of equity participation (including collective forms of equity sharing such as Community Land Trusts) will have a part to play, and the RHB should commission

research as necessary, as well as facilitating strategic-level discussions between the financial institutions and housing providers.

Affordability

We welcome the emphasis placed on monitoring affordability at sub-regional level, and on commissioning joint housing needs studies and integrated housing strategies (Policy box following Table 3.1.2). We also note with approval the commitment to financial support for new initiatives of this type ((Policy box following Table 3.10) and we intend to bring forward a detailed proposal for consideration by the RHB in the near future. Financial support is essential to establish a firm foundation for joint working in newly-defined sub-regional market areas; in SHMA this calls for close collaboration between local authorities traditionally separated from each other by county boundaries.

We welcome the RHS' specific recognition of the need for social housing investment to address affordability issues in the urban areas of Warwick, Stratford and Worcester (Policy box following 3.81). However, it is clear that with the majority of districts having low levels of accommodation for social renting other urban areas within the SHMA are also affected by these problems (see our comments above, in relation to The Economy - p.29). Addition of the following words to that policy box is requested: "whilst recognising the importance of also supporting other urban and rural housing needs in the South HMA".

This is also true of the rural areas. The statement in respect of the West HMA (Policy box following 3.83) should be recited in the previous Policy box too, as it applies equally to the South HMA.

There are high levels of homelessness and significant pressures on the reducing social housing stock across the SHMA, but this is downplayed in the RHS (see our comments on Section 4 below). For example, Worcester is clearly not able to meet its own growth needs in full, and it cannot be expected to accommodate all the growth required in Worcestershire. Redditch will receive little investment due to its above average provision of social housing, despite the Strategy's recognition of its high housing stress (3.81).

Table 3.12 (p55) underestimates the extent of housing needs; (see Table 1 in this response).

Rural renaissance

A policy statement should be included which supports the settlement hierarchy and refers to affordability, scale and sustainability.

Rural designation for RTB purposes may not deliver significant benefits, especially where RTB sales are declining.

4. PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

This section of the report underplays the impact of an ageing population, and ignores young people's housing needs.

Rightly, there is a strong focus on the needs of BME communities. However, the RHS tends to overstate BME housing needs within the SHMA, as noted above.

It also clearly states that the aspirations of BME communities are no different to those of other would-be out-migrants:

“Increased prosperity, educational achievement and the decline of extended family networks may result in growing demand from aspiring BME communities. The housing tenure aspirations of the BME community...replicat[e] accepted norms amongst the wider population. There is a need to understand and facilitate these housing demands and aspirations...”.(4.18) [Emphasis added]

Such aspirations truly lie “at the root” of the RSS (3.24). It is difficult to see how they can be “facilitated” differentially for the benefit of BME communities.

CASE STUDY

The impact of P.N.O funding on Homelessness in Wyre Forest

Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau run a court advice service at Kidderminster County Court partially funded by P.N.O monies. They provide staff at Kidderminster County Court on possession hearing days to help and advise clients who seek their assistance. They can attend hearings to help negotiate suspended possession orders wherever possible and work with the client so that they can negotiate with landlords or mortgage providers to agree a repayment plan to clear arrears. In 2004/05, the Kidderminster County Court workers prevented 12 evictions.

Over the last three years our homelessness presentation figures have reduced as follows, in part due to PNO initiatives such as the CAB scheme:-

Year	Homeless presentations
2002/3	517
2003/4	422
2004/5	348

Homelessness

This section of the Strategy is poorly-drafted and contains contradictory messages (4.65). The RHB should re-examine the underlying data as a matter of urgency, and refine this section accordingly.

The Regional Homelessness Strategy was grounded in official homelessness returns to central government (P1E forms). However, more than one authority in the sub-region reported that the wrong figures were used for their authority. As these figures were fundamental to the study, the credibility of the strategy has to be called into question.

It is inaccurate to say that 30% of social lettings would be sufficient for “the majority of Authorities” to deal with those homeless in priority need. Many authorities already allocate more than 30% of their lettings to the homeless. Far higher percentages are being experienced, for example in Malvern Hills (where last year 80% of allocations to general needs RSL stock were to priority homeless need cases); Bromsgrove (where the figure is 60%); and Warwick (62%).

Supporting People

The RHS should reinforce the need for adequate housing related support, and show how SP could contribute to directly enabling the achievement of key outcomes.

Members are concerned about the proposed new methodology for distribution of grant, which seems likely to squeeze resources further, and prevent the provision of necessary new services. There is a danger that the benefits of the SP regime will be lost before they are fully realised.

The RHS should address the likely impact of such changes in the West Midlands, and provide the basis to lobby for additional resources if required.

The RHS' focus on improving joint-working (4.87 – 4.91) is supported. However, this will not produce significant new resources to address the lack of move-on accommodation. This shortage could result in some existing services being de-commissioned, since they are “silted up” with residents who no longer require the support being provided.

The Regional Homelessness Strategy should have an element of ring-fenced grant to provide move-on, enabling existing supported housing to be utilised more effectively.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

In general we are opposed to the dispersal of asylum seekers to areas where the resources required for their support do not exist and where the adverse impact on meeting local housing need is significant. Local authorities do not have the necessary resources to support dispersal programmes to such areas.

Gypsies and Other Travellers

There is currently an absence of available information about the local housing needs of gypsies and travellers. This gap has been recognised by the Government and is now a consideration in i) future Local Authority Housing Needs Surveys ii) Housing Strategies iii) Development Plan Documents. However these changes in policy will take time to become embedded and outcomes to be achieved to help inform our plans/strategies at regional, sub-regional, county and local levels. Further research is therefore needed in the short-term to enable evidence based plans to be developed. From the biennial count information, the existing distribution of caravans does not reflect the % population with a disproportionate high incidence of caravan sites (authorised and unauthorised) within the South HMA compared to the population. Generous provision of authorised sites in the South HMA appears to have attracted gypsies and travellers from outside of the local area. Future provision should not be based on the historical pattern of site provision, but should be based upon identified needs.

In the interim, it is important that existing sites are used to their maximum and that sites are not allowed to be closed. The RHS identifies a relatively high incidence of unauthorised sites within the South HMA with 90% of these sites being within Stratford and Wychavon. The RHB should undertake further research to establish the level of need, preferred options/aspirations and in particular the reasons behind the unauthorised encampments (e.g. lack of enforcement action, preferred area of choice, local connection etc).

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND DECENT HOMES

Decent Homes

The Regulatory Reform order is not working. The Kickstart process urgently needs to be rolled out (Policy box following 5.21 - point 4).

The RHB not only “could” but should “**introduce some financial incentives to local authorities to introduce programmes designed to encourage owners to invest more in the maintenance and repair of their properties**” (Policy box following 5.21 - point 9)..

The delivery of affordable housing

We are concerned that the restrictive conditions for funding of s106 sites (Policy box following 5.28 - 5th point) will severely fetter the discretion of the Housing Corporation to support schemes where they consider this to be appropriate.

We would recommend that this be amended to read “Public funding for affordable housing on s106 sites will **not normally** be available **unless** a viability study shows this is necessary...”. This gives a little flexibility where necessary.

It will be essential to agree upon the financial criteria to be used in assessing viability. While it may be preferable to standardise the provision of viability data by developers, this is unlikely to occur. There is a need for regional research and advice on viability issues, and better access to appropriate professional advice; without this it may be difficult or impossible to obtain and analyse the necessary cost information in support of grant bids or to negotiate on an equal footing with well resourced developers.

We would reiterate like to see the point on disposals of public land strengthened, so that public authorities are urged to give preference to its use for affordable housing (Policy box following 5.28 – point 11). Recently announced Government initiatives seem to support this approach.

Public bodies such as English Partnerships and Advantage West Midlands should be mandated to look at how disposals can contribute to wider strategy objectives, and to give less emphasis to achieving a commercial return on their investments.

Health and Health Proofing

There is insufficient emphasis on the potential contribution of housing to wider public health objectives. Housing resources should be targeted to mitigate adverse public health impacts.

6. MONITORING AND PARTNERSHIPS

There is a need for adequate consultation when targets are set, and for transparency across all four HMAs.

We fully endorse the need for regional data collection (6.12) and a protocol on the definition of affordable housing (Policy box following 6.12); we would also like to see a protocol for affordability criteria.

The SHMA would also welcome the RHB allocating funding to support the appointment of Rural Housing Enablers. There are only two such posts across Worcestershire and Warwickshire, and yet the success achieved thus far indicates their benefit. Guaranteed funding support should be given to ensure continuance of these posts within the voluntary sector.

We also strongly endorse the approach to joint working set out in 6.43 and the following Policy box.

We are already operating as a HMA Working Group; our objectives include those set out in the RHS (6.45), and we will shortly be drawing up a constitution for the SHMA Group.

It is because we fully endorse this approach that we would like to see the RHS strengthened as a tool for our HMA and others to lobby Government for adequate resources to address the issues identified in the Strategy. This could include applying the recommendations of the Barker Report on housing supply, to ensure that the West Midlands is not overlooked.

The opportunity should be taken in the partial review of the RSS to resolve any discrepancies between the assessment of housing need at regional level and those derived from local assessments.

It is important to achieve balance in the allocation of research funds, in order to avoid skewing the evidence base which will be used for future allocations.

7. PRIORITIES, IMPLEMENTATION, REVIEW AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY

We are concerned at the assumption within the RHS that local authorities are not seeking to use their own resources to maximum effect; the implication is that they must somehow prove that they are doing so before seeking additional resources.

There should be greater recognition of the efforts being made already, and of the real barriers which exist. One of these is the over-emphasis on funding via the HIP route, which is unhelpful for debt-free authorities. This is tacitly acknowledged in the Regional Allocation Strategy, which goes so far as to suggest that these “resources” could go unused (9.1); and even suggests that the recipients might therefore agree to their being re-allocated elsewhere(9.2).

Rural housing is not seriously addressed. Despite the evidence of acute needs already provided, the focus of the Allocations Strategy (10.2) is on the “complex nature” of rural renaissance, and the consequent need for “more strategic work” and “other interventions”. These vague formulations should be spelt out in more detail, and an indication should be given of what overall level of priority is to be accorded to rural renaissance.

8. NEXT STEPS

We would strongly urge that each of the HMAs be represented on the Regional Housing Partnership in addition to the existing membership. This would enhance the consultation route to the Board.

We support the joint-working approach to strategy, but would welcome further guidance on the coverage and purpose of such strategies, and how their production will be supported financially.

Collective Response of the County Council and District Councils of Worcestershire to the Consultation on the Regional Housing Strategy for the West Midlands

This collective response has been prepared on behalf of Worcestershire County Council and the District Councils of Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest.

General

The opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) is welcomed and conformity with other key regional policy documents, such as the Regional Economic (RES) and Spatial Strategies (RSS), is acknowledged.

We see the RHS as having a number of purposes:

- Evaluation and analysis of the evidence base of research data to identify the housing and related issues for the West Midlands.
- To set out the key housing policies for the region.
- Identification of further research and data requirements to support future refinement of policy.
- To form the basis for allocation of the Regional Single Housing Pot.
- To act as a powerful tool to lobby Government for additional resources to be allocated to the West Midlands to address evidenced housing needs.

Our overall view is that the RHS largely fulfils these purposes with the exception of the final point regarding a tool for lobbying. It is appreciated that guidance for the production of regional housing strategies must be followed but we consider the document could be strengthened significantly in this regard.

The forthcoming phase two partial review of Regional Spatial Strategy (commencing this Autumn) will, inter alia, define shire district level housing target figures. The housing market area-based needs of the RHS will have to be reconciled with these figures. It is therefore crucial that the work streams of the HMA Groups and the RSS Partial Review are properly co-ordinated. The Housing Reference Group recently established by the Regional Planning Body and including members of the Regional Housing Partnership should have a central role in this co-ordination.

We understand that it is the Government's intention to merge the Regional Housing Boards into the Regional Planning Bodies by the end of this year. The Regional Monitoring Officers' Group (responsible to the Regional Planning Partnership) therefore needs to take responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the RHS as part of its current housing ("Plan, Monitor and Manage") report.

The Economy

Contrary to the thrust of the text we are concerned that Figures 2.4a and 2.4b do not demonstrate that investment priorities of AWM and the Regional Housing Board are as closely aligned as suggested. The spatial housing investment does not match with the Central Technology Belt (CTB) that traverses Worcestershire or the Rural Regeneration Zone that includes the western fringe of the County. The CTB is strongly supported within Worcestershire but it does generate inward migration and upward pressure on house prices and thereby exacerbates the problem of

affordability for local people. This must be recognised in the allocation of resources for the development of new social rented and low cost ownership pathways for local people.

Affordability

The significant problems of affordability are well demonstrated in table 2.4. This plainly shows that the majority of districts in Worcestershire are areas of very high house prices and that the South Housing Market Area (SHMA) clearly suffers the greatest problem in this respect. However, we are concerned at the conclusions in paragraph 3.81 that are drawn from this analysis and data on homelessness, which suggest that the priority for affordable housing investment should lie in Stratford and Warwick Districts rather than in Worcestershire. We do not believe that the evidence adequately supports this conclusion and many areas of Worcestershire have an equal or higher claim for priority for such investment. For example Worcester City shows housing stress, homelessness and high prices, Malvern Hills demonstrates high prices and homelessness (see figure 4.3). We do however welcome the statement in the policy box under paragraph 3.81 that Worcester is given priority for social housing investment, but this should not mean that the pressures on the other Worcestershire Districts are underestimated.

We would ask that the statements in paragraph 3.81 be reconsidered in the light of the data to give a fair representation of the difficulties faced throughout Worcestershire and to give the necessary priority for investment of the RSHP to address those issues.

Household Forecasts and Migration

Table 3.10 illustrates the current problem of migration trends to the South HMA and highlights the aims of the RSS to redirect household growth to the MUA's in the period to 2021. Our concern is that the RHS also acknowledges the pressure from inward migration to Worcestershire from other regions and from the South-East in particular. Plainly, there will be a requirement for adequate levels of housing allocation to emerge from the partial review of the RSS to ensure that the needs of Worcestershire are met. It is vital that we collectively deal with the impact of the inter-regional migration flows otherwise the problems of affordability in Worcestershire will be made worse and the demand for affordable homes will continue to rise.

The other associated issue that troubles representatives of Worcestershire is that if household growth is centred on the MUA's it is likely that many newly forming households comprised of young economically active people will migrate to the conurbation. This will inevitably add fuel to the gentrification of market towns and rural areas and will do nothing to address the ageing profile of the rural population. Sufficient investment from the RSHP must be allocated to meet the needs of the young in Worcestershire and to support balanced communities. Paragraph 3.53 states that 62% of newly forming households in the south of the region cannot afford to purchase a home (based on an income multiplier of 4.25). If an income multiplier of 3.5 is used that figure rises to 74%. There are hotspots within Worcestershire where the position is even worse and we strongly request that attention is paid to this issue in both the allocation of resources and in the review of spatial housing allocations.

Demand for Affordable and Social Housing

Table 3.12 shows that in the period 2011-2021 a total of 7,767 new homes in the affordable and social sectors are required in the South HMA. The current RSS housing allocation for Worcestershire during the same period is only 10,000 units in total across all sectors. It is clear that the need for homes for low income households is unlikely to be satisfied within Worcestershire given the other pressures within the marketplace.

We welcome the policy *“At sub-regional level affordability monitoring to be carried out by consortia of LHAs commissioning jointly local housing need studies and integrated housing strategies. Each sub regional housing market area should have regionally consistent approaches to dealing with migration and any risks of double counting”*.

Our present concern is that the need data held by local authorities and RSL's in Worcestershire indicates higher levels of demand for low cost ownership and social rented accommodation. There appears to be a 'credibility gap' between the figures produced locally on need and the housing allocations of the RSS. We accept that some housing need assessment figures may contain an element of aspiration but the issue must be examined and resolved. We therefore support the conduct of housing need assessments to a common and consistent standard across the West Midlands. Furthermore, we suggest that this is an important area of research that should be fully funded by the Regional Housing Board.

The ability of RSL's and local authorities in Worcestershire to meet the identified levels of need is severely hampered by a shortfall in the levels of social and affordable stock. This is clearly evident in the data presented on tenure and house type in section 3 of the RHS. The partial review of the RSS should take this situation into account and the RSHP allocations, particularly of ADP, to Worcestershire Districts should reflect the priority of meeting this shortfall.

Homelessness

Paragraph 4.42 suggests that *“Lettings to homeless families on average represent only 19.5% of all lettings by social landlords...”*. Due to the lower levels of social housing stock in Worcestershire the percentage of lettings to the priority homeless is actually far higher and is most notable in general needs stock. In order to mitigate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation until lettings can be made we would welcome retention of grant funding for flexible hostel type temporary accommodation for the homeless within the local authority and RSL's sectors. This form of adaptable accommodation has been used very successfully in Worcestershire and removal of ADP funding as suggested in paragraph 10.3 of the draft Strategy for Allocation the Regional Single Housing Pot 2006-2008 is regretted. Our view is that this form of properly managed temporary accommodation has a valuable place alongside permanent schemes aimed at accommodating local needs.

Comment in paragraph 4.65 that *“Reported homelessness in much of the South HMA shows relatively low pressure”* appears contrary to the evidence, particularly when the data weighted for population is examined. The problems of homelessness within Worcestershire are highlighted in figures 4.3a and 4.3b and priority for investment of the RSHP within the South HMA should be given to those areas suffering the greatest difficulty.

In considering the sub-regional partnership approach set out in the policy box under paragraph 4.67 regard should be had to the role of existing local strategic partnerships that operate within these areas.

Supporting People

The RHS acknowledges the real difficulties in promoting Supporting People programmes in rural areas, which include Worcestershire. However, it appears to offer little in the way of supported solutions. Investment in suitable move-on accommodation is urgently required for a number of the groups represented at paragraph 4.75. Whilst the emphasis on partnership and joining-up of policy approaches is strongly supported the RHS appears 'long on talk but short on delivery'. This is we believe an area where further work should be done.

Asylum Seekers

In general we are opposed to the dispersal of asylum seekers to areas where the resources required for their support do not exist and where the adverse impact on meeting local housing need is significant. Many local authorities do not have the necessary resources to support dispersal programmes and supporting infrastructure and services do not exist within the local communities. These factors should be borne in mind when dispersal programmes are considered both for the benefit of the asylum seekers themselves and local people in housing need.

Gypsies and Travellers

This is an area where we consider further research on demand for pitches would be helpful. We suspect that the areas in which greater numbers of sites have been provided actually attract greater numbers of travellers in the hope of securing a pitch. This situation may be arising in Wychavon at present. Although this is a difficult area we consider that regional research should be funded to more fully explore the demand for pitches and their required future location.

Decent Homes

It is accepted that the data on vulnerable persons in the private sector who occupy homes that do not meet the Decent Homes standard is variable across the County. We therefore support further work to clarify the position and would again welcome financial support to ensure consistent assessment of stock condition across the region.

The difficulty lies in adequately funding action through the private sector grants system to address deficiencies in standards of repair, insulation and amenities. Local authorities are struggling to find the necessary capital to fund private sector improvements now that the Government financial support is limited only to disabled facilities grants. This is an issue on which the Regional Housing Board should make representations to Government for a review of the impact of the removal of such subsidies. It is no good setting national targets if the resources to deliver against them have been taken away.

Financial Products

We consider that it would be helpful if the Regional Housing Board took the lead in negotiating with the financial institutions to develop financial products that will assist delivery of the RHS. This could offer significant benefit to older homeowners who

may be rich in equity value but poor in cash terms and support the moves to address under occupation or promote conversions to smaller units. Local authorities do not have the capital reserves to offer such products themselves and the financial institutions should be encouraged to become more engaged.

Strategy for Allocation of the RSHP

In general we understand and support the principles behind the allocation strategy. However, it is hard to provide informed comment without the detail of the allocations at a sub-investment area level. We therefore request that these details are consulted upon before final decisions are made.

The use of ADP for acquisition of existing homes for social rent or low cost ownership is strongly supported, particularly in rural areas where opportunities for new developments are limited.

Additional observations with regard to the Strategy have been made in the earlier comments above.

Response from the South Housing Market Area Working Group
to the

West Midlands Regional Strategy for allocating the Single Regional Housing Pot for 2006-08

<p>11.1</p>	<p>Should the investment sub-areas be based on the current local authority boundaries? Should the investment sub-areas be based on the current local authority boundaries? Should the investment sub-areas be based on the current local authority boundaries?</p>
<p>11.1</p>	<p>The investment sub-areas should be based on the current local authority boundaries. The investment sub-areas should be based on the current local authority boundaries. The investment sub-areas should be based on the current local authority boundaries.</p>
<p>12.20</p>	<p>We need to understand the empirical basis for the investment sub-areas within SHMA. In particular, if Worcester is a focal point for social housing investment, why is it lumped together for investment purposes with Malvern Hills, Wychavon and Wyre Forest?</p>

Wyre Forest DC response to the draft WM Regional Housing Strategy 2005

We confirm our endorsement of the responses to the draft RHS by both the South HMA Group and the Worcestershire Local Authorities and please read those as our substantive consultation response.

There are just some other areas that we would specifically like to emphasise from this Councils perspective.

We know from past experience that where strategy and policy statements are made that highlight specific locations or Local Authority areas in the text, usually by way of example of a particular problem, that these are read as priority for funding and support. This has certainly happened in the past with Housing Corporation ADP funding. This may appear to simply be a presentational issue but it is not. We are not for a moment suggesting that all references are omitted and fully accept that some areas such as Worcester City in our County, will be referred to, as they are highlighted as a growth area.

The problem for this Council is that we often appear to fall on the periphery or edge of initiatives such as the Marches regeneration zone or the high technology corridor. Or that certain elements of WFDC housing data in the RHS doesn't appear to warrant noting, when in fact our housing problems are demonstrably as difficult as neighbouring areas.

The housing data being used to make judgements and policy statements is partially out of date and has over the course of the development of the current RHS and the development of this latest RHS, produced lots of data, drafts, presentational material, subsets of paper etc. These have if tracked back, brought areas and towns in and out of focus, dependant upon the issue, updates of information and redrafting of emphasis.

The issue is therefore:

- to be extremely careful about setting priorities, possibly unintentionally, that will be evidenced in the RHS until a full review and may be based on out of date assumptions.
- that the situation is fluid and data must be refreshed with a mechanism for adjusting, (within reason), how priorities are set and funding is distributed.

The South HMA has been established as it contains Local Authorities with very similar housing market characteristics i.e. low social housing base, high house prices, homelessness problems, impact of RTB etc. and by definition there are only going to be some differences by degree between the LA areas. The **whole** of the SHMA therefore will need support and funding to meet its needs. The Policy Box at 3.81 must therefore be amended to reflect this.

Next Steps:

We would anticipate that the RHS will move to the next stage by the development of some Action Planning to set out milestones and targets in order to flesh out what are a very high number of policy statements throughout the document, some of which at this stage appear quite general. It is not therefore always easy to identify where your Local Authority may have an interest. Kidderminster for instance is highlighted as a

regeneration area (as are other towns) in the RSS, but this is missed in the policy statement box on the economy on page 33. This is important for WFDC as it is linked to a policy statement on “fulfilling strategic objectives of pathways of future housing choice”. It would be helpful to specifically use the term regeneration areas as per the RSS in this policy box so that these towns are considered in this context.

Some consideration of setting up regional consultation events in the format that have taken place over the last 18 months would be helpful, so that we can continue to engage and assist in the ongoing development and implementation of the RHS. This should be considered whatever form of representation system is put in place for Local Authorities and key stakeholders. It is important that the future process is transparent and can be monitored.

We look forward to the implementation of the RHS and hope that it will have an impact in meeting the strategic housing and related needs of this District.

6/5/05

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AUDIT PANEL
14TH JUNE 2005**

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S INTERNAL CONTROL ENVIRONMENT
2004/2005**

At the Audit Panel meeting on the 14th June 2005 a report was considered from the Financial Services Manager that informed members of the Annual Report on the Council's Internal Control Environment for 2004/2005.

The Annual Report on the Council's Internal Control Environment 2004/2005 provides an opinion from the Financial Services Manager (Audit and Benefits) - Council's Chief Auditor, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's Internal Control Environment. This opinion is based on the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Section in accordance with the approved Annual Audit Plan for 2005/05. The report is presented to members in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the Internal Audit section approved by the Council.

Overall it was concluded that the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's Internal Control environment was 'Adequate with Reservations.'

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

To note the Annual Report on the Council's Internal Control Environment for 2004/2005 from the Financial Services Manager (Audit & Benefits) attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

**FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL
20TH JUNE 2005**

BUDGET REVIEW GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

The Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel, at the request of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, have scrutinised the budget process with a view to streamlining in order to make more time for scrutiny of the financial strategy.

The Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel set up a Working Group comprising all members of the Panel in order to consider the process. Resultant deliberations are contained within the recommendations detailed below:-

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- 1. The Budget Review Group, replace the Budget Task and Finish Group reporting to the Finance & Corporate Affairs Policy & Scrutiny Panel.**
- 2. The Budget Review Group, as part of the Budget Scrutiny process, scrutinise and prioritise all Council activities to assist with one of the points identified in the CPA Report, that the Council did not identify “lower or non priorities”, with a view to re-allocating resources to services with higher priority or to new activities. This will also assist in identifying possible ‘Gershon’ efficiency savings.**
- 3. The Budget Review Group/Finance & Corporate Affairs Policy & Scrutiny Panel report to December Cabinet outlining recommendations relating to the Base Budget in order to assist in formulating the Finance Strategy for the next three years.**
- 4. Income Service Options be forwarded to the Budget Review Group/Finance & Corporate Affairs Policy & Scrutiny Panel in November for scrutiny and recommendations prior to being considered by Cabinet in December.**
- 5. Expenditure Service Options be replaced with :-**
 - i) Fully costed recommendations from Policy Panels;**
 - ii) Cabinet proposals in relation to new policy/changes to levels of existing services.**

NOTE: With the Government contemplating the issuing of 3 year Finance Settlements to Local Authorities, it should be possible from 2006 (even this year if the Settlement comes out early enough in November) for the Cabinet to issue Draft Budget Proposals in December. This would allow further time for the scrutiny and the consultation process.

Council may wish to have an ‘understanding’ that all alternative amendments go through the Scrutiny process before the day of Budget Setting Council, and as a consequence a specific meeting is set as part of the Budget Timetable for scrutiny of alternative budgets.

J/Committee/Cabinet/Reports/30.06.05/10 finance&corprecs.doc

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINANCE AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS
POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL
20TH JUNE 2005**

LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATION

Since the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000 the Council's Committee Structure has been radically altered. Previously a system of "service" committees generated an average of approximately 100 meetings per year. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced new ways of working by requiring Councils to establish a split between the Executive and the Scrutiny functions to operate alongside regulatory functions. In addition Councils were required to introduce a Standards Committee and other freestanding Committees for non-Executive functions.

A big change that has resulted from the new Act has been the extra resources required to service individual Scrutiny Committees/Cabinet Scrutiny, liaison meetings and Cabinet Scrutiny Committee. This year has also seen a considerable increase in the use of Task and Finish Groups as the Scrutiny function develops within Wyre Forest.

Initially scrutiny was an unknown quantity for Members who were familiar with the traditional service committee structure. A considerable amount of time and energy has been invested by Officers and Members in developing the scrutiny function. A Scrutiny Officer was recruited in 2004. This Scrutiny Officer is currently off on maternity leave and the Committee Assistant is providing cover during the interim period with a temporary member of staff providing the committee backup. The exceptional enthusiasm and commitment of these two Officers who are providing the Committee Scrutiny cover has meant considerable progress has been made in the last six months with developing the Scrutiny function particularly the co-ordination between the Executive and Scrutiny functions and the co-ordination of different scrutiny panels.

One noticeable gap is, however, is the servicing of Task and Finish Groups. It has not been possible to give proper support to these groups. Wherever possible the Scrutiny Officer has provided Task and Finish Groups with limited assistance but it is acknowledged that the existing Committee Team do not have the capacity to provide research or practical assistance for Members on these Task and Finish Groups.

If the scrutiny function in Wyre Forest is developed further and for support and assistance to be given to Task and Finish Groups and further the co-ordination between the Executive and Scrutiny functions, consideration would need to be given to an additional post within the current Committee Team. The Team currently consists of a Principal Committee Officer, a Part-time Committee Officer, a Democratic Support Officer and a Committee Assistant. The Elections Officer also assists with the Committee function outside the Election period.

After consideration and discussion of the above points, the Panel recommended the following:-

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

In order to develop the scrutiny function in Wyre Forest and to further the co-ordination between the Executive and Scrutiny Functions and for support and assistance to be given to Task and Finish Groups, an additional post be appointed to the Committee Section.

J/Committee/Cabinet/Reports/2005/30.06.05/finance&corprecs2.doc