



## Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Report of: Kate Bailey  
Strategic Housing Services Manager  
Date: Thursday, 7th October 2010  
Open

### Private Sector Housing Action Plan

#### 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the Private Sector Housing Action Plan, identifying the reasons behind the drafting of the plan and covering key issues and priorities for the Strategic Housing Services team.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 In 2007 Wyre Forest District Council undertook a stock condition survey to evaluate the condition of private sector housing in the District, the likely problems with the stock and the possible costs. This stock condition survey and subsequent research such as the Warmer Worcestershire Thermal Flyover, informs the Strategic Housing Services team and the Council where it should prioritise spending to improve stock and assist people in remaining in their own home.
- 2.2 The Council also gives regard to the legislative framework and guidance outlining interventions within the private sector and across tenure (for disabled facilities grants) when determining its strategies, plans and the allocation of resources. This includes the Housing Act 2004, the Regulatory Reform Order (2002) and the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- 2.3 The Council approves a Housing Assistance Policy that determines the way resources are allocated to and the procedures for undertaking key elements of the work we undertake through Strategic Housing Services, which includes Disabled Facilities Grants, and Decent Homes Assistance.
- 2.4 Funding is also obtained through a Regional Housing Pot, via Government Office, and the allocation of this resource is also influenced by the stock condition survey and approved by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services. Funding from the Regional Housing Pot ends in March 2011.

**3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 Currently there is no one action plan or strategy that draws all the work undertaken by the Strategic Housing Services team in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants or other repair / improvement work in the private sector. This new action plan seeks to draw together strands from the previous and emerging Housing Strategies, the Climate Change, Empty Homes and Affordable Warmth Strategies as well as actions highlighted as a consequence of undertaking research such as the Warmer Worcestershire project.
- 3.2 The action plan highlights key issues within the private sector and previous demand and spend on grants and loans. It also outlines the key national, regional and local strategies, policies and plans that govern the work we undertake.
- 3.3 The document outlines how both the research and stakeholder focus groups have informed the identification of seven key issues that need addressing and the action plan itself illustrates how we will focus our activities to meet these priorities. The seven key issues are;
- 1) To assist vulnerable, elderly and disabled people to remain in their own home and experience a better quality of life
  - 2) Improving private sector housing stock particularly around thermal comfort
  - 3) Tackling energy efficiency and fuel poverty through giving advice and financial assistance to aid reduction in fuel consumption and utilise renewable technologies
  - 4) Developing positive relationships with landlords and estate agents to deliver good quality and well managed housing available for rent
  - 5) Making residents feel safe in their homes through providing advice, assistance and grants to victims of domestic abuse, harassment, hate crimes and anti-social behaviour
  - 6) To make best use of existing housing through reducing the number of Empty Homes within the district and bringing grant aided empty properties back into use for those with housing need
  - 7) To have a better understanding of the residents of licensed caravan park sites needs in relation to their properties and ongoing support.
- 3.4 Stakeholders will continue to be consulted on as the plan progresses and we review our progress. The action plan outcomes will be monitored by the Private Sector Housing team and updated annually.

**4. Options**

- 4.1 That the Committee considers the action plan and makes any amendments / recommendations to be included within the plan and adopts it.

**5. Consultation**

- 5.1 Stakeholders were invited to attend a workshop event in July where the key issues that we had identified were presented and priorities and appropriate actions developed to tackle those issues. A number of people attended from 15 different organisations as well as staff from the Council spanning numerous disciplines.

**6. Related Decisions**

- 6.1 The Housing Assistance Policy and the allocation of the Regional Housing Pot were agreed in March / April 2010. An amendment to the Housing Assistance Policy to incorporate Kickstart eligibility (for decent homes repairs within the private sector) is currently being considered by Cabinet.

**7. Relevant Council Policies/Strategies**

- 7.1 Previous and emerging Worcestershire Housing Strategy.  
7.2 Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2010.

**8. Implications**

- 8.1 Resources: The decision to allocate resources to deliver this action plan forms part of the budget process annually and greater detail will be known after the Comprehensive Spending Review. Where possible we have considered actions within the context of likely funding cuts.
- 8.2 Equalities: N/A
- 8.3 Partnership working: The Strategic Housing Services team deliver a number of actions within the plan in conjunction with other partners including District Councils, Landlords and Estate Agents, Regulatory Services, Worcestershire Care and Repair etc.
- 8.4 Human Rights: N/A  
8.5 E-Government: N/A  
8.6 Transformation: N/A

**9. Equality Impact Needs Assessment**

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the Private Sector Housing function was undertaken in 2009.

**10. Wards affected**

- 10.1 All wards.

**11. Appendices**

- 11.1 Appendix 1 - Private Sector Housing Action Plan

**12. Background Papers**

N/A

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**Appendix One – Private Sector Housing Action Plan 2010-11**

Contents

Executive Summary .....	15
Introduction .....	15
Private Sector Housing – the National, Regional and Local Priorities.....	16
National Priorities .....	16
Regional / County Priorities .....	17
Local Priorities.....	18
Sustainable Communities Strategy.....	18
Corporate and Service Plans .....	18
Climate Change Action Plan.....	18
Affordable Warmth Action Plan.....	18
Empty Homes Strategy .....	19
Health Improvement Strategy .....	19
Performance Indicators.....	19
Wyre Forest Private Sector Housing Stock.....	20
Stock Condition Survey .....	20
Building Research Establishment data.....	22
Warmer Worcestershire .....	22
Home Energy Survey and NI187.....	22
Local demographic, social and economic information.....	23
Consultation Events .....	24
Private sector landlord survey 2009 .....	24
Consultation with stakeholders 2010.....	24
Ongoing Stakeholder Involvement / Partnership Work .....	24
Emerging Priorities.....	25
Action Plan 2010 - 12.....	26
Appendix 1 – Information From Stakeholder Day .....	26

## **Executive Summary**

Wyre Forest's Private Sector Housing Action Plan has been developed to clarify the role, aspirations and priorities that the council and relevant stakeholders have for improving the quality, management and availability of private sector housing over the period 2010 – 12.

The document has been developed in close relationship with partner agencies, taking into account all relevant stock condition, housing and demographic data. Stakeholder consultation has led to the identification of various priorities including within the action plan.

Improving the standard of private sector housing and increasing the availability and accessibility of privately owned and rented housing, especially to the vulnerable and those on lower incomes, together with the important role of administering Disabled Facilities and Home Improvement grants are key areas of work for Wyre Forest District Council and support the wider agenda contained within the Sustainable Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Worcestershire Housing Strategy.

The action plan considers national, regional and local priorities and the housing stock condition within Wyre Forest. It also considers wider demographic, social and economic issues that have an impact on the housing market and condition of the stock.

The final section considers the key priorities (shown below) identified by the research and in consultation with stakeholders and then details the action plan for the coming three years.

Key priorities;

- 8) To assist vulnerable, elderly and disabled people to remain in their own home and experience a better quality of life
- 9) Improving private sector housing stock particularly around thermal comfort
- 10) Tackling energy efficiency and fuel poverty through giving advice and financial assistance to aid reduction in fuel consumption and utilise renewable technologies
- 11) Developing positive relationships with landlords and estate agents to deliver good quality and well managed housing available for rent
- 12) Making residents feel safe in their homes through providing advice, assistance and grants to victims of domestic abuse, harassment, hate crimes and anti-social behaviour
- 13) To make best use of existing housing through reducing the number of Empty Homes within the district and bringing grant aided empty properties back into use for those with housing need
- 14) To have a better understanding of the residents of licensed caravan park sites needs in relation to their properties and ongoing support.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this action plan is to consider the characteristics and issues within Wyre Forest's private sector housing and to develop an action plan for 2010/11 to tackle identified problems.

Wyre Forest District Council have a track record of making better use of existing housing and improving housing stock and from April 2007 to March 2010 have committed over £796k capital to improve the condition of the private sector stock. This has led to us achieving the former Public Sector Agreement target of 70% of vulnerable households living in decent housing by 2010 but we recognise that there is more work to be done.

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

Wyre Forest have also committed over £2,354,000 of funding from April 2007 to March 2010 through the Home Improvement Agency to enable older and disabled residents to remain in their own homes. This improves the quality of life and reduces negative impacts on their health for those residents and in consequence, saves money for stakeholder organisations such as the NHS and social care who would otherwise be funding expensive treatments and accommodation.

### **Private Sector Housing – the National, Regional and Local Priorities**

The Private Sector Housing Action Plan recognises that in order to manage the supply, demand and quality of private sector housing within the District, Wyre Forest District Council has to embody a broad range of national, regional and local, policies, strategies and legislation. The Private Sector Housing Strategy therefore embraces the following: -

#### **National Priorities**

At a national level, there have been significant legislative and policy changes which have affected the way in which local authorities deliver their private sector housing services. The main policy changes are as follows: -

***The Housing Act 2004***; this is the most significant recent piece of legislation that replaced the 'fitness standard' with the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). That directly links housing and health. The Act also strengthens the rights for privately renting tenants through the introduction of the rent Deposit Protection Scheme, the mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and provides greater powers for tackling empty properties.

***Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All (2000)***; set out policies to achieve the aim of offering everyone the opportunity of a decent home and so promotes social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence including a new direction for the standards in the social and private sector.

***The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) 2002***; emerged from 'Quality of Choice: A Decent Home for All' and introduced a range of discretionary powers in order to provide a more flexible manner to deal with the standards of private sector dwellings.

***The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) (England and Wales) 2005***; replaces much of the previous fire safety legislation. It is instrumental in placing the responsibility onto any person who exercises some control in a residential premises to take reasonable steps to reduce the risks from fire. The order details the Local Authority and Fire Authority's responsibilities particularly in the case of enforcing fire standards.

***Supporting People***; the government initiative that introduced centralised funding, multi agency strategic planning and commissioning of support services to vulnerable people with special needs, has been designed to promote peoples independence and ability to remain in their homes and community.

***The National Framework for Older People and Integrated Services for Older People*** - relies on providing support in order to assist older people to live safely and healthily in their own homes.

***The Housing and Health Agenda*** – highlights the high cost to the health service of delayed discharge of patients from hospital often due to the condition of their home or the urgent need for adaptations.

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

**Rugg Review** – a research paper that has been instrumental in the review of England's private rented sector provides recommendations to maximise the full potential of private rented accommodation to ensure that it is a well functioning element and viable housing option.

**Home Energy Conservation Act 1995**; - influences the development of Energy Efficiency and Affordable Warmth Policy and Government targets to increase Energy Efficiency and eradicate fuel poverty in all UK homes by 2016.

**Sustainable Communities: Building For the Future Plan (Feb 2003)**; This paper introduced the government's new approach to maintaining and encouraging thriving communities where people want to live and have access to decent and affordable homes.

**Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (2008)** outlines where the Government aims to be in five years' time:

- Existing housing stock will be improved to raise it's quality and promote good health. Many more homes will be warm and comfortable.
- Major and minor adaptations will become easier to obtain.
- Major adaptations through the Disabled Facilities Grant will be quick and simple to obtain and appropriately linked to other services.
- Home improvement and handyperson services will be widely accessible. Home Improvement Agencies will be available in all parts of the country and will deliver a more proactive, wider range of services.
- People will get these services before a crisis happens.
- Where housing services are needed they will be personal, progressive, high quality and joined-up. They will provide choice and will give individuals more control to make housing-related decisions.

The following table indicates the National Performance Indicators:-

<b>Table 1: National Performance Indicators</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
NI142 – Vulnerable households able to remain in their home with support	98.01%
NI186 - Per capita reduction in CO2 emissions in LA area	Not yet available.
NI 187: - Tackling fuel poverty – people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy rating (SAP) of less than 35 and those above SAP 65	SAP < 35: 10.15% SAP>65: 34.21%
NI 188 - Adapting to climate change	Level One achieved

### Regional / County Priorities

**The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy**; has been formulated by the Regional Housing Board who are responsible for the allocation of housing funding. The key aim is to address the condition of housing in the District through advice and enforcement action to ensure that dwellings meet Decent Homes standard.

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

***The Worcestershire Draft Code of Practise for Home Adaptations for People with Disabilities;*** adopted by Wyre Forest District Council, the protocol identifies best practise in the administration of Disabled Facilities Grants and identifies the role and responsibilities of the Local Authority and partner agencies.

***Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy;*** identifies the importance of the Home Improvement Agency as a vehicle for the delivery of low level housing support to older and vulnerable clients.

***Worcestershire Housing Strategy;*** the emerging Housing Strategy supports assisting people to remain in their own home and tackling poor conditions and thermal comfort within the private sector. It will commence in April 2011 for a period of five years and is supported by the Supporting people Strategy and the Worcestershire Homeless Strategy.

### **Local Priorities**

#### **Sustainable Communities Strategy**

The Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) demonstrates the long term vision for housing and is supported effectively by the Council and it's partners. The SCS has six key themes; communities that feel safe and are safe, a better environment for today and tomorrow, economic success shared by all, improving health and well being, meeting the needs of children and young people and stronger communities. Within the SCS there are particular priorities that relate directly to housing which include increasing the availability of appropriate, affordable and decent housing, (to) improve housing conditions and (increasing) access to housing and preventing homelessness but the strategy clearly outlines the links to housing to all the other themes including crime, education, health and economic success.

#### **Corporate and Service Plans**

The Corporate Plan has four key aims; a better quality of life (which is most relevant for Housing Services), a well run and responsive council, a sustainable environment (which is most relevant for Sustainability and climate change) and a vibrant local economy. Beneath these aims are various corporate priorities and these are incorporated into individual directorate and service business plans. The objectives for the service business plan pertinent to this action plan are highlighted below;

- Develop a private sector housing action plan
- Support the implementation of the new Home Improvement Agency and develop a business plan
- Implement the findings from the renewable energy / energy efficiency scrutiny panel
- Implement the 10:10 climate change plan d

#### **Climate Change Action Plan**

The Wyre Forest Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan sets out work to:

- Raise awareness about climate change issues
- Reduce the district's carbon emissions (including from housing)
- Adapt to the impacts of climate change.

#### **Affordable Warmth Action Plan**

The Wyre Forest Affordable Warmth Action plan is delivered by partners including the district council, Community Housing, Disability Action, Age Concern, the Fire Service, the PCT, eaga plc and Act On Energy. It aims to tackle fuel poverty the district through activities such as awareness raising about grants and social tariffs, free insulation schemes and affordable warmth referral training for front line workers.

## **Empty Homes Strategy**

The Empty Homes Strategy has five principle aims as follows:

- **To identify ways in which empty properties can be brought back into use** - To tackle the problem of empty properties it is essential to have a range of schemes available and to use Local Authority powers such as compulsory purchase orders to deal with properties in disrepair or those which are unfit for habitation.
- **To actively encourage owners of empty properties through a range of incentives to bring their properties back into use** - It is essential that some form of positive incentive be given to the owner of an empty property. Advice and assistance are tailored to specific circumstances.
- **To raise awareness of empty property issues** -The issue of empty properties needs to be promoted both internally within the Council and externally through use of the media, leaflets and the website.
- **To work with regularly updated information from the Council Tax system.**
- **The investigation and use of appropriate enforcement activity.**

The main focus of attention will be on the long-term empty residential houses and those which give rise to the most significant impacts on the local community.

## **Health Improvement Strategy**

The Worcestershire Health Improvement Strategy outlines how partners will work together to include public health. It's main aims are:

- To strengthen leadership of the health improvement agenda in the County.
- To develop a suite of evidence based healthy lifestyle services, so that everyone in the County is enabled to make healthy lifestyle choices, regardless of where they live or the social group to which they belong.
- To improve the quality of and access to information about healthy lifestyles.
- To train staff so that they are better able to look after their own health, provide advice to others and signpost to healthy lifestyle services.

## **Performance Indicators**

The following table indicates Countywide and Local performance indicators: -

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Average cost of works	£4394.98	£4372.62	£5055.87
Number of DFG referrals	139	131	136
Timescales for DFG's (from approval to completion)	150	140	131
Number of homes improved with vulnerable households to meet the decent homes standard	179	205	253
Overall number of properties in the district where energy efficiency improved	200	212	450

**Agenda Item No. 5  
Appendix 1**

Number of empty private sector dwellings brought back into occupation each year as a result of action by the Local Authority	71	14	22
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In 2010/11 the Strategic Housing Services team will also collect data on the number of landlords / letting agents receiving information regarding the accreditation scheme that go on to join up.

## Wyre Forest Private Sector Housing Stock

### Stock Condition Survey

The Housing Stock in th2 district was surveyed in 2007. The profile of the stock is as set out below:

Tenure	Wyre Forest 2007		EHCS 2005
Owner occupied	34,000	78%	71%
Housing association (RSL)	6,400	15%	8%
Private rented	3,400	8%	11%
Local Authority*	0	0%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,800</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Wyre Forest Private Sector House Condition Survey 2007**

\* Local authority figures are shown here for comparative purposes. Figures given generally throughout the report are in relation to the private sector only.

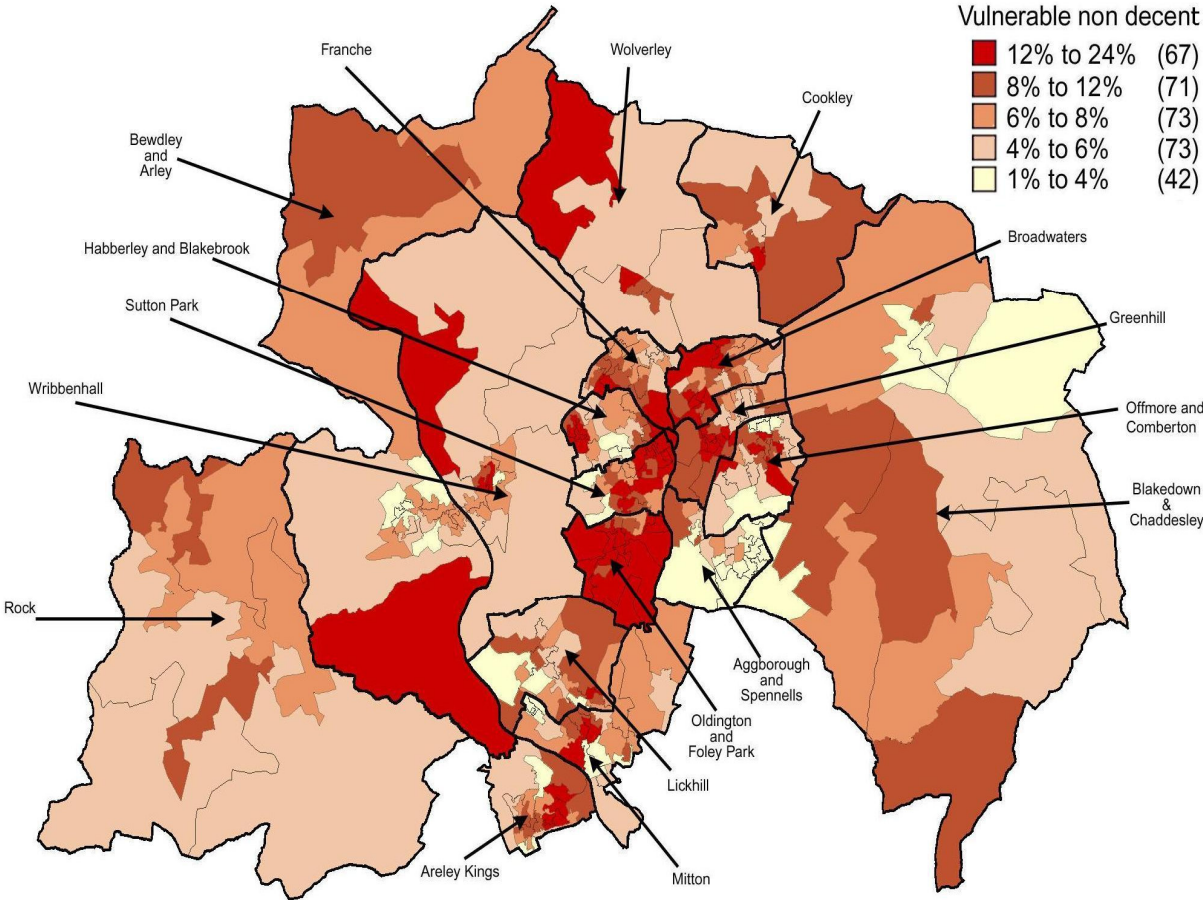
The following list gives some of the key features of Wyre Forest's housing stock and population.

- Lower proportions of stock built pre 1945 but with much higher levels of post 1944 stock, particularly within the 1965 to 1980 age band
- Dominated by detached, semi-detached houses and bungalows
- More older residents (60+)
- Fewer single parents and lone adults, but more two adult and lone older (60+) households
- Average incomes are lower than for England as a whole with nearly 41% below £15,000
- Benefit receipt at 19% is slightly above average (mainly two adult and lone older households)

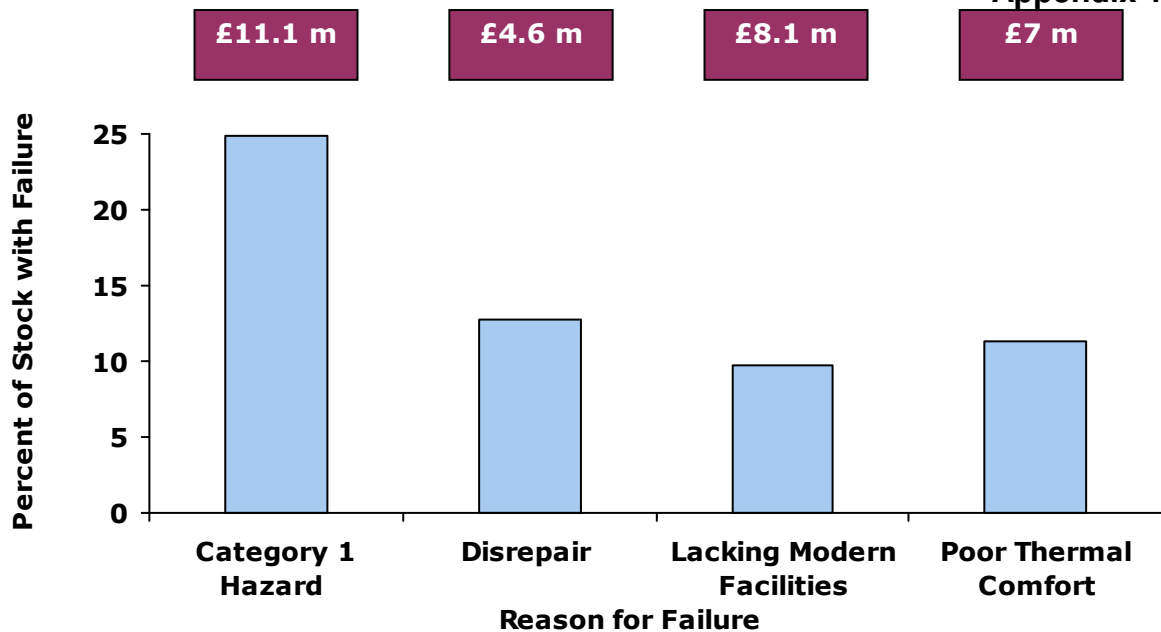
**Agenda Item No. 5  
Appendix 1**

- Non decency, at 26.2%, slightly below the national average (EHCS 2005 = 27.1%)
- Failure rate largely driven by Category 1 hazards (see next section) and energy efficiency standards

The following map illustrates the distribution of vulnerable people living in non decent dwellings.



The following graph illustrates the total cost of remedying each of the causes of non decency listed. These costs are the total sum that would be needed for remedial work, regardless of the source of funding.



### Building Research Establishment data

In addition to the Stock Condition Survey, information was provided through a BRE study that split down anticipated levels of non-decent properties by ward area. This supported the profiling of key issues such as insulation/energy efficiency to areas and has been used with other data to help targeting of resources.

### Warmer Worcestershire

In 2009, a thermal imaging flyover was carried out across Worcestershire. An online map was produced ([www.warmerworcestershire.com](http://www.warmerworcestershire.com)) so that any resident can check the energy rating of their property, based on heat loss through the roof. This information has been cross referenced against benefits data, to help identify areas with higher numbers of vulnerable households (energy inefficient property + benefits recipient). As a result, more targeted work is to be carried out in the following areas: Greenhill (Kidderminster), Wribbenhall (Bewdley), The Walshes (Stourport) and Rock.

### Home Energy Survey and NI187.

In October 2009, the Energy Savings Trust sent a Home Energy Survey to all households in the Wyre Forest district. The survey returns were used to calculate data for NI187 (see table 1). The results showed a small improvement for the below SAP35 (least efficient) group, compared to the previous year. However there were also marginally less properties above SAP65 (most efficient). Since it is unlikely that the energy rating for specific properties is worsening, it does suggest that more owner/occupied properties are being included in the benefit lists as a result of the current economic problems affecting this sector more than others.

## **Local demographic, social and economic information**

Wyre Forest District is a mix of urban, rural and market towns, comprising the three towns of Kidderminster, Stourport on Severn and Bewdley together with a rural hinterland of several villages including Arley, Rock, Chaddesley Corbett and Wolverley. The district has a population of 98,100 (Jun 09).

The majority of the population (96.2%) are White, around 1.8% are Asian or Asian British, 0.9% are Mixed, 0.6% are Black or Black British and the remaining 0.6% are Chinese or from another ethnic group.

When compared regionally and nationally the District has a high population of over 65s. This is projected to rise by at least 50% during the next 20 years. 14.6% of households in the district have at least one member with a long term illness or disability

Life expectancy of people in Wyre Forest is higher than both West Midlands average and the England average for both Males and Females.

	<b>Wyre Forest</b>	<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>England</b>
<b>Males</b>	78.18	77.17	77.93
<b>Females</b>	82.47	81.57	82.02

Source: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk) (Jan06-Dec08)

However, life expectancy of men from the most deprived areas of Wyre Forest is almost six years shorter than for those in the least deprived areas and the corresponding difference for women is almost seven years.

The district has an above average crime rate with instances of violent crime and theft of motor vehicles being above the national average.

Unemployment levels are 8.3% of the population higher than the national average of 7.7% but lower than the average within the West Midlands of 9.4% (Dec 2009). The levels of benefit claimants in Wyre Forest 15.3% of population are similar to the national average of (15.1%) but considerably lower than the West Midlands average of 17.1%. February 2010.

There has been a 55% decrease in homelessness acceptances in Wyre Forest since 2006. There were 62 households accepted as homeless and in priority need in 2009 as opposed to 112 in 2006.

The majority of housing stock in Wyre Forest is owner-occupied (78%) with social housing accounting for 14.5% (April 09). The largest social landlord is The Community Housing Group who is the Council's Large Scale Voluntary Transfer organisation, formed in 2000.

## **Consultation Events**

### **Private sector landlord survey 2009**

A survey was undertaken with local private landlords to find out more about the nature of the local rental market including types of tenants and size of properties and find ways to work with local landlords.

This also gauged the possible level of interest in an accreditation scheme. Useful information discovered included that most would look to the internet or other landlords for information and advice and that many were experiencing problems with arrears.

### **Consultation with stakeholders 2010**

In 2010 WFDC hosted a Private Sector Stakeholder Consultation Event to share issues regarding the private housing sector with partner agencies and stakeholders. Workshops were grouped around three main themes off; helping people to remain in their own homes, tackling poor conditions in caravan sites and tackling thermal comfort issues in the private sector.

Stakeholders from more than fifteen different organisations and interest groups attended as well as a number of Council officers from different teams.

This stakeholder day enabled us to clarify our thinking around the issues with private sector housing and suggest ways of dealing with some of the problems.

The Factsheets and key priorities identified in this event are included in an appendix to this Plan.

## **Ongoing Stakeholder Involvement / Partnership Work**

There are a number of stakeholder groups operating across the county and district that influence and are informed by the action plan and some of these are identified below.

- **District Health & Wellbeing Theme Group**  
This group aims to improve health and wellbeing in general, address specific local health issues and reduce health inequalities in the district.
- **County Climate Change Theme Group**  
This group delivers the county Climate Change Strategy, which aims to raise awareness about climate change, reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change in the county.
- **County Home Energy Group**  
This group aims to tackle the health, economic and environmental issues around affordable warmth and fuel poverty.
- **County Private Sector Officers Group**  
This group meets to discuss technical issues, procedural and legal matters relating to private sector housing enforcement and assistance.

- **Home Improvement Agency Performance and Management Board (KB)**

This group oversees the governance and business plan of the countywide home improvement agency service – Worcestershire Care and Repair.

- **District Private Sector Working Party (SH / RL)**

- District Landlords Forum (SH/RL)

## **Emerging Priorities**

The stakeholder event and the Council's review of issues have led us to identify the following a number of priorities. These are shown below in more detail and incorporated into an action plan with matched resources and timescales.

These priorities are subject to available resources. Currently much of the work undertaken is funded from the Regional Housing Pot and it is unclear at this stage if the funding will be available beyond March 2011. Internal resources may also be under threat and this will not be clear until we are aware of the outcomes from the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010.

The wider context through which Housing Strategy and Resources are determined has also changed with the end of the Government Office and Regional Assembly. New structures are yet to be fully determined.

The full details of the workshops, including data provided regarding issues and the priorities identified are included in Appendix One.

**Action Plan 2010 - 12**

Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome / Output
To assist vulnerable, elderly and disabled people to remain in their own home and experience a better quality of life	<p>Developing a standardised, high quality home improvement service across the county</p> <p><b>Communication</b> Information to client including timescales and details of the process and why it is required to be done in the way it is To develop a suite of information leaflets outlining services and eligibility criteria available in key access points / website including detailed explanation of DFG process and timescales and</p>	<p>Performance and Management Board</p> <p>Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)</p> <p>Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)</p>	£50k revenue funding + 10% agency fee	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2010 - 2013	<p>Applicants with a disability able to remain in their own home where it is appropriate to do so or assisted with a move into more appropriate accommodation</p> <p>Measure;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 400 households over 3 years remaining in home</li> <li>• 95% customers satisfied with service received from C&amp;R</li> <li>• 90% customers satisfied with service received from contractors</li> <li>• Leaflets available on website and in public venues by March 2011</li> <li>• Performance and Management Board to meet no less than 4 times a year</li> </ul>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome / Outputs
To assist vulnerable, elderly and disabled people to remain in their own home and experience a better quality of life	<p>Regular liaison between all interested parties including the HIA / DCs / County / OTs / Charities</p> <p><b>Alternative forms of funding</b> To consider the pooling of budgets – DC's RSL's and County equipment when the contract is renegotiated</p> <p>Equity release schemes like Kickstart / interest free loans / Charities</p> <p><b>Reducing Costs</b> Standard assessment and prioritisation process across the county</p>	<p>Strategic Housing Services Manager</p> <p>Strategic Housing Services Manager Supporting People County Council Health Service</p>	To be confirmed	2012 - 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendation to Performance and Management Board / Supporting People Commissioning Body regarding future delivery of service</li> <li>• Increased number of clients accessing alternative forms of funding (10 households p.a.)</li> <li>• Single Housing Assistance Policy across County (December 2010)</li> <li>• Single prioritisation</li> </ul>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

					process across County (March 2011)
Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome / Output
To assist vulnerable, elderly and disabled people to remain in their own home and experience a better quality of life	Procurement (equipment, services and contractors) and partnership agreements	Care and Repair	Officer time	Completed 2013	To procure across the county for the following services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Means testing software provider</li> <li>• Architects</li> <li>• Level Access Showers</li> <li>• Stairlifts</li> <li>• Ramps</li> <li>• Recycling of stairlifts to reduce costs (target to be around number of recycled lifts being re-used and agreed by C&amp;R)</li> <li>• If viable a policy written covering use of alternative technologies by Sept 2011</li> </ul>
	Recycling of equipment where possible	Care and Repair	Officer time	Completed 2012	
	Utilising new technologies where these are proven to be cost effective e.g. PODs	Care and Repair and Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)			
Improving private sector housing stock	Develop and implement a Communication Strategy	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing) & Principal Health and	Officer time (website) Design & Printing costs	December 2011	Households living in safe & decent homes that meet thermal comfort giving them a better quality of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of</li> </ul>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome
		Sustainability Officer	(corporate resources)		households accessing financial assistance (target to be agreed with Act on Energy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in SAP rating of homes (NI187 target)</li> </ul>
Improving private sector housing stock	Developing area based schemes around safety and security	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	£20k	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 gated entry schemes by March 2011</li> </ul>
	Homes Repairs Assistance loans	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	£30k	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 6 households not eligible for other forms of assistance</li> </ul>
	Assistance to Landlords for thermal comfort / fire safety measures	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	£100k (shared with empty properties)	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 18 properties meet decent homes standard / brought back into use</li> </ul>
Tackling energy efficiency and fuel poverty through giving advice / financial assistance	Developing area based schemes around thermal comfort throughout district	Principal Health and Sustainability Officer	£105k	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 400 households improving thermal comfort across 4 identified areas of district</li> </ul>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

to reduce fuel consumption and utilise renewable technologies					
Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome
Tackling energy efficiency and fuel poverty through giving advice and financial assistance to aid reduction in fuel consumption and utilise renewable technologies	Ongoing review of legislation, policies and funding energy efficiency and micro-generation fields to identify appropriate ways to tackle hard to treat properties	Principal Health and Sustainability Officer	Officer time	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to treat properties given advice and assistance (target to be agreed)</li> </ul>
Developing positive relationships with landlords and estate agents to deliver good quality and well managed housing available for rent	<p>Communication with landlords through a variety of media.</p> <p>Promotion and review of Accreditation Scheme including through Website and regular press releases</p>	Principal Strategic Housing Officer	<p>Officer time</p> <p>Printing costs</p> <p>Refreshments / room hire</p>		<p>Landlords managing good quality and decent accommodation</p> <p>Measure;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold two landlord forums p.a.</li> <li>• Publish a minimum of one Landlords newsletter per annum</li> </ul> <p>Undertake one landlord survey per annum</p>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome
Making residents feel safe in their homes through providing advice, assistance and grants to victims of domestic abuse, harassment, hate crimes and anti-social behaviour	To fund schemes to help residents feel safe in their homes in conjunction with wider community safety agenda including gated entry, sanctuary schemes, CCTV etc.	Principal Strategic Housing Officer	£20k (shared with security schemes)	Annual	Households feel safe and able to remain in their own home  Measure; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly attendance at MARAC meetings</li> <li>• All households requesting sanctuary Scheme offered appropriate advice and assistance</li> </ul>
To make best use of existing housing through reducing the number of Empty Homes within the district and bringing grant aided empty properties back into use for those with housing need	To work with property owners to reduce the number of empty properties through advice, financial assistance and enforcement	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing) / Principal Strategic Housing Officer	£100k (shared with landlord assistance)	Annual	To make best use of available stock and increase the supply of accommodation to households in need  Measure; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 properties per annum brought back into use through officer intervention</li> <li>• Empty Homes strategy / action plan reviewed and updated</li> </ul>

**Agenda Item No. 5**  
**Appendix 1**

Priority	Details	Lead	Resources	Timescale	Outcome
To have a better understanding of the needs of residents of licensed caravan park sites in relation to their properties and ongoing support or adaptation requirements.	Carry out visits, investigations and survey to gather information regarding site use, conditions, amenities, rules and contracts	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	Officer time	March 2011	Site conditions and terms of occupation are improved for residents  Measure; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey site owners across district by March 2011</li> <li>• All holiday sites have updated (model) conditions by 2012</li> <li>• Assess the full implications of changes to planning consent for sites changing from holiday to residential</li> <li>• Joint publicity / promotion around contractual issues with Trading Standards</li> </ul>
	Update site licenses in line with model standards following consultation with site owners	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	Officer time	March 2012	
	Joint working with Trading Standards regarding fair contracts for site residents	Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing)	Officer time	March 2012	

## **Appendix 1 – Information From Stakeholder Day**

### **Tackling Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Factsheet**

In 2007 the Council conducted a Stock condition survey that identified issues in the area.

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Dwellings</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>English House Condition Survey 2005</b>
Owner occupied	34,000	78%	71%
Privately Rented	3,400	8%	11%
Housing Association (RSL)	6,400	15%	8%
Local Authority	0	0%	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,800</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The area has a mix of ages of properties, having many pre 1919 terraced properties around the main towns, housing developments from between 1960 to 1980 again around the main towns and a large number of older stock in the villages and rural areas. This helps to give rise to a mixture of issues for the physical stock itself. This has to be taken in context of the population demographic, income and needs.

About 35% of private rented properties are the pre 1919 terraced houses, compared to less than 20% of owner-occupied properties being this old.

The area has approximately 680 vacant properties, of which 400 have been vacant for longer than 6 months

The stock condition survey highlighted the most common category one hazard as excess cold, particularly in relation to pre 1919 terraced properties and rural solid wall construction houses. These are known as 'hard to treat properties'

The most common complaints received regarding housing conditions from tenants are cold and damp and condensation issues followed by general repairs.

The Council has focused landlord grants on thermal comfort measures. The level of Decent Homes for vulnerable people has increased from 63% in 2007 to 70 % in 2010. The Council aims to reach 75% by 2015.

The Council has a duty to respond to category one hazards under the Housing Act 2004 and uses advice, information, enforcement through improvement and prohibition notices as well as grants and loans to tackle stock conditions.

The Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency is a key partner helping to deliver home improvement grants and loans.

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

### Energy Efficiency Facts and figures:

- 41% of Wyre Forest's CO2 emissions come from the domestic sector, ie from heating and powering the district's homes. There are various international, national, county and local targets to reduce these emissions, e.g. UK Climate Change Act 80% by 2050.
- The average SAP rating for private sector housing in Wyre Forest is 54, compared to a SAP rating of 74 for Community Housing properties.
- Every £1 spent improving heating in homes saves the NHS £34.19 (over 10 years, based on 100,000 homes).
- The average annual gas bill increased from £330 in 2003 to £790 in 2010, a 139% increase.
- The % of West Midlands households in fuel poverty increased from 6.7% in 2003 to 20.3% in 2010 (NEA).
- In Worcestershire in 2008/9 there were 23% more deaths in winter than the expected average. Half of excess winter deaths are from cardiovascular disease and a third from respiratory disease, both of which are made worse by living in cold, damp conditions.
- In 2009/10 Wyre 60 funded insulation for 449 properties. Collectively this is expected to save 239 tonnes of CO2 and £74,515 on energy bills *per year*.

### Questions to Consider

- **What are the key priority issues for us to tackle in order to improve private sector stock condition and energy efficiency?**
- **What is already happening? Is it working well?**
- **What is needed in the future? How will we make it happen?**

**Tackling Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Workshop Priority Outcomes**

**1. Develop and implement a Communications Strategy**

There are a lot of different schemes out there which can cause confusion. We need an effective communication strategy to help avoid confusion, raise awareness, target different audiences/ age groups and encourage uptake throughout the year. Include staff at council and partner organisations- many will be residents and come into contact with many other residents.

E.g. many people who are not over a certain age or in receipt of benefits don't realise they are entitled to subsidised insulation – need to promote this more widely and encourage uptake in the summer months, when prices are cheapest and waiting times are shorter.

Should include behaviour change e.g. through use of energy monitors, as well as insulation and heating improvements. More awareness needed about costs of running different appliances.

Include positive, local case study examples and good news

**2. Area based schemes**

Previous schemes (Wyre 60 etc) have targeted residents over a certain age. These have had good uptake but it will become harder to find eligible residents and other age groups miss out. It was agreed that this year's council insulation/ thermal comfort budget should be used for area based schemes and have no age restriction.

There is much data available to identify specific target areas/ measures, including Warmer Worcestershire, benefits data, stock condition survey, uptake of grants etc to date. Suggestions for promotion included a letter from the council with a follow up visit and promotional events in each target community, to also involve partners such as Benefits department to ensure people are talking up benefits they're entitled to.

**3. Hard to treat properties**

Whilst recognising that solutions are far more expensive, Wyre Forest has many hard to treat properties with thermal comfort issues. The council and partners should explore external funding opportunities (e.g. CESP) and could look into linking up with other districts.

Renewable energy may be a more viable option for off grid properties- carry out more awareness about opportunities (council grant, feed in tariff etc) in these areas.

Focus on what CAN be done in these properties, to include behaviour change.

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

### Factsheet: Assisting People to stay in their own homes

- 5,430 (14.6%) dwellings have at least one resident with a long term illness or disability.
- Worcestershire County Council (WCC) have a duty to assess need
- WCC provide an aids and adaptations service that covers costs up to £1000 for eligible persons.
- Wyre Forest District Council have statutory duty to provide disabled facilities grants to meet disabled persons needs. There are some limits to the scope of works.
- DFG works are 80% level access showers and/or stairlifts, the rest being extensions and other conversion work.
- Approximately 70% of cases are to people over 60 years old.
- The grants are means tested and some people have to give a contribution.
- Current waiting list estimated cost is £1.8M. Annual budget is £800k. The Government provide £429k of this and the rest has to come from the Council. Total estimated cost for adaptations and improvements in Wyre Forest estimated at £3M.
- DFG cases categories into priority 1,2 or 3 by Occupational Therapists.
- Cases are worked through the Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency who provide additional services.
- 90% of the 15,000 owner occupied households over 60 are mortgage free
- Home Improvement Agency now delivered by a countywide service

### Recent changes that have impacted are:

1. All dfgs for children are not means tested against parents anymore.
2. Royal British Legion no longer fund cases (was approximately £40k per year) until application process completed and funds exhausted by LA
3. Where works are above £5k, the costs above £5k (up to £10k total) are placed as a charge on the property for repayment. This should result in money coming back in over time but 80% of cases are less than £5k. this only applies to private sector properties.
4. We have an aging population with greater needs and perhaps expectations.
5. Wyre Forest has a high number of disabled persons and elderly home owners.

### Some Key questions to consider

1. Should we try to get housing options more involved in regard of appropriate accommodation?

Yes – the earlier the referral into housing options teams the better especially from medical practitioners. There are issues around peoples income and ability to afford other choices but if going from private to social this isn't a problem.

2. How can we reduce the costs involved?

Recycling equipment where possible. Tackling issues around the warranty. If possible to rent equipment?. Procurement across the county.

3. Are we actually meeting the overall needs of people?

The process is slow and this does affect customer satisfaction. We need to make it very clear to customers and OT's what the timescales actually are and explain the legal process that must be followed so they understand why it takes so long.

4. The Adult Social Care, Health Service and disabled facilities grants are run by separate organisations with their own interests. How does this impact overall meeting of customer needs?

## Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1

There are concerns that private v social housing residents in Wyre Forest are not prioritised appropriately as treated separately / differently. This will change next year when all private and social housing work done in the same way.

5. Is it reasonable to look to a persons capital asset (home) to bear more costs of any of their needs?

There seems a general move to more charges being put on peoples property. No one in the focus group was opposed to this.

6. What changes could be made in service delivery by organisations to better meet peoples needs whilst recognising the financial limitations being faced?

Definite requirement for more information to client at beginning of process to make an informed choice – especially around housing options.

Need clarity over the whole process around the hierarchy of need.

Need to improve understanding of other bodies contributing funding.

Rationalise paperwork.

Solutions;

1. Communication
  - a. Information to client including timescales and details of the process and why it is required to be done in the way it is
  - b. Regular liaison between all interested parties including the HIA / DCs / County / OTs / Charities
  - c. Housing Options information on getting rehoused and process
2. Alternative forms of funding
  - a. Longer term consider the pooling of budgets – DC's RSL's and County equipment
  - b. Equity release schemes like Kickstart / interest free loans
  - c. Charities
3. Reducing Costs
  - a. Standard assessment and prioritisation process across the county
  - b. Procurement (equipment, services and contractors) and partnership agreements
  - c. Recycling of equipment where possible
  - d. Utilising new technologies where these are proven to be cost effective e.g. PODs

**Caravan Sites Factsheet**

**Licences (1-10 months)**

- Total number of 1 – 10 month sites = 6
- Total number of caravans on 1 – 10 month sites = **451**

**Licences (11 months)**

- Total number of 11 month sites = 19
- Total number of caravans on 11 month sites = **2185**
- Breakdown of total number of caravans;
  - Static caravans, holiday - 2144
  - Static caravans, managers residence - 4
  - Touring caravans - 37

**Licences (12 month – HOLIDAY)**

- Total number of 12 month sites (holiday use) = 2
- Total number of caravans on 12 month (holiday) sites = **124**

**Licences (12 month – RESIDENTIAL)**

- Total number of 12 month residential sites = 8
- Total number of caravans on 12 month (residential) sites = **213**

**Some Key Issues**

- As residential sites the residents have a reasonable level of protection from eviction from site as they come under the Mobile Homes Act 1983. On other sites the protection is much less and a matter of the contract between site owner and occupier.
- On non residential sites, occupiers are mostly paying council tax rather than business rates paid by site owner.
- Site owner agreements may require them not to be having the caravan as only residence.
- When elderly residents have medical issues, some have sought to remain during closed season by request to planning enforcement This has not been allowed.
- Sites may be isolated from facilities/amenities, issues of access and transport.
- Some sites have residents associations and strong community sense, others not.
- Disabled facilities grants are available to caravans where only or main residence and the site owner gives permission

## **Agenda Item No. 5 Appendix 1**

- A number of sites have flood risk and a mapping exercise has been done

### **Key questions and Responses from the Group**

#### **What issues are there for residents?**

Main discussions were around the legal relationship between the site owner and occupiers on non-residential sites. Concerns were that the several thousand residents using sites as their main or only residence are not adequately protected or informed about their contractual status under which they live on the site.

There was an shared concern that residents would not be forthcoming with specific concerns as to make themselves known would invite potential retribution , whether legal or not, by the site owner.

Site residents would be much better protected if the 11 month occupancy sites were changed to full residential. This would require planning permission.

Isolation on site was considered but not thought to be a major issue as most health services for example were delivered into peoples homes, even on sites. Overall access and site suitability for aged persons may become more of an issue over time due to the population on sites becoming older

#### **What does the future look like?**

The aging population and indications thus far regarding age of residents on sites as well as occupation trends for retired persons to see 11 month occupancy sites as an affordable downsizing option means that we will have more and more elderly residents with associated needs living in these caravans.

#### **What should the Council role be?**

The Council could review the current planning status to resolve whether any 11 month or 12 month holiday sites should be allowed residential full 12 month, in the interests of the residents there. Site owners may or may not be interested in such a change as it strengthens the residents situation to their detriment.

The council should work with County trading standards on reviewing the site rules and contracts, including a possible survey of site residents. A joint campaign could be considered with county trading standards to publicise fair terms and conditions for non residential sites.

The Council's role is limited to the planning status and licence provisions that cover health safety and amenities. This could link up better with the County Council trading standards role regarding fair contracts. It is to be noted that the Council charges Council tax to residents on non-residential sites and this brings an expectation of service provision.

#### **What should the top 3 priorities be?**

1. Carry out visits, investigations and possible survey to gather information regarding site use, conditions, amenities, rules and contracts
2. Campaign with County Council Trading Standards on fair conditions for residents
3. Consider further issues regarding any potential change from 11 month or 12 month holiday to full residential planning status.