

East Dorset District Council
**Private Sector Housing
Strategy**

2010-2015



www.dorsetforyou.com/housing



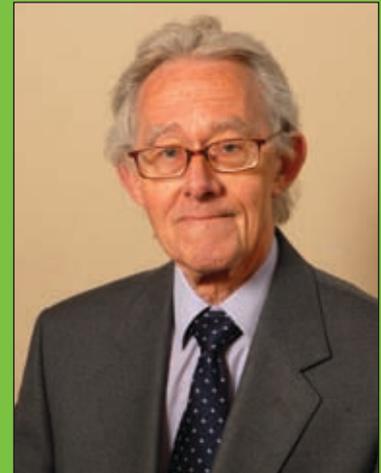
CONTENTS

Foreword	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Background	8
3 The Housing Market in East Dorset	13
4 The Condition of Housing in East Dorset	14
5 Aims and objectives of the Strategy	19
6 Private Sector Housing Strategy Action Plan	27
Abbreviations.....	33

Foreword

This strategy sets out how the Council will work with partners to improve the condition and management of private sector housing in East Dorset. It has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Council carried out a survey of the owner-occupied and privately rented sectors in 2008 in order to help develop this new strategy. In addition national studies have helped our understanding of the private rented sector.

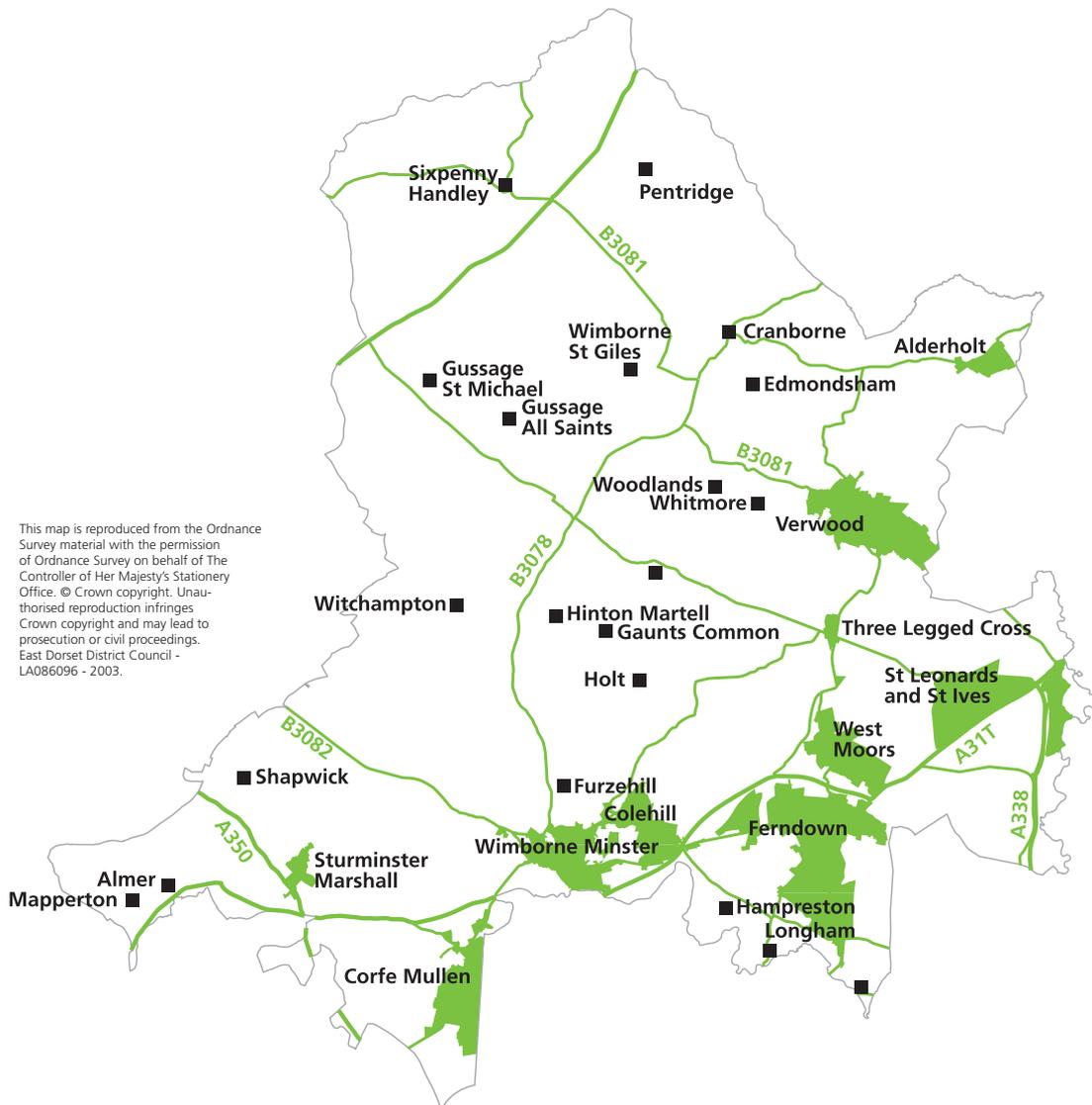


The Strategy is designed to contribute to objectives of the Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy, the Council's Housing Strategy and has links with other Council strategies seeking to improve the health and well-being of local people.

Over the last few years to help in the delivery of its strategic aims, the Council has developed and implemented a range of financial assistance for home owners and tenants. This has included grants to make the funding of urgent repairs more sustainable and a new energy insulation scheme. We have also worked with our partners to improve the processing times of Disabled Facilities Grants, increased Warm front uptake in the East Dorset area, and supported the development of Home Improvement Agency services to assist elderly and vulnerable people in the district.

We will continue to deliver targeted assistance to households in East Dorset, maximise the use of resources to deliver the best value for money housing services and use every opportunity to bid for additional resources to help us in the work.

Councillor John Little - Lead Member for Housing



1 Introduction

Private sector housing (that is, owner-occupied and privately rented housing) has a vital role to play in the Council's wider strategic housing activity. It is accepted that there is a direct relationship between the environment and our health and housing is a fundamental necessity. Housing is expected to meet the needs and aspirations of a wide spectrum of different households. What provides a safe and healthy environment for one household may be inappropriate for another. It should be a general principle that housing should provide an environment which is as safe and healthy as possible.

The aims for this strategy have been derived from the evidence of housing conditions, demographic data and housing need, the Council's new Corporate Plan and have also been strongly influenced by local, sub-regional, regional and national policy.

The Council's Corporate Plan has been developed around the vision to be a forward looking organisation working with the community and partners to identify and respond to local needs in an effective and cost-effective way. In doing this people will be able to have their say on issues which directly affect them and their community and to receive good, value for money services.

East Dorset District Council's Private Sector Housing Strategy aims to make a difference to local households by:

- increasing the proportion of private housing that is of a decent standard and reduce the incidence of category 1 hazards in the private rented sector;
- supporting the elderly, vulnerable and disabled people to live in comfort and security in their homes;
- reducing the number of Long Term Empty Homes (dwellings empty for more than 6 months);
- helping improve the energy efficiency of homes, reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions;
- delivering a customer focused service.

The Council has various duties and powers with regard to private sector housing, such as:

- assessing the quality, condition and quality of management of the housing stock in both the social and private sectors;
- tackling poor housing conditions;
- developing measures to bring empty properties back into use;
- helping to drive up standards of property and management in the private rented sector;
- helping to improve homes, including assistance to home owners on low incomes;
- improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions from housing;

- administering and enforcing the mandatory House in Multiple Occupatio (HMO) licensing scheme.

The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) remains the only mandatory grant specifically set out by the Government within housing legislation. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provided local authorities with a general power to provide assistance for housing renewal. To exercise this power, local authorities are required to publish and implement a policy detailing how they intend to provide assistance to tackle conditions in the private housing sector in their local area. This grants and loans policy is reviewed annually, a copy of the current year's policy can be found on the 'dorsetforyou' web site;

www.dorsetforyou.com/housing

In the delivery of its housing services the Council is responsive to its customer's needs. Vulnerable owner occupiers, tenants, landlords, the elderly and disabled people are key service users and their views help to form our service through ongoing consultation. We will monitor and continually improve our services through the setting of a challenging and comprehensive range of service standards. Our customers will be involved in setting and monitoring these standards, as well as providing us with feedback on the services that they have received. This will ensure that the policies and practices of the Council are better tailored to local needs.

The Council uses a variety of methods to communicate with service users including customer satisfaction surveys, forums, groups, talks and its web site 'dorsetforyou'.

Ensuring hard to reach, vulnerable residents know about and access our service is challenging particularly in our rural communities. Partnerships with health professionals, Home Improvement Agencies and the 'third sector', combined with marketing materials and directed mailings help to ensure equitable access.

The delivery of these private sector functions have been the subject of a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment which has drawn conclusions about their impact on different groups highlighting negative impact or unequal outcomes. The assessment also includes an action plan designed to address the issues identified which will be reviewed annually.

We cannot deliver the aims of this strategy alone. Our partners are vital to the delivery of our housing services particularly at a time of increasing demand for services and reducing resources to meet those needs, we cannot deliver this strategy effectively without them. They range from the Parish and Town Councils and other Councils within Dorset, local landlords and the National Landlords' Association, the Primary Care Trust, community groups, Citizens Advice Bureau, Dorset Energy Advice Centre, Royal British Legion and other charities, Partnership for Older Peoples' Projects and many more.

The Council is now delivering joined private sector services with Christchurch Borough Council which will provide us with more flexible capacity.

One of the key resources available to us is financial and money to fund grants and loans and to support agencies such as Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services is essential. The Council's revenue resources are used to fund the provision of services such as the HIA, Handy van and Housing Options (HOs) services but the capital resource that is made available to us by the Government to help us meet the needs of local households through grants and loans is reducing significantly year on year and this has a direct bearing on the grants and loans policy that is delivered each year.

More than ever we need to ensure that resources are targeted at those most in need and that wherever possible we will lever in finance from a range of other sources.

2 Background

Private sector housing represents the largest proportion of East Dorset's housing stock and can be identified as two main categories, owner occupation and private rented. It is essential that we have a good understanding of the housing stock, the needs of those that occupy that stock and the options available to us to influence its improvement.

The Owner-Occupied Sector

Home ownership is overwhelmingly the preferred tenure in the UK and most people who own their homes are comfortable and well housed. But while successive Governments have provided incentives for people to become home owners, they have been less active in ensuring that home ownership is sustainable. For many years, money has been made available to low income home owners and landlords for various types of improvement works. The belief that home owners should be responsible for the upkeep of their homes coupled with pressure to keep public spending down, has, over time, led to a steady reduction in funding.

The decline in public investment has coincided with increased levels of home ownership - often to more marginal home owners who find it harder to maintain their homes. This hands-off approach has been challenged by a number of emerging problems facing the sector. These have revealed that the housing market is not self-sustaining and that problems cannot always be tackled by individuals alone. In many areas, and for many people, public intervention is required for home ownership to be sustainable.

One example where such intervention might be needed are residential park homes which make up 2.5% of the whole housing stock in East Dorset. They are occupied almost exclusively by older people and all but the most modern residential park homes have particularly poor thermal comfort. This sector demonstrates high levels of vulnerability, up to 50% of households are in receipt of a means tested benefit with increasing incidence of fuel poverty. Unfortunately, this type of tenure excludes the occupiers from being able to access many types of financial assistance from the Council for major repairs or energy efficiency improvements.

We have developed a comprehensive range of assistance for owner occupiers as we adopt a wider, holistic approach to housing and encompass strategic issues such as community safety, fuel poverty, targeting need and assisting, enabling and facilitating partnerships to allow people to have informed choices. Out of necessity, our principal focus is one of supporting, enabling, finding solutions and helping households access other sources of funding.

The Private Rented Sector

The nature of the private rented sector at local level and the way it operates (as a sector and as individual properties) can have a significant impact on households, communities, and service providers. It can make a range of contributions to the delivery of economic prosperity and achievement of the Council's wider social and environmental objectives. Although it makes up only about 8% of East Dorset's

housing stock, the private rented sector meets a range of housing needs in a way that is quite distinct from owner occupation and social renting, making it a vital part of the housing market.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new definition of a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and also a mandatory licensing system for prescribed types of HMO with 3 or more stories and 5 or more occupants sharing facilities. The Council has identified four HMOs that may require and issued mandatory licenses for two of those. Certain types of lower risk HMOs do not require a mandatory licence. Although this type of accommodation accounts for a small proportion of East Dorset's total housing stock, they account for higher proportions of unsatisfactory living conditions throughout the district mainly due to poor energy efficiency, lower energy efficiency (SAP) ratings and category 1 hazards due to the risk of 'excess cold' under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

As access to owner occupation and social renting has become more difficult in recent years, the role of the private rented sector in providing accommodation to many households has become more widely recognised and valued. In particular it has been seen as a major contributor to the resolution of homelessness.

The highest proportion of non-decency and poor conditions is found in this sector and private rented sector tenants may often be the most vulnerable, low income groups requiring special attention.

Private rented housing needs to be considered separately from the rest of the private housing sector because its role, management, and impacts on the housing market and economy are significantly different from owner occupied housing.

The Government's objective for the private rented sector is to secure a larger, better-quality, better-managed stock of privately rented housing by:

- retaining the many good and well-intentioned landlords, and help them to raise their standards further;
- persuading reputable investors to expand the supply of decent rented homes; and
- making the worst landlords perform better, or get out of the business altogether.

The Government's key measures to achieve this include:

- helping well-intentioned landlords to improve their expertise through voluntary accreditation schemes and other best practice initiatives;
- a compulsory licensing system for HMOs and selective licensing of private landlords in areas of low demand; and
- a sound enforcement regime within the Housing Act 2004 to ensure compliance where appropriate.

The key measures that we have adopted to achieve this include:

- the development of an active landlords' forum to support landlords with up to date advice and support;
- the development a robust but fair enforcement policy to improve conditions in the private rented sector;

- helping well-intentioned landlords to improve their expertise through our voluntary accreditation scheme including a small level of grant assistance
www.dorsetforyou.com/housing
- the application of a more pro-active approach to enforcement in the private rented sector rather than relying upon reacting to tenant complaints.

Decent Homes

The Government established targets to ensure that all social housing meets standards of decency and expanded this to the private sector. A decent home is one that is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities. These targets have been expanded to increase the proportion of private housing, including owner occupation and the rented sector, in decent condition occupied by vulnerable families.

Whilst the levels of non-decency in East Dorset are less than the national average, and it is likely that we will achieve the targets set, conditions still present a challenge to the Council to achieve improvements.

Empty Properties

The Housing Act 2004 contains provisions to enable local housing authorities to deal with the problems created by long-term empty homes in the private sector. Empty homes have a negative impact on the local environment, particularly when they fall into disrepair and display general signs of neglect. They can also act as a 'honey-pot' for criminal and anti-social behaviour and not to mention a wasted asset for their owners. Perhaps more importantly at a time of housing shortage, they are a potential source of rented accommodation for local households in housing need. The Government is keen to see the numbers of empty homes reduced throughout the country. Whilst the level of long term empty homes in East Dorset is small in proportion to the overall stock, it is still significant. To work towards this aim, local authorities may identify owners of empty homes from council tax and other data held by the Council and take steps to bring vacant dwellings back into use.

These steps range from the provision of grant assistance conditioned with nomination rights to the taking of enforcement action to bring long term empty properties back into use.

We have a current Empty Homes Strategy; **www.dorsetforyou.com/housing**

To further strengthen our work in this area we are working with partner authorities within Dorset to develop a co-ordinated county wide empty property strategy. This will include the development of a toolkit of measures to bring empty homes back into use and in depth training of key local authority staff.

Support for the elderly, vulnerable and disabled people

The majority of us wish to remain in our own homes. However research has shown that older people, disabled people and people living on low incomes are more likely to be living in a home which is in need of significant repairs or adaptation with the resultant negative impact on health and quality of life.

Since 1990 local housing authorities have been under a statutory duty to provide DFG assistance to disabled people for a range of adaptations to their homes. This included funding a minimum 40% of the grant spend with the remaining 60% coming from the Government. The mandatory grant is used to fund adaptations ranging from small-scale works such as the replacement of baths with level access showers for people with poor mobility, to large scale alterations such as ground floor bedrooms for children and adults with long term complex needs.

The DFG programme has recently been subject to a national comprehensive review. This review was conducted as a result of growing concern regarding the DFG 'means test', particularly its impact on children and working age adults, increasing demand and long waiting lists and observed inequity between housing tenures. This review has initially removed the need to means test applications for adaptations for children with a disability, increased the number of disabled people that will receive 100% funding, extended the type of works that can be grant aided and extended the maximum level from £25,000 to £30,000.

The review has also relaxed the requirement for authorities to make their 40% contribution towards the DFG although the expectation is that we will still maintain existing levels of financial support. However, financial pressures on the Council particularly on the capital budget, is causing and will continue to cause an inevitable tension.

With an increasingly elderly population and the emphasis on trying to keep people living in their homes rather than going into care, demand for support including grant assistance has increased significantly. Whilst we will continue to support people and assist them to remain in their own homes, at a time when the financial resources available to meet this demand are not keeping pace, we will have to continue to prioritise access to grants.

HIAs have established a reputation as a key source of help and assistance to enable older, disabled and vulnerable people to remain living independently in their own homes. HIAs play a significant role in bringing this about and as such are integral to the housing services of the Council. We will continue to work with the local HIA to provide the highest levels of support to the most vulnerable elderly and disabled people needing assistance.

Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty

The Council has had responsibilities to improve the energy efficiency of private sector housing since the mid-1990s and in that time has assisted many households achieve improvements. However, with increasing energy costs, the threat of global warming and the setting of a number of European and Government targets, we need to achieve a significant increase and improved delivery of both advice and installation of energy efficiency measures, and this requires projects and co-ordination of delivery.

This step change will be delivered through a new partnership initiative, the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency Strategy 2009 (www.dorsetforyou.com/housing) which has been endorsed by a wide range of organisations. We are a key partner in the delivery of the strategy's action plan to improve advice and assistance to households and reduce energy consumption in the home, reduce fuel poverty and increase the take up of renewable energy schemes.

This strategic work has already enabled the partner councils to access funding to support new schemes and to employ a specialist officer who will co-ordinate and drive this work forward. This new officer will also provide us with the skills to access a range of additional funding for schemes that to date have been inaccessible to us.

3 The Housing Market in East Dorset

The Council has an up-to-date and accurate picture of its housing market and how that market relates to the rest of Dorset and the wider area including Bournemouth and Poole to the south and east. As part of a wider Strategic Housing Market Assessment covering Bournemouth, Poole and the rest of Dorset, the Council completed a Housing Needs Survey in January 2008.

Using data from the household survey it is possible to provide a detailed picture of the profile of local households and their dwellings. Some of the main findings were:

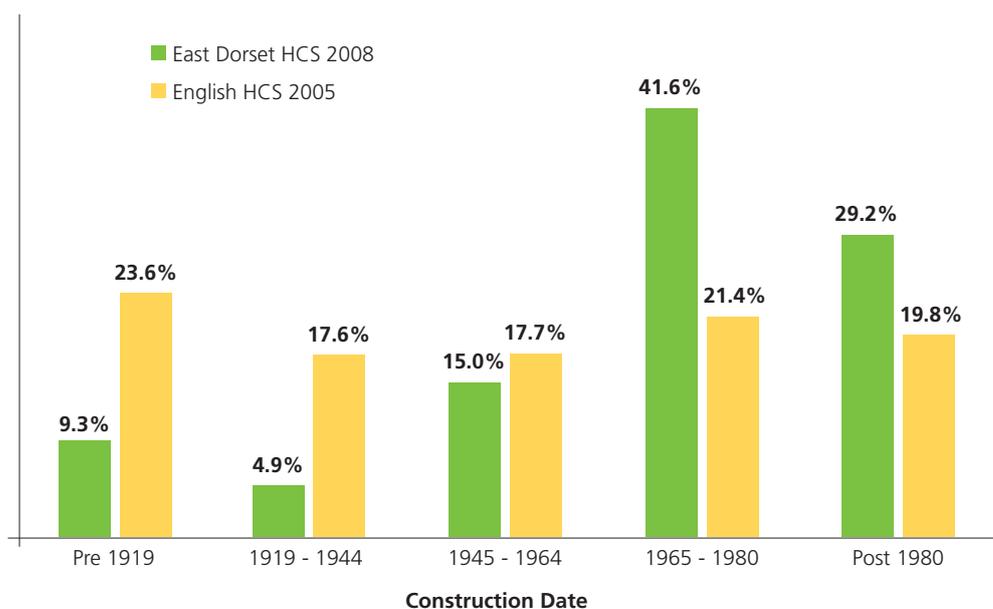
- In total 61.6% of households live in detached houses or bungalows, whilst only 9.9% live in flats. Households living in rented housing are more likely to live in flats whilst those in owner-occupation are more likely to live in detached houses than other tenures;
- Over a third of all households are 'pensioner-only' and just under a fifth contain children. Lone parent households were found to be concentrated in the rented sectors;
- The most characteristic feature of the population of Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset is the high proportion of older people (here defined as those over retirement age.) The 2006 ONS mid-year population estimates show that 25% of the population in Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset is over retirement age. The national average is just 18.8%. In each of the rural sub-Housing Market Areas the proportion of older people increases to almost 28% (Bournemouth / Poole periphery, Dorchester / Weymouth periphery and North West Dorset);
- Analysis of household moves in the last two years shows that private rented tenants are the most mobile. An estimated 41.1% of private renters had moved home in the past two years, compared to only 18.2% of social renters and 13.2% of owner-occupiers. There were more moves recorded within tenures than between them;
- The population of East Dorset is predominantly 'white' and survey data suggests that less than 1% of households are 'non-white';
- The level of overcrowding recorded in East Dorset at 1.0% is lower than the national average. The high figure for under-occupation is typical, and is associated with the high level of owner occupation;
- The proportion of employed household heads varied significantly across the tenures. Some 82% of households buying with a mortgage are headed by an employed person compared to 55.7% in the private rented sector and 32.8% for social housing tenants;
- Households in the private rented sector and those buying with a mortgage have the highest housing costs, households in the social rented sector the lowest.

4 The Condition of Housing in East Dorset

In order to maintain a detailed and up to date understanding of the private sector housing stock in East Dorset and meet its obligations under the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions under review, the Council conducted a Private Sector House Condition Survey (HCS) in September 2008.

The survey provided evidence of the current composition, condition and household make up of the district's private sector housing. The survey identified that there were an estimated 38,700 private sector dwellings in East Dorset. The tenure profile in East Dorset differs from the national average with a much higher proportion of owner occupied dwellings (85% compared to 71% nationally). The proportion of privately rented stock is appreciably lower than the national average (7% compared to 11%). The age profile of the stock differs from the average for England with the greater proportion of the housing stock being built after 1965. The level of dwellings considered to be non-decent is substantially lower than the national average (22% compared to 37%).

Figure 1 - Dwelling age profile England and East Dorset



The building type profile in East Dorset also differs from the national pattern with lower levels of small and medium/large terraced houses, semi detached houses and converted flats. There are, however, significantly higher proportions of detached houses and bungalows. In addition, data gathered as part of the Council's licensing regime under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 indicate 980 (2.5% of the housing stock) residential mobile homes in the area predominantly situated on 12 sites.

The vast majority of dwellings (90.05%) are houses generally occupied as built. Of the remainder, most are purpose built or converted flats. An estimated 0.08% of dwellings are HMOs, representing just 30 buildings being used to house multiple households. The national average for HMOs is approximately 2%. The Council has licenced two HMO's under the Housing Act 2004 mandatory licensing scheme.

Empty Properties

From the stock condition survey it is estimated that of the private sector and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) dwellings within East Dorset, 240 (0.6%) are long-term vacant, defined as any dwelling vacant for six months or more.

Decent Homes Standard

Based on the data gathered as part of this house condition survey, 8,700 dwellings (22.4%) in East Dorset can be classified non decent. In England as a whole the rate is 36.7% (owner occupied, privately rented and RSL stock) making the East Dorset rate significantly less than the national rate. In East Dorset, the hierarchy of reasons for failure differs slightly to that of the national profile with thermal comfort failure and Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS) Category 1 hazards being reversed hierarchically. It should be borne in mind that 'Excess Cold' is the main Category 1 hazard reason for failure and this overlaps with the poor thermal comfort criterion. All but the most modern residential mobile homes have particularly poor thermal comfort.

The older housing stock, pre 1944 have the highest levels of non-decency, with the highest rate being found in the rural areas of East Dorset (48.6%). The highest proportion is found in the private rented sector (56% compared to 40.7% nationally), with the owner occupation rate (19.3%) lower than the national rate (24.9%).

Having determined the reasons for dwellings being classified as non decent, it is possible to indicate what level of repairs would be needed to make all dwellings decent.

Figure 2 - Repair cost by non-decency reason

Reason	Total cost (£ million)	Cost per dwelling (£)
Category 1 Hazard	£10.3	£2,720
Repair	£7.8	£4,200
Amenities	£3.7	£8,800
Thermal comfort	£7.7	£1,400
Total	£29.4	£3,800

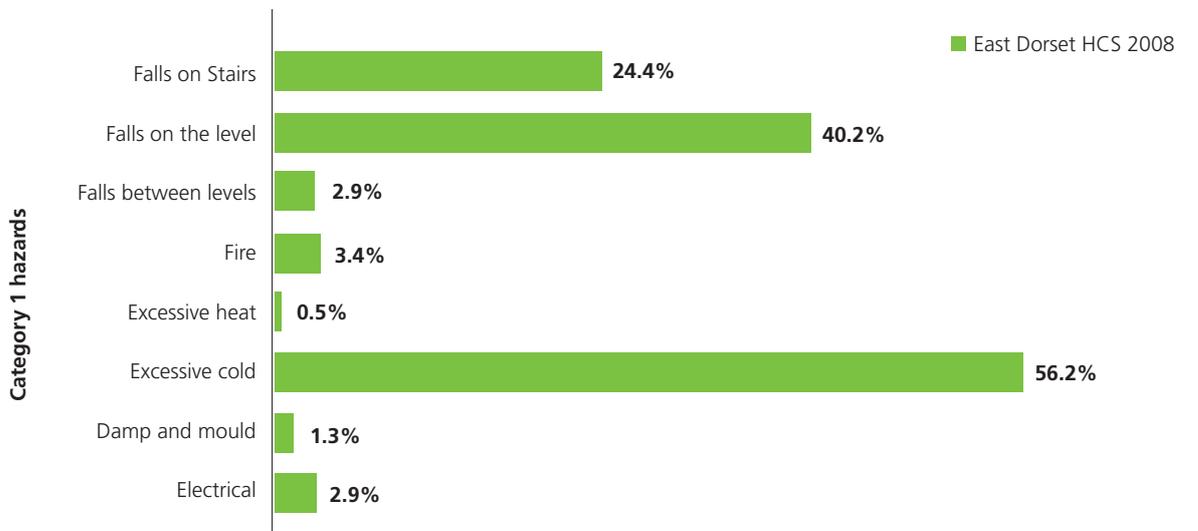
In East Dorset, at present there are 8,800 private sector dwellings (owner occupied and privately rented but excluding RSL dwellings) that are occupied by residents in receipt of one of the 'vulnerability' benefits. Of these an estimated 2,760 are classified non decent, which represents 31.3% of dwellings occupied by a vulnerable resident. Conversely this means that 68.7% are decent. The Government have set a target of 70% to be met by 2010.

Category 1 Hazards

The overall proportion of dwellings with a Category 1 Hazard is 9.8% compared to 22.4% nationally (owner occupied, privately rented and RSL dwellings) found in the EHCS 2006, representing 3,800 dwellings across East Dorset.

The figures for Category 1 Hazards are dominated by excess cold hazards by a substantial margin. As commonly found, this is followed by falls on the stairs and on the level. Category 1 hazards are strongly associated with the private rented sector, older dwellings occupied by those over 65, those on lower incomes and in receipt of income related benefit and those with a disability.

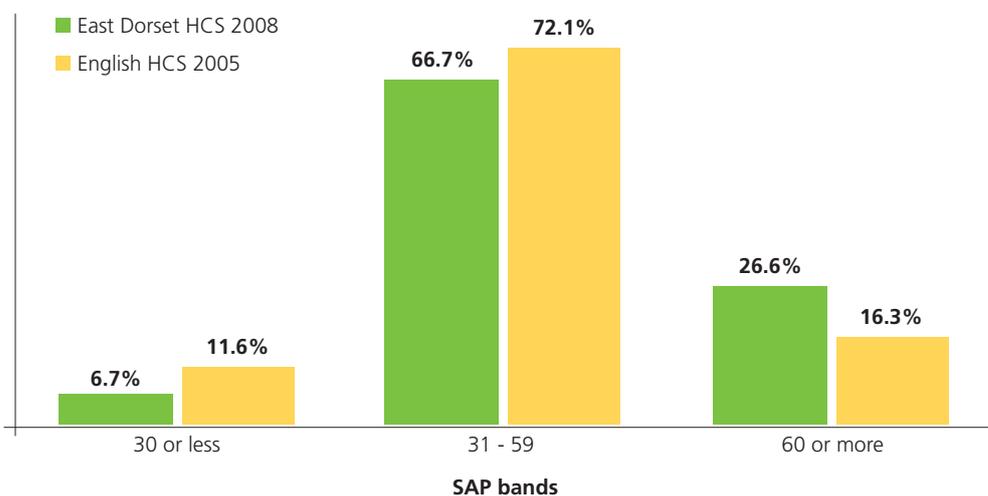
Figure 3: Category 1 Hazards by reason, as % of Category 1 Hazards



Energy Efficiency and SAP Ratings

The average SAP rating (an energy rating on a scale of 1 to 100 with 100 being the best) for a private sector dwelling in East Dorset is 52. This compares very favourably to an average SAP rating of just under 46 nationally, based on the findings of the 2005 EHCS. The chart below shows the distribution of SAP ratings for private sector dwellings within East Dorset compared to the EHCS 2005.

Figure 4 - Frequency distribution of SAP in East Dorset and England



The majority of dwellings (66.7%) have a SAP rating between 31 and 59, compared with the national average of 72.1%. The target SAP for all dwellings is a minimum of 65 described under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. A SAP of less than 30 is considered unacceptably low and represents a difficult and expensive dwelling to heat. In East Dorset 2570 dwellings (6.7%) have a SAP rating of less than 30, which is considerably lower than the 11.6% found in the EHCS 2005. For SAP ratings of 60 or above there is again a substantial difference with East Dorset having 26.6% of dwellings within this band compared to 16.3% nationally. The private rented stock has the lowest average SAP rating at 42, followed by owner occupation at 52. All but the most modern residential mobile homes have particularly poor SAP ratings.

Increases in SAP are usually associated with a reduction in dwelling age with the most modern stock having the highest SAP. This pattern is repeated in East Dorset with the lowest mean SAP of 39 for pre-1919 properties, and the highest at 57 for post 1980 properties. The lowest mean SAP rating is found in the rural area of East Dorset.

The CO₂ data provided as part of this survey indicates that emissions within the private sector stock of East Dorset are 137,200 tonnes per annum, an average of 3.5 tonnes per annum per property or 1.6 tonnes per capita.

Residents and Dwelling Conditions

It is now worth considering what relationships can be found between the general characteristics of dwellings and occupiers and the condition of dwellings and its energy efficiency. The following table compares a selection of dwelling condition characteristics between the overall East Dorset position and that for the oldest and youngest heads of household.

Figure 5 - Age of head of household by dwelling condition

Group	Category 1 hazard	In disrepair	Fuel poor
Over 65	10.1%	6.5%	12.6%
Under 25	6.6%	6.3%	0.0%
East Dorset average	9.8%	4.8%	10.9%

This table shows that for those over 65 two of the indicators (Category 1 hazards and fuel poverty) are above the district average. However, with younger heads of households none of the indicators were above the authority averages. Levels of disrepair for both households on benefit and on incomes under £10k are higher than the average for East Dorset as a whole. The level of excess cold hazards is an issue given the numbers of older residents in East Dorset.

There is a strong relationship between fuel poverty (households that spend more than 10% of their net income to keep warm), low income and benefit receipt, which is to be expected given that fuel poverty as a measure uses income. In East Dorset 4,200 dwellings are occupied by households in fuel poverty with a cost of £12.2 million to remedy. Fuel poverty is far more likely to affect households in rural areas of East Dorset. Residential mobile homes in East Dorset are almost exclusively occupied by older people. This sector demonstrates high levels of vulnerability, up to 50% of households are in receipt of a means tested benefit with increasing incidence of fuel poverty.

Disabled People

The house condition survey indicated that there are approximately 5,600 households in East Dorset with one or more residents having a disability, representing 14.5% of the stock. The total cost of all adaptations that could potentially be fitted to benefit residents with a disability is just under £5.2 million. When means testing has been applied this total reduces to just under £2.5 million, which reflects the fact that many residents with disabilities may be on average or above average incomes.

5 Aims and objectives of the Strategy

Appropriate actions to tackle private sector housing problems can meet a number of social, economic and health objectives, as follows:

- **Community planning** - Both at Dorset county level through the Dorset Strategic Partnership and at local level through the town and parish based partnerships a key component of community planning will be to address the living conditions and health of residents
- **Sustainability** - A reduction in domestic energy use is a priority objective of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and the sub regional Energy Efficiency Strategy. This can be achieved through a programme designed to increase insulation levels, energy efficient heating systems and public awareness of energy saving measures.
- **Regeneration/economic development** - The Council will ensure that private sector renewal activity contributes to the economic health of the district and meets the objectives set out in the Multi Area Agreement objectives.
- **Housing** - This strategy is designed to support the Council's strategic housing objectives.
- **Community safety** - All new private sector dwellings and developments are assessed at planning stage to see where they meet secured by design criteria and contribute towards meeting the Council's community safety objectives. The Council offers financial assistance and works with its Handy Van scheme to ensure that security improvements can be performed to existing dwellings.
- **Public health** - The provision of assistance to local households is designed to enable people to stay safe, healthy and secure in their own homes. In addition through partnership working with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Social Services, private sector housing policies will contribute towards facilitating hospital discharge, the prevention of hospitalisation, falls and bed-blocking. The outcomes of having interventions are also linked into the Council's Health Improvement Statement.
- **Energy efficiency and fuel poverty** - The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 imposed a statutory duty on Councils to develop strategies designed to achieve a significant (30%) improvement in energy efficiency by 2010. The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published as part of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 has targets for the eradication of all fuel poverty by 2016, where 'fuel poverty' is defined as a household that spends at least 10% of its income to heat their home to an 'adequate' standard of warmth. More recently such works assists in making progress on National Indicator 186 (reduction in Carbon emissions) and 187 (Fuel Poverty).
- **Supporting people:** The Council has worked with the Supporting People Team, the PCT and Social Services, neighbouring authorities and providers to establish home improvement agency services, and related services, to households in need in the private sector.

This strategy is also designed to assist in the delivery of the Council's key objectives relating to housing set out in the new corporate plan, to improve the quality and availability of housing.

The following section details how this strategy intends to deliver against its objectives, with proposed actions and targets detailed in the Action Plan.

Strategic aim 1

Increase the proportion of private housing that is of a decent standard and reduce the incidence of category 1 hazards in the private rented sector.

Owner Occupiers

Vulnerable homeowners on low incomes living in properties that are in poor condition can apply to the Council for assistance to remove health and safety risks around the home, raising thermal comfort standards and tackle fuel poverty.

Private Rented Sector

Tenants and landlords contact the Council on a regular basis regarding a variety of issues concerning private rented accommodation. The Council acknowledges that it has a key role to play in advising both parties on information regarding necessary repairs and standards and continues to provide the necessary support.

The Council has a statutory duty to deal with properties that possess HHSRS category 1 hazards. In accordance with its Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy (www.dorsetforyou.com/housing) the Council will always aim to ensure that necessary repairs to properties are undertaken in a timely and appropriate manner by giving advice, encouragement, appropriate assistance and above all a proportionate approach. However where an informal approach has proved unsuccessful, then enforcement action will be taken in accordance with the Councils Enforcement Policy.

We will proactively identify poor quality housing in the private rented sector, particularly that stock owned by landlords with large portfolios and work with landlords to improve the condition of that sector.

East Dorset Housing Association are the largest landlords in East Dorset and we have developed close working practices with them through a memorandum of understanding that improves service delivery to tenants by recognising that EDHA have primary responsibility for repairs and setting service standards for both parties.

Although the Decent Homes Standard cannot be legally enforced the Council will endeavour to work with all landlords to ensure that improvements achieved via enforcement activity not only remove or reduce category 1 and 2 hazards under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System but also work towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard.

In addition the Council will help owners of empty properties to bring those properties back into use by providing advice and information on letting their properties and where possible through the provision of financial assistance.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

In addition to the national mandatory HMO Licensing scheme, the Council will address the standard of certain types of non-licensable HMO with a view to ensuring that the persons responsible for such properties take the appropriate action to remove serious health and safety risks, remove category 1 hazards, reduce category 2 hazards and also comply with the Management Regulations.

Landlords

To ensure County wide consistency the Council has adopted a Landlord Accreditation Scheme; www.dorsetforyou.com/housing based on a Dorset wide model. The Scheme is operated in partnership with the National Landlords Association (NLA); www.landlords.org.uk/index.htm and was formally launched at a joint Local Authority Landlord Forum in October 2005. Accreditation is a voluntary scheme and landlords wishing to apply need to provide accommodation that achieves the prescribed standards of repair, they should maintain sound business and management practices, be a member of a recognised landlord association and comply with that association's code of conduct.

The Council uses the benchmark of accredited status as a central element of its delivery of services in the private rented sector. Landlord Accreditation links to grant assistance including Accredited Landlord Grant, Empty Property Grant and other services such as Private Sector Leasing (PSL). To encourage landlords to join the Council's Accreditation Scheme, the Council provides an Accredited Landlord Grant to provide assistance towards carrying out thermal insulation works and electrical safety checks.

The Council runs a very active Landlords' Forum open to all owners of private rented residential accommodation, their letting agents and social landlords and is a forum for dialogue on all issues concerning the rented sector. The forum aims to meet three times per year in the evenings and provides specialist information and advice for owners, letting agents and rural estate landlords who make up a large proportion of the private rented sector in the area. A regular newsletter to landlords helps to keep all up to date with current developments at local and national level.

Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL)

The Council operates a PSL scheme where private properties are leased to the Council and then re-let to persons in housing need. Owners of leased properties benefit from guaranteed income and routine maintenance of their properties.

Strategic aim 2

Support the elderly, vulnerable and disabled people to live in comfort and security in their homes.

The Council has always been a major point of contact for local homeowners, landlords and private tenants enquiring about the repair and maintenance of their homes. In addition to financial assistance, in recent years the council has developed its role providing basic advice to homeowners regarding general housing issues. The council also fulfils an important sign-posting role, directing enquirers to other organisations who may be able to assist. These include the government funded 'Warm Front Team' offering energy efficiency grants, Dorset Energy Advice Centre (DEAC), the Councils HIA, Handy Works/Handy Van Scheme, Social Care and Health, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Age Concern and others. The development of a single referral scheme for health professionals throughout Dorset called 'Safe and Independent Living' will ensure improved access to all services for vulnerable residents.

New Home Improvement Agency Services 2010-2015

Through our partnership working across the County we have been successful in awarding a further contract to the Anchor Staying Put HIA until 2013.

The objectives of the service are to ensure;

- people have decent and safe homes
- people can heat their homes properly and efficiently
- income is maximised and fuel poverty is overcome.
- older people have a real choice of good quality housing suitable for their needs
- people can obtain adaptations to their homes if they need them
- the risks of older people falling are minimised
- a reduction in the need for residential and hospital care

These objectives are achieved by supporting people over the age of 50 in line with the Ageing Well in Dorset Strategy, throughout the repair, adaptation or improvement process, so that the individual is able to remain in their own home in a warm, safe and secure environment. This could also include the direct provision of repair and maintenance services, preventative initiatives, and providing advice on accessing appropriate funding, including private finance.

Alongside these core functions the HIA will operate;

- Handy Van service to provide reliable help with minor DIY jobs around the home. The contractors are skilled, experienced and police checked, giving customers peace of mind and taking the worry out of finding reliable trades people, and
- Housing Options (HOs) service providing support to individuals who no longer find coping in their own home easy and may need help in considering the possibility of moving home or exploring other options. Nationally, it has been shown that HOs have major benefits for health, social care and housing agencies, reducing emergency admissions, delaying or preventing the need for high level social care services and maximising the best use of available housing stock.

Mandatory DFG

The Council works closely with the Occupational Therapy Teams at Dorset County Council and the Home Improvement Agency, to ensure that the adaptation provided is appropriate to meet the identified need of the client.

Despite high demand for assistance the Council provides a 'fast track' system for providing adaptations under DFG, where an Occupational Therapist identifies that a service user is at imminent risk of harm, adaptations may delay hospital discharge, or urgent adaptation is required for a service user with an aggressive, terminal illness. High demand for DFG has resulted in a considerable shortfall of funding for these types of mandatory adaptation. In the short term funding solutions will need to be found. In the longer term the Council will need to identify and implement sustainable methods of funding the projected future demand.

At the beginning of 2010 we entered into a new aids and adaptations partnership agreement with our major housing association to promote and ensure the funding and provision of efficient and customer focused adaptation services to their tenants.

Financial assistance

As outlined above the Government recognises that what many home owners and tenants require is 'that bit of help' at the right time, to enable them to live safely and securely within their own home. In response the Council will, when financial resources permit, target financial assistance to those most in need and least able to afford works to their homes. Residential Park Homes, because of their construction and in East Dorset, exclusive occupation by older people, deserve a specifically tailored approach and we will ensure that these resources will also be targeted at Park Home residents most in need of help.

We will ensure that we maximise the use of funding for these types of assistance and will actively bid for resources from a variety of sources when the opportunities arise.

Strategic aim 3

Reduce the number of long term empty properties.

The Council has a current Empty Homes Strategy; (www.dorsetforyou.com/housing) but to further strengthen our work in this area we are working with partner authorities within Dorset to develop a co-ordinated County wide empty homes strategy. This will include the development of a toolkit of measures to bring empty homes back not use and in depth training of key local authority staff.

To work towards this aim, we have introduced procedures to routinely identify long term empty properties using a range of data held by the Council. Each property identified from this data will be visited and risk rated with action to bring them back into use commensurate to that rating. This action ranges from the provision of information, advice, grant assistance where resources permit conditioned with nomination rights to the taking of enforcement action to bring them back into use.

Although the Housing Act 2004 provides local authorities with the power to take formal action, the Council's preferred approach is one of support and encouragement for landlords and owners. In addition owners of commercial premises are encouraged to recognise under used space above shops to create living accommodation.

Strategic aim 4

Help improve the energy efficiency of homes, reduce fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions.

The Council is working in partnership with a number of external agencies to assist home owners, landlords and tenants access good quality impartial advice and finance for energy efficiency improvements to their homes.

This work is being expanded to deliver the energy efficiency, renewables and fuel poverty Action Plan contained within the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency Strategy 2009; www.dorsetforyou.com/housing. This new partnership initiative has been endorsed by a wide range of organisations. We are a key partner in the delivery of the strategy's action plan to improve advice and assistance to households and reduce energy consumption in the home, reduce fuel poverty and increase the take up of renewable energy schemes.

The aim is:

- to create a high degree of awareness and community action on energy efficiency through good quality, impartial energy advice provision
- to maximise the use of available resources within national programmes such as 'Warmfront' and energy company schemes to achieve a step-change in energy efficiency improvement in the domestic sector and tackle fuel poverty in vulnerable households
- for the council to take a leadership role to promote energy efficiency in the wider community, and
- to enable the council to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fuel poverty in line with national and regional targets.

Partnership working concentrates on sharing knowledge and information of households that are in properties with low SAP ratings or who maybe in fuel poverty and sharing the costs of ensuring regular targeted campaigns to maintain the uptake of assistance that is available, particularly to the hard to reach rural communities. Assistance is available nationally to tackle energy efficiency and fuel poverty targets including advice and financial assistance for a variety of works to be performed including loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, draught proofing, insulation of hot water tanks and the improvement of heating systems.

Unfortunately, due to the specific eligibility criteria of such schemes a number of key vulnerable groups miss out on financial assistance. We will actively work with partners to bid for resources from a variety of sources when the opportunities arise to maximise the availability of funding for these groups.

Strategic aim 5

Deliver a customer focused service

Success is achieved when we are providing the community with services that it needs in a way that it needs. We can only achieve this when our work is customer focused and it is important that we increase the level of consultation, feedback and information to the community as well as setting challenging targets on service standards and customer satisfaction.

To achieve this we have introduced customer satisfaction surveys to provide customers with the opportunity to provide us with feedback on our services and we we will introduce a comprehensive range of service standards developed with our customers. The feedback and monitoring of service standards will be essential tools to ensure that our policies and practices are better tailored to local needs and to manage our performance.

We will also improve the range and distribution of information and advice on housing matters.

East Dorset District Council, Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 to 2015

Action Plan

Strategic Aim 1

Increase the proportion of private housing that is of a decent standard and reduce the incidence of category 1 hazards in the private rented sector.

Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan	Related risk	Milestones and Targets
Increased number of houses that achieve the Decent Homes Standard. Reduced proportion of vulnerable households living in non-decent homes.	Promote the Council's grants and those provided by other agencies. Publish and distribute an advice leaflet for owner occupiers and tenants. Develop a programme to address housing issues in residential park homes.	PSHM Lead Member for Housing Dorset District and Borough Councils. Warmfront	Regional Housing Pot Grant used to fund Fuel Poverty, Empty Dwelling grants and Park Home grants. Warmfront	Monitored and reported at the end of each financial year.	Housing Act 2004. NI 186 & 187, PSA 17 & 18 South West Regional Housing Strategy.	Vulnerable residents will be at risk from poor quality, non-decent housing. Poor quality housing has a detrimental effect on the health of vulnerable people and will result in increased demand on other services.	Information leaflets to be produced in house style by November 2010 distributed in accordance with distribution strategy and reviewed annually. Website content to be reviewed quarterly. Per annum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of properties meeting the decent homes standard by 60 • 8 Park Home Grants to be approved • 2 Warmfront grant mailouts • Publish 3 articles in the local press and attend 4 local events

Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan	Related risk	Milestones and Targets
<p>A responsibly managed decent private rented sector.</p> <p>Reduce the incidence of category 1 hazards in the private rented sector.</p>	<p>Publish a private sector housing enforcement policy.</p> <p>Publish and distribute a housing standards advice leaflet for private sector tenants and landlords.</p> <p>Develop and implement an inspection and enforcement regime for landlords with a large portfolio and houses in multiple occupation.</p> <p>Publish and distribute a series of landlords newsletters and promote the landlord accreditation Scheme.</p> <p>Monitor and review the partnership arrangement for dealing with disrepair in EDHA properties.</p>	<p>PSHM Lead Member for Housing East Dorset Housing Association National Landlords' Association Local landlords Dorset District and Borough Councils</p>	<p>Regional Housing Pot grant used to fund Landlord Accreditation Grant.</p>	<p>Leaflet to be reviewed annually. Enforcement activity to be monitored and reported at the end of each financial year. Memorandum of Understanding with EDHA to be reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Housing Act 2004. NI 186 & 187, PSA 17 & 18 South West Regional Housing Strategy.</p>	<p>Tenants will be at risk from poor quality, non-decent housing.</p>	<p>Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy included on website. Information leaflets to be produced in house style by November 2010 distributed in accordance with distribution strategy and reviewed annually. Website content to be reviewed quarterly. Per annum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of private rented sector properties with category 1 hazards by 10 • 80% of enforcement activity to be complied with within 20 weeks of initial complaint • Contribute to the target of increasing the number of properties meeting the decent homes standard by 60 • Publish 3 landlords' newsletters and hold 3 landlord events </p>

Strategic aim 2

To support the elderly, vulnerable and disabled people to live in comfort and security in their homes

		Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan					
Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Related risk	Milestones and Targets	
Vulnerable, elderly and disabled people living independently and safely in a home of their choice as a result of timely intervention.	Investigate and implement long term sustainable solution to funding deficit and sub regional administration issues of DFG. Publish and distribute a grant assistance leaflet to improve uptake of assistance. Increase the number of partnership agreements with local Housing Associations for aids and adaptations in their own stock. Work in partnership with the Home Improvement Agency services to support local people and promote their services. Increase access to services by vulnerable residents through the Safe and Independent Living referral scheme.	PSHM Lead Member for Housing Dorset District and Borough Councils PCT DCC – Social Care and Health RSLs in Dorset HIA	Regional Housing Pot Grant and DFG grant EDHA DFG funding DFG HIA funding from partners: DCC, Dorset District and Borough Councils and PCT	Monitored and reported at the end of each financial year Number of HIA clients assisted to be monitored quarterly	Ineffective delivery of services could deprive vulnerable groups of the assistance they are eligible for and/or require.	Information leaflets to be produced in house style by November 2010 distributed in accordance with distribution strategy and reviewed annually. Home Improvement Agency Services offered to all grant applicants. Home Improvement Agency promotional material distributed with in house material. Per annum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 110 DFGs approved • 270 vulnerable households receiving assistance to maintain living conditions. • Website content to be reviewed quarterly • Introduce 1 new partnership agreement with a local housing association. • Make 30 referrals to the safe and Independent living Scheme 	

Strategic aim 3

To reduce the number of Long Term Empty Properties

Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan	Related risk	Milestones and Targets
Increase in the supply of housing	<p>To develop a County wide Empty Property Strategy</p> <p>To biannually monitor the number of dwellings that have been empty for more than 6 months</p> <p>To risk rate those properties to identify those needing action</p> <p>To engage with the owners and take the appropriate action</p> <p>To promote the Empty property grant</p>	<p>PSHM</p> <p>Lead Member for Housing</p> <p>DCC, Dorset District and Borough Councils</p>	Regional Housing Pot Grant	<p>Monitored and reported at the end of each financial year</p> <p>Advice on empty homes to be reviewed annually</p>	Housing Act 2004	<p>Ineffective use of existing housing stock</p> <p>Housing supply not increased</p>	<p>County wide Empty Property Strategy to be endorsed by 31 March 2011</p> <p>Web site content to be reviewed quarterly</p> <p>Per annum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to bring 10 long term empty properties back into use by the direct action of the Council

Strategic aim 4

To help improve the energy efficiency of homes, reduce fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions

		Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan					
Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Related risk	Milestones and Targets	
Residents living in warmer, more energy efficient homes and a reduction in the number of households in fuel poverty.	<p>Publish and distribute information on the availability of financial assistance, Warmfront, CERT funding and A to D grant.</p> <p>Increase take up of grants and improve access to and quality of advice available.</p>	<p>PSHM Lead Members for Housing and Environment DCC and Dorset District and Borough Councils PCT EAGA EST DEAC</p>	<p>Regional Housing Pot Grant Warmfront Grant CERT funding</p>	<p>Monitored and reported at the end of each financial year.</p>	<p>Carbon emissions from domestic properties remain unchecked. Availability of resources for sub-region not maximised. Increase in fuel poverty.</p>	<p>Web site content to be reviewed quarterly. Per annum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Warmfront grant mailouts • 200 Warmfront completions (55 new boilers, 55 cavities, 20 new c. heating systems, 70 lofts). • 400 households assisted through CERT and other local grant schemes. • Publish 3 articles in the local press and attend 4 local events • 80 A to D insulation grants to be approved • 8 Park Homes Insulation Grants to be approved </p>	

Strategic aim 5

Deliver a customer focused service

Outcome	Action	Lead Officer/ Councillor Partners	Resources	Monitoring	Links to national, regional, sub regional, community and Corporate Plan	Related risk	Milestones and Targets
Better take up of services and increased knowledge of housing services in the community.	<p>Provision of quality advice available through web site and written material in consultation with customers.</p> <p>Develop and publish a comprehensive range of service standards in consultation with clients.</p> <p>Obtain feedback from clients on services through customer satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>Complete equality impact assessments on policies and procedures.</p>	<p>PSHM</p> <p>Lead Member for Housing</p>	Existing resources	<p>Revisions to web site 30 June 2010 plus quarterly reviews.</p> <p>Information leaflets reviewed annually.</p> <p>Service standards monitored and reported at the end of each financial year.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction monitored and reported at the end of each financial year.</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment to be reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Ni 2, 3, 13, 5, 14, 23, 124, 125, 128, 131, 138, 139 & 140</p>	<p>Eligible individuals not receiving the services to which they are entitled.</p> <p>Delivering the service in the wrong way.</p> <p>Unchallenging, inefficient delivery of service.</p> <p>Individuals being excluded from access to the service and risk of legal action for discrimination.</p>	<p>Website content to be reviewed quarterly</p> <p>Owner occupiers, tenants and landlord leaflets to be produced in house style by November 2010 and distributed in accordance with distribution strategy.</p> <p>Comprehensive service standards to be introduced and published by November 2010.</p> <p>Public Health IT system upgraded to facilitate monitoring of standards including reporting and staff training completed.</p> <p>Results of customer satisfaction survey to be reported annually.</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment to be reviewed during 2010.</p>

Abbreviations

DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation
CAB	Citizens Advice Centre
ONS	Office of National Statistics
HCS	East Dorset House Condition Survey 2008
HECA	Home Energy Efficiency Act 1995
HHSRS	Housing Health and Safety Rating System
PSL	Private Sector Leasing Scheme
PSHM	Private Sector Housing Manager
LHA	Local Housing Authority
DFRS	Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
DCC	Dorset County Council
HIA	Home Improvement Agency
HO	Housing Options Service
NLA	National Landlords Association
PCT	Primary Care Trust
RSL	Registered Social Landlords
RBL	Royal British Legion
DEAC	Dorset Energy Advice Centre
EAGA	Manages Government funded Warmfront Grant
SAP	Standard Assessment Procedure (for energy efficiency assessment)
EDHA	East Dorset Housing Association





Designed and Printed by East Dorset District Council
July 2010