

## Housing in Cherwell and the Current Economic Climate – Action Plan

This Action Plan highlights the key tasks that need to be undertaken between January 2011 and March 2012. After this time the forthcoming Cherwell Housing Strategy Action Plan will take effect. The Action Plan is framed around the four key challenges that need to be addressed.

The Action Plan will be monitored each quarter by the Housing Services Management Team, and reported to Corporate Management Team via the Strategic Director (Planning, Housing and Economy). Progress will also be reported via the Performance Plus system which is reported to Executive each quarter.

The context for this Action Plan is the overarching need is to provide a value for money and responsive service for Cherwell residents in fast changing financial, policy and economic environments. Failure to grasp the implications of new policy announcements or new opportunities being offered will result in increased homelessness, soaring costs of temporary accommodation, reduced supply of affordable housing and a breakdown in social cohesion.

In order to provide such a service, we will keep up to date with policy announcements to provide creative locally based solutions. We will use the latest housing intelligence based on current market conditions, and will update housing needs evidence and viability work in the light of government changes, and we will monitor and analyse changing patterns of demand, understanding "hotbed areas" where we will work with partner agencies to respond.

Housing Services have delivered £760,000 worth of value for money savings up to March 2011 - £160,000 higher than the target figure. The need to continue delivering services within a framework of value for money is important now more than ever.

### Challenge 1 – Continuing to build new homes and ensuring a good supply of affordable homes

Issue	Risk	Action to Mitigate Risk	Resources	Timescale
1.1 Financial viability has led to low levels of new future housing development including strategic sites which would deliver both market and affordable homes	A lack of supply maintaining high house prices, and little affordable housing delivery, hence lack of opportunity to access suitable accommodation for households potentially leading to increased homelessness/ use of TA.	Using the financial viability toolkit to promote the provision of affordable housing with nil grants	Updating financial viability toolkit to take account of market and policy changes	April 2011
		Exploring option of 'free serviced land' as an alternative to mixed developments	Staff time Potential need for consultancy within existing resources	March 2011

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1.2 Significant reduction in social housing grant from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) affordable housing programme, including an end to the HCA funding social renting and shared ownership schemes	Reduced ability to deliver future targets for affordable homes in coming years– resulting in decrease in affordable housing supply	Work with RP Partners to secure recycled capital grant and other investment, and negotiate increased levels of RP investment in their own stock	Continued support funding to offer capacity building training to voluntary agencies which could attract funding to CDC  £500k devolved capital funding to use to attract other resources	Starting immediately
		Model the effects of RPs' increased investment coming from charging 80% market rents as a result of the introduction of affordable rents	Staff time	January 2011
		Negotiate with RPs to secure some of the increased funding is spent on development in Cherwell	Staff time	Immediate and on-going
		Proactive approach to securing capital from alternative HCA funding programmes including 'Places of Change' and empty homes. Staying alert to opportunities to apply for funding e.g. when schemes from other local authorities have slipped	Staff time	Immediate and on-going
		Build capacity within local organisations to secure charitable and private capital investment including Big Lottery	Staff time Small amounts of pump priming funding from existing budget	June 2011
		Pursue alternative forms of affordable housing delivery which have a greater social impact and will therefore have a competitive edge when securing grants - this includes Self Build Housing Schemes (with training element) & community Land Trust.	Staff time Pump priming funding from existing funding	On-going

Issue	Risk	Action to Mitigate Risk	Resources	Timescale
		Use of CDC capital as leverage to attract external investment	Investment as leverage in housing projects to attract inward investment	On-going
1.3 Lack of turnover in existing housing stock	<p>'Stagnation' of choice based lettings with fewer properties available</p> <p>Decrease in supply together with increased demand will result in increasing levels of homelessness and temporary accommodation use</p> <p>Significant risk of budget implications for CDC</p>	<p>Promoting downsizing initiatives through RP partners including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial incentives</li> <li>• Help with organising and small repairs</li> <li>• Promoting partners use of creativity over mutual exchanges</li> </ul>	<p>Shared costs of information bringing together all district information on downsizing</p> <p>CDC funding to provide "extras" in downsizing accommodation e.g. carpeting in communal areas, provision of mobility scooter stores etc</p>	<p>February 2011</p> <p>May 2011</p>
1.4 Scarcity of decent affordable private sector housing for households on low incomes as a result of increased demand and reluctance of landlords to house people in receipt of benefits - heightened by reduction in Local	<p>Increased homelessness</p> <p>Shortage in specialist supported housing</p>	Intensive work with Private Sector landlords to encourage and incentives the provision of affordable property at LHA Rates	<p>Investment to attract further funding</p> <p>Staff time in negotiation</p> <p>Staff time</p> <p>Increased contributions to cashless deposit bond</p> <p>Potential investment in premises and staff for social lettings agency</p>	<p>Commissioned by May 2011</p> <p>On-going</p>

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<p>Housing Allowance (LHA - which affects Housing Benefit for new claimants)</p> <p>The situation could be exacerbated by people moving from more expensive areas such as Oxford, West Oxfordshire or even London</p>			<p>Consultancy on build prices</p> <p>Investment in community land trust board</p>	
		Use Landlords Forum and consultation exercises to work closer with landlords to bring forward private sector opportunities and mitigate risks of landlords leaving the market	Staff time	February 2011
		Follow up landlord consultation feedback by offering the help in which landlords would like the Council provide i.e. a managed repairs service	Staff time	June 2011
		Feasibility study on establishing a Lettings Agency either in-house, through an RP or as a Social Enterprise to increase credibility and 'offer' for private sector landlords	Staff time	June 2011
		Offer landlords the opportunity to advertise private rented properties through CBL in return for agreeing to accept tenants on LHA	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Software amendments</p>	September 2011
		Offer those applying for private rented properties a financial assessment to help them judge which properties are affordable	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Training</p>	September 2011
<p>1.5 Housing associations will be able to charge new affordable rents set at up to 80% of market</p>	<p>The money will be invested outside the district</p> <p>There may be a</p>	Partnership work with RPs to ensure that opportunities in the district are maximised	Staff time	On-going
		Model the effects of the change to affordable tenure and ensure maximum take up of benefits	Staff time	February 2011

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level. The higher rental income from social housing is designed to encourage the private sector to invest in social housing, and so build more social homes.	disincentive to work due to higher rent levels	Produce a tenancy policy for the district based on up to date market information so we have a clear position on tenure requirements that both maximises delivery and meets needs	Staff time  Consultation expenses	To be confirmed following further government announcements
		Investigate joint ventures in more detail, particularly if Free Serviced Land enables Council to set these up	Staff time	On-going
		Use a team approach to housing enabling. The 'affordable housing task force' should continue to determine approach on specific viability issues	Within existing resources – should save staff time	On-going
		Following use of the financial viability tool kit use independent quantity surveying expertise to challenge build costs where they are above the toolkit values	Consultancy fees  Training expenses	June 2011
		Explore new models of making housing development viable	Staff time	On-going
		Test proposed affordable housing policy during the SPD consultation period by using the Three Dragons Consultancy	Staff time  Consultancy fees	March 2011

**Challenge 2 – Ensuring Housing Benefit reductions are understood, and then applied to housing advice and preventative homelessness services, and used to inform the viability of new housing supply for customers.**

Issue	Risk	Action to Mitigate Risk	Resources	Timescale
2.1 Housing Benefit claimants and particularly those subject to Local Housing Allowance are to face significant changes to the amount of benefit they are entitled to receive	<p>Increase in poverty and associated increase in people affording rent, mortgages and household bills (as per section 7)</p> <p>There are currently 1849 'live' Housing Benefit (LHA) claims throughout Cherwell, including working individuals and families, the unemployed and disabled who could be affected by changes</p> <p>Complication of changes may cause landlords to leave the sector</p>	Set up a joint Housing and Benefits panel to ensure local DHP is targeted appropriately during transition	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Additional DHP fund £100,000 pa to supplement DHP allocation from National budget</p> <p>Training costs</p>	May 2011
		Investigate maximising discretionary housing payments by all concerned Council departments contributing to a pooled budget	Staff time	July 2011
		Undertake detailed mapping with Revenue Services of all individuals to be affected by changes and undertake detailed casework with each family to have individual plans to mitigate risk through use of DHP, maximising income, managing personal finances and if necessary secure more affordable housing. Also ensure anyone entitled to increased allowance for overnight carers is accessing this new benefit.	Staff time	From January 2012
		Follow DWP guidance in preparing for the changes	Staff time	On-going April 2011
		Work with RP partners to map the impact of LHA in light of changes to tenure	Staff time	June 2011

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		Ensure continuous training on the Benefit changes is provided to all staff	Staff time Training expenses	On-going
		Continue to publicise housing options service to residents of Cherwell District Council	Advertising costs, kept to a minimum by using Council publications and buildings, rural bus etc wherever possible	On-going
2.2 Local Authorities in more expensive areas may commission temporary accommodation in Cherwell as a response to welfare reform and changes in housing resulting from the CSR.	Residents of neighbouring local authorities accessing services and housing in Cherwell. Reducing availability of housing supply and options to Cherwell residents. Contributing factor to increasing homelessness and scarcity of appropriate temporary accommodation. Significant risk of budget impact.	Monitor use of local services by non-Cherwell residents Engage with local landlords to monitor access to private sector housing for non-Cherwell residents	Staff resources	April 2012 on
		Ensure local landlords are fully aware of incentives to support Cherwell residents such as PALS Scheme, grants etc.  Liaise at a county level if trends appear – for example for increased funding from Supporting People, Adult Services or Children’s Services	Staff resources	On-going
2.3 Residents of more expensive areas may choose to relocate to Cherwell District Council	There may be fewer options for existing Cherwell District Council residents, especially emerging households	Continue to engage landlords	Staff time	On-going
2.4 Increase in	People living in unsafe	Promote ‘best practice’ in establishing HMOs as they are	Staff time	On-going

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number of unregulated 'ad hoc' Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) due to people living together in groups for reasons of affordability	housing – increasing housing pressure when comp  ASB, complaints to Police/ Councillors	needed in Cherwell but need to be safe and meet legal standards	Premises for meetings and meeting expenses  Staff time	
		Increase proactive enforcement work to ensure properties are safe & have adequate amenities	Staff time	On-going
		Encourage landlords to consider conversion suitable of properties to HMOs	Staff time Possible consultancy fees drawing up example plans	December 2011
		RP partners to consider providing and managing HMOs to provide good quality management	Staff time Possible need for funding for leverage	July 2011
		Fully understand supply and demand of this type of accommodation	Staff time	June 2011
		Strategically plan location of new HMO provision to reduce concentrations of potential social problems	Staff time	November 2011



**Challenge 3 – Ensuring Welfare Benefit changes and the role of housing in helping people into employment are understood, and used to inform service provision and changes**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Action to Mitigate Risk</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
3.1 households' ability to access or pay for their housing in all sectors may be affected by unemployment or changes to the welfare benefits system	Increased repossessions – impact on service will be pressure on private rented sector, increase in homelessness and use of temporary accommodation. Significant risk of budget implications for CDC.	Enhanced Housing Options through new software package attached to Abris (Housing Register Management Software) which will link people into advice and employment support at point of registration on the housing register, offering applicants opportunities to get back into work.	Cost already identified in budget	February 2011
		Promotion of advice and debt counselling services and maximising benefit take up	Staff time Using CLG homelessness prevention funding	On – going
		Continued commissioning of Court Desk (with CAB) to ensure representation at mortgage hearings to reduce repossessions	Funding to CAB	On-going
		Securing funding through second round of mortgage rescue funding (we have a strong case as CDC is viewed as leading local authority in mortgage rescue)	Staff time	February 2011
		Closer working with Jobcentre Plus, Next Steps and Job club to help applicants to be 'work ready' and increase household income. This will include linking to the corporate financial inclusion work and targeting it to people on housing register and people engaging with housing options Team at CDC.	Staff time Using CLG homelessness prevention funding	April 2011
		Ensure customers are advised to access other sources of support such as the Homeowner Mortgage Support and Support for Mortgage Interest changes	Training expenses	On-going

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		Developing the Foundation Learning Centre/Youth Hub partnership with YMCA	£50k per annum revenue funding (from CLG homeless prevention funding )	Due to open March 2011
		Providing skills training opportunities such as self build projects, retro fitting environmental measures, new generation broadband cabling	May require funding to kickstart projects though most would be negotiated through partners	September 2011
		Pilot of 'Pre-Tenancy Qualifications' which will entail a basic course to ensure new social tenants and private sector tenants who are assisted through the Council will demonstrate a basic understanding of tenants' rights and responsibilities including management of personal finances	Funding for training	On-going January 2011
		Re-modeling of voluntary sector advice services (in collaboration of re-modeling of customer services centres) to establish three advice and information hubs.	Current allocation of grant funding for voluntary sector advice services is c£250k per annum. Intention is not to increase funding but achieve efficiencies through re-modelling	Negotiations underway ~ commissioning timetable to commence August 2011 and new services to commence 2012
		Increasing awareness of the housing needs service across all tenures using multi media, and working closely with partner agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure advice is freely available at the right time and in the right place for all residents in the district	Advertising expenses	On-going

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3.2 Unemployment and changes in benefits system may restrict households' ability to pay fuel costs. This is further impacted as fuel prices rise	Increase in the current level of households fuel poverty, which is currently:  The dedicated Warm Front programme will be cut by more than two-thirds. The Coalition government's plans for tackling fuel poverty remain vague, and there may be moves to change the definition and remove the legal targets established by the last government	Continued partnership working with the Cocoon & warm front schemes  Promotion of the Flexible Home Improvement Loan for the Over 60s	Staff time	On-going
		Promotion of energy efficiency grant for landlords	Advertising expenses	April 2011
		Working with OTs to offer energy efficiency advice when assessing for DFGs	Staff time	February 2011
		Retro fitting in social housing – map current activity by RPs	Staff time	May 2011
		Affordable warmth plans to be provided	Staff time	August 2011
3.3 Increasing restrictions on eligibility for mortgages including requirement for larger deposits, especially in relation to shared equity/ownership housing.	RPs more reluctant to deliver shared ownership/equity housing (this will also be affected by the expectation that they will be delivered with nil grant) which in turn impacts viability of schemes.  The funding for the MyChoice HomeBuy and HomeBuy direct schemes, where properties could be purchased on the open market with an equity loan has now ceased.  Young people/ first time buyers unable to enter the owner occupation sector	Discussions with RP partners including the Catalyst Housing Group in relation to RPs developing mortgage/equity products	Staff time RPs	On-going  January 2011  May 2011 On-going
		Discussions with lenders/investors in relation to strategic sites (especially regeneration sites such as Orchard Way) and negotiation of mortgage packages	Staff time	April 2011
		Impact report on CDC becoming mortgage lender and/or equity investor targeting strategic sites – this will be considered as part of Cherwell's 2011/12	Staff time	March 2011

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		investment strategy.		
		Self build/ community land trusts	Staff time HCA	March 2012
		Changing the expectations of people overcrowded or still living at home by advising them of other options, including use of the advanced housing options toolkit	Staff time	June 2011

**Challenge 5 – Ensuring the needs of vulnerable people are addressed so they are not at risk of homelessness and other unsatisfactory housing conditions**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Action to Mitigate Risk</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
5.1 History shows us that vulnerable adults are most at risk of homelessness during a recession	Decrease in supply together with increased demand will result in increasing levels of homelessness and use in temporary accommodation.	Ensure Supporting People funded housing support is targeted at vulnerable adults	Staff time	On-going
		Build capacity in Vulnerable Adults Multi-Agency Casework Group to ensure complete 'buy-in' from adult services, probation services and health. Re-model this group to become a 'panel' for supported housing provision for vulnerable adults to ensure appropriate targeting of resources	Staff time Partners	December 2011
		Ongoing commissioning of targeted interventions with partners such as the Beacon Centre to engage vulnerable adults at risk of rough sleeping.	Staff time Partners	Ongoing
		Continued use of small 'returning home fund' to enable a quick response to issues which may prevent a vulnerable adult remaining at home.	Existing Resources	March 2012
		Ongoing liaison with faith groups and churches who are likely to be approached by vulnerable adults for support Impact report on CDC becoming mortgage lender and/or equity investor targeting strategic sites	Staff time Voluntary Sector	Ongoing
		Ongoing liaison with police and street wardens to ensure all agencies 'flag up' individuals identified as rough sleepers to ensure early intervention	Staff time Existing Partnerships	June 2011

