1. Introduction

In April 2010, North Somerset Council published a new Housing Strategy setting out our vision, priorities and actions for helping to meet housing need in the district. This is the second annual review of that Strategy and highlights the progress we have made in the last two years of the Strategy’s life. It also explains how the delivery of the Strategy has been affected, and will continue to be affected for the next few years, by internal and external changes.

Since the introduction of our Housing Strategy 2010-2015, the national picture has changed considerably, with inevitable knock-on effects for local delivery. The implementation of the 2011 Localism Act has brought significant changes to local authorities, such as changes to housing and planning, and allowing authorities greater freedoms. There are various cuts to the welfare system, in an attempt to reduce government spending on benefits. These upcoming welfare reforms, including the under-occupation penalty, the introduction of universal credits and the cap on benefits will bring further changes and a significant impact to the way housing policy and strategy is developed and delivered.

The details of these changes are discussed further below, but they have clearly affected, or are expected to affect, the delivery of the Strategic Housing Service in North Somerset.

Working in partnership continues to be key in achieving our Housing Strategy objectives and priorities for service delivery. Our contribution is also fundamental to other services and agencies achieving their objectives and priorities. We work very closely with: planning and regeneration colleagues, and Registered Housing Providers to deliver new affordable/homes, with Adult Social Care and Health services, Children’s and Young Persons services and the voluntary sector in meeting the needs of vulnerable people. We also work in partnership with other council services and other key partners, such as Agilisys, the Police and Liberata to jointly deliver customer services from the Town Hall Gateway.

Please Note: This review should be read in conjunction with the North Somerset Housing Strategy 2010-2015.
2. Factors Affecting Our Strategy

2.1 Policy Changes – National Context

Welfare Reform

The next few years will see considerable welfare reform, and the effects of these changes will be widespread and significant. It will be important to monitor these effects, as they are likely to present challenges in terms of housing need and homelessness.

The key changes include;

- Changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), from which the amount of housing benefit a person is eligible to receive is calculated.
- Allowing single people up to the age of 35, to only claim housing benefit for bedsit accommodation or a single room in a shared house, rather than the previous age limit of 25 years.
- Significantly increasing the deductions made from the LHA for those tenants who have adult non-dependants living with them.
- From April 2013, anyone living in social housing that is assessed as having an extra bedroom will have their housing benefit reduced - by 14% if they have 1 room extra or 25% if they have 2 or more extra rooms.
- Also from the Summer of 2013 a cap will be placed on the total amount of benefit most people aged 16 to 64 can receive.
- Further, Housing benefits are to be paid to tenants, rather than directly to landlords, apart from in exceptional circumstances.
- Universal Credit will be implemented nationally in October 2013. This will combine all of a recipient’s benefits into one direct monthly payment.

Registered Housing Providers may face increased rent arrears as there are concerns that some social housing tenants will fall into debt when faced with a combination of direct payments, the under-occupation penalty and the benefits cap. This may result in less money being re-invested in the development of new affordable housing and also an increase in demand in the private rented and social housing sectors, especially for affordable accommodation in smaller units, including bedsits and single rooms in shared houses.

Many of these reforms are controversial, and subsequent changes have already been made to the under-occupation penalty (foster parents and parents with children serving away in the armed forces are now both exempted). Changes may not be felt immediately, as effects such as rent arrears will take some time to become apparent. It is therefore likely that we will not see significant issues arising until late 2013.
The Budget 2013

The 2013 Budget placed greater importance than previously on Housing, with a number of funding initiatives to stimulate and increase housing supply, including the ‘Help to Buy’ Scheme, which some have argued will allow some people to become second home owners, instead of meeting its original intention to increase home ownership and allow ‘second-steppers’ to move. ‘Help to Buy’ will come into effect in January 2014, although aspects of the scheme may change before then. We will follow these initiatives to see how they will affect our priorities in future housing strategy development.

Planning Policy

Since the last Housing Strategy Review in 2011, we have also seen changes to the planning system, which will affect our delivery in upcoming years. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2012), sets out the government’s planning policy for England. This is a framework within which local people and Councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their community. The government introduced the NPPF as part of its agenda to kick start the economy through house building, with a ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’, and has several factors which support this overall aim;

- The New Homes Bonus scheme
- Enabling the conversion of empty offices into housing without the need for planning permission
- Amendment to relax permitted development rights for householders (due to come into effect May 2013)
- Neighbourhood Planning provisions

The NPPF refers to the need to plan positively for new development, ‘to boost significantly the supply of housing’ and to meet the ‘full and objectively assessed’ needs for market and affordable housing.

Neighbourhood Planning provisions within the Localism Act 2011 empower communities to shape the development and growth of a local area through the production of a Neighbourhood Plan, a Neighbourhood Development Order or a Community Right to Build Order. Allowing neighbourhoods to have a greater input in how their communities are developed should lead to the development of housing, designed to meet the specific needs of the local community.

In North Somerset, Backwell and Long Ashton are currently in the process of developing their Neighbourhood Plans.
2.2 Local and Regional Context

Budget Reductions

The Strategic Housing Service, in common with other public services, faces significant reductions in funding - by 2018 the Council’s net revenue budget will have reduced by approximately 50% compared to 2010/11. At the same time, demand for our services continues to increase – there is a high demand for improved housing and for a wider range of housing options.

We will deliver this Housing Strategy by continuing to respond in a strategic way to these national spending reductions and the changes and pressures in the housing market, which will help ensure that the impact on service delivery is minimised. We will effectively manage the changes needed to deliver our budget reduction plans, including introducing new ways of working. This will however be difficult and there is inevitably a risk that we will be unable to deliver all of the aspirations set out in our Strategy. We will work with our partners to minimise this risk and will regularly review our progress in delivering our priorities.

During 2013, as part of the council wide approach to achieving budget savings, the Adult Social Services and Housing Directorate will merge with the Children’s and Young Person’s Directorate. We will work to quickly and successfully establish the new People and Communities Directorate to further develop opportunities for joint working.

Hinkley C

The Secretary of State in March 2013 gave planning permission to EDF (Energy) for the construction of a new nuclear power station - Hinkley Point C in West Somerset. Construction is due to begin during the Summer of 2013 but that is subject to funding being in place and negotiations with the government over the price of electricity. EDF (Energy) estimate that around 550 non-home based workers will seek accommodation in North Somerset at the peak of the construction phase (Yr 5) and that this is likely to be mainly in the private rented sector.

Since this may have a significant local impact on the supply of private rented accommodation, and potentially increase housing need for this tenure, the Council successfully negotiated mitigation funding through the S106 process. This means if construction commences the Council can draw upon approx. £700,000 of funding to help increase supply in the private rented sector.

Core Strategy

Whilst the Core Strategy was adopted in 2012, the policy setting out the housing requirement was challenged in the courts. The challenge found that the Inspector had failed to give adequate or intelligible reasons in his report for his conclusion that the Core Strategy housing requirement of 14,000 dwellings made sufficient allowance for latent demand (which is a demand for
housing unrelated to the creation of new jobs). Policy CS13, as well as a number of other policies which may be affected if the housing requirement is increased, have been remitted back to the Planning Inspectorate for re-examination. Dependent upon the outcome of this process, this may have implications for the overall housing target and where new housing areas may be accommodated.

**Housing Delivery Panel**

The West of England Housing Delivery Panel was set up in 2011, and is now well established, working towards its priorities of delivering affordable housing and promoting housing growth. We are currently conducting performance monitoring of the Panel, and will continue to work closely with the Panel to ensure further development.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment**

The West of England Partnership’s Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identifies the level of housing need in North Somerset which in turn provides an evidence base for our housing and planning policy. Work is now completed on an addendum to the SHMA, which looks at the impact on affordability of the introduction of the affordable rent product. Work has also commenced on a programme for a revised SHMA, with a final draft report anticipated in 2015.

**3. Achievements and Our Priorities**

Despite the challenges we have faced, we can celebrate a number of achievements in the last year of the Housing Strategy.

**3.1 Our Achievements Include:**

- Achieving 86% Customer satisfaction across all Housing Services.
- Completing the review of the Council’s Home Choice Policy in light of the Localism Act
- Continuing to develop joint working to prevent homelessness amongst 16/17 years olds
- Continued improved delivery of services to meet the needs of homeless people with mental health needs through partnership work
- Re-commissioning the Sheltered Leasehold Contract and the management of council owned Gypsy and Traveller sites
- Securing £675,000 S106 funding to mitigate the impact of the Hinkley C development on housing in North Somerset
- Completing the revised draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for Affordable Housing and commencing consultation
- Successfully obtaining funding to build 24 residential and 5 transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in partnership with Elim HA
- Partnership work with Alliance Homes to submit 3 bids to the Homes and Communities Agency for 155 units of Extra Care housing.
• Successful delivery of the empty homes pilot
• Completing initial assessments of the backlog of uninspected multi-occupied privately rented homes
• Completing the Private Sector House Condition Survey and developing a new Private Sector Housing Delivery Plan.
• Taking forward our HMO survey in Central Ward, Weston-super Mare.
• Successfully adapting homes for disabled people
• Taking forward the work to extend the Willowmead Gypsy and Traveller site
• Commissioning a new West of England Home Improvement Agency Service
• Achieving the vast majority of our performance targets
• Developing a new Gateway service for customers at the refurbished Town Hall in partnership with the police
• Leading the housing contribution to the West of England Strategic Framework
• Leading the implementation of the North Somerset Partnerships Strategy for Older People and the action plan to improve services for Gypsies and Travellers.
• Completed survey of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.

3.2 Our Priorities

In the 2010-2015 strategy, we highlighted a number of priority areas of work to help us meet our vision of “Maintaining and developing successful communities where people want to live, by meeting the housing needs of our residents now and in the future”. The priority outcomes were:

• Delivering homes, developing communities
• Better homes, better places
• Greater opportunity, greater choice

These priorities have not changed, although how we address some of them has had to. The next section of this review will explain the external and internal influences that will affect our delivery under each priority.

The Welfare Reform Act, which is being implemented in stages between 2013 and 2016, and discussed earlier, will likely present new challenges that impact on our services and the way we deliver them. The teams within Housing will therefore need to work closely together to manage any impact of the welfare reforms.

4. Delivering Homes, Developing Communities

The Housing Strategy 2010 – 2015 explained that:

“The challenges we face in meeting this outcome include ensuring that we deliver housing growth that contributes to the creation of successful
communities. We need to deliver affordable housing of an appropriate size and tenure to meet identified need and ensure mixed and balanced communities. We also need to make best use of existing stock and provide sites to meet the needs of gypsy and traveller communities”.

This situation has not changed, but the environment and frameworks in which we are working have changed considerably.

4.1 Housing Growth

The overall housing requirement for North Somerset is determined through the Core Strategy. This process assesses the evidence from demographic and economic sources and makes policy choices about the amount and distribution of new housing to 2026.

As previously explained, an element of the Core Strategy setting out the Council’s housing requirement was successfully challenged in the courts and will need to be re-examined. The results of this may affect housing growth in North Somerset.

The overall spatial strategy, as set out in the Core Strategy, has a priority of employment-led development at Weston-super-Mare. The allocation of Weston Villages will aim to meet this priority by delivering around 5,800 dwellings over the plan period. The Weston Villages Supplementary Planning Document sets out the master planning framework. Development has commenced at Locking Parklands with the completion of the first phase of development, and construction of the new principal access road across the former Weston Airfield has commenced. Detailed master planning for both developments is at an advanced stage, and other permissions have either been granted or are awaiting determination.

The Government introduced the New Homes Bonus in April 2010 as an incentive to increase new house building locally and to bring empty properties back into use. For every property that has been built or long term empty property that has been brought back into use, the Government has awarded an amount the equivalent of six years of council tax Band D, with an additional £350 paid for each affordable unit built.

There are also other new government schemes which aim to encourage housing growth, including the ‘Build to Rent Fund’, ‘Community Right to Build’ and the ‘Get Britain Building Fund’. The government is also streamlining planning processes, in an attempt to increase development.

We support the private house building market by assisting them in overcoming obstacles to avoid stalled sites and streamlining our planning processes. We have also prepared our Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to provide clarity and certainty, as well as a clearer, flexible approach to viability and negotiation.
The housing market remains uncertain and the future rate of growth depends heavily on the confidence of house builders in the demand for new homes and the availability of mortgage funding for potential buyers of new and second hand homes as well as a recovery in the economy as a whole.

4.2 Census 2011

The Census 2011 results show that, since the last Census (2001), the proportion of people in North Somerset living in private rented accommodation has increased. The Census results also show us that significantly less people live in social rented housing in North Somerset than either across the South West or nationally. The 2011 Census contains other relevant information such as household size, household composition and age profiles, which provides a useful evidence base for policy and strategy development. *NB. A table highlighting tenure changes etc from Census data will be inserted in the final draft for publication of this review*

4.3 Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision

A successful bid was submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to fund the provision of two additional pitches at our Willowmead Site. The proposals are due to be submitted to planning during the Summer 2013 following pre-planning public consultation.

We are currently working in partnership with Elim Housing Association, who have been allocated £2.1m from the HCA, to enable delivery of 29 pitches (24 residential plus 5 transit/stopping places) at Old Junction Yard, Weston Super Mare. Site investigations are currently underway and we will consult with local residents and the local Gypsy and Traveller community, prior to Elim submitting a planning application in the Summer of 2013.

In 2011/12, we carried out a consultation with local Gypsy and Traveller communities, so that we could better understand their requirements for site provision. The findings can be found on our website at: [http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/strategiesandpolicies/gypsyandtravelleraccommodationconsultation2011.htm](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/strategiesandpolicies/gypsyandtravelleraccommodationconsultation2011.htm). This has informed our site identification and development work.

We have been working in partnership with the Planning Department in order to identify further potential sites. The Sites and Policies Development Plan Document (February 2013) identified a possible Gypsy and Traveller site, Old Junction Yard, as well as another opportunity as part of a mixed use site at Winterstoke Road.
4.4 Affordable Housing Delivery

Since the last review, the 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme is now well underway. Registered Providers (RP’s) are delivering Affordable Housing (AH) via their investment contracts with the HCA, and we have seen considerable successes in delivering AH since 2011/12. We have again exceeded our AH target, delivering 211 new affordable homes this year in partnership with Registered Providers and the HCA. All grant funded units in the programme must be complete by 31st March 2015. The projected delivery date will result in continued levels of delivery until this time.

The new ‘Affordable Rent’ tenure is now being delivered across North Somerset. This tenure is charged at up to 80% of local market rents, which in some areas, such as Portishead, is considerably higher than social rents. RP’s are also converting a small proportion of their re-lets from social rent to affordable rent, further increasing AH delivery.

As well as external funding, we have also used some of our own limited funding in order to assist delivery of AH. It has also been necessary to use our own funding to maintain affordability, in conjunction with the HCA’s AH Programme. S106 negotiations remain important for securing future AH delivery.

Since the last Housing Strategy Review, we have put in place our Tenancy Strategy, as required by the Localism Act. The Tenancy Strategy sets out our views on fixed term tenancies, the introduction of Affordable Rent tenures and changes to the way we use the private rented sector to house homeless people. We will also be addressing potential changes to the eligibility criteria for the HomeChoice register.

The Tenancy Strategy can be found at https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/strategiesandpolicies/Strategic+Tenancy+Policy.htm.

We will face significant challenges to future delivery post 2015, as there are uncertainties over HCA grant funding past this date, as well as ongoing affordability issues. This will impact on the way we deliver AH. As the welfare reforms are implemented it will also become clear how important affordable housing is in a setting of benefit cuts and Universal Credit, which may result in increased rent arrears and tenancy management issues, highlighting the importance of affordable housing developments in preventing homelessness.

4.5 Making Best Use of Existing Stock

In the Housing Strategy 2010-2015 we prioritised bringing empty homes back into use and helping under-occupying social housing tenants to move into smaller properties, enabling us to make best use of the existing housing stock in North Somerset.
4.6 Under-Occupation

Due to the recent welfare reforms, under-occupation has become an important issue which is likely to have deep and far-reaching consequences. The ‘bedroom tax’ will penalise those considered to be under-occupying in social housing according to government criteria, and may result in financial hardship for many households across North Somerset.

However, Alliance Homes (previously known as NSHousing) run a scheme aimed at tackling under-occupation, in order to use housing stock as efficiently as possible. The ‘Home Move Support scheme’ pays £600 for the first bedroom ‘given up’ and £300 for any additional rooms.

There could be increased take-up of the Home Move Support Scheme, and any other similar schemes, as the consequences of the ‘bedroom tax’ become more apparent. Coupled with direct payments and other benefits changes, there are likely to be increases in rent arrears and evictions. We will therefore continue to encourage Registered Providers to offer support to tenants who are under-occupying to move to smaller homes, as this will contribute towards our aims of preventing homelessness.

4.7 Empty Properties

Our Empty Property Delivery Plan is now in place and is currently in the process of being updated for 2013. Since the last Housing Strategy Review, progress has been made against our Empty Property Delivery targets. 42 empty properties have been brought back into use during 2012-2013.

We have been working closely to support RP’s and Community Groups bidding for HCA funding in order to bring empty properties back into use, and have contributed to an RP’s successful bid. Bidding closed in March 2013. We will now concentrate on following this bid through to implementation.

We are currently working with partners to set up a private leasing scheme, to help bring empty properties back into use. We are in the process of arranging a scheme in collaboration with Chapter 1 Housing Association and Alliance Homes.

5. Better Homes, Better Places

In the 2010-2015 Housing Strategy, we explained that:

“The challenge we face in achieving this outcome includes ensuring housing quality across all tenures. We have particular challenges in raising standards within the Park Home and Private Rented Sectors, improving energy efficiency and improving conditions in our older owner-occupied housing stock. We must also ensure new homes are of good design and are built in locations that create sustainable communities.”
5.1 Private Sector Housing

In 2011 a Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey was carried out across the district. The survey findings have formed an evidence base to develop our priorities and actions for a new Private Sector Housing Delivery Plan. There are a number of challenges facing the private housing sector including welfare reforms, an ageing population and rising energy costs.

The Private sector housing Delivery Plan 2013-2016 was approved in May 2013. The Plan can be viewed here: http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti/PrHous/consultationHome

5.2 Assisting Owners

Assistance to owners is largely delivered through our low-cost, loan-based products and we have retained a limited programme to provide assistance for essential repairs to support the most vulnerable people. The Private Sector Housing Delivery Plan outlines this priority in its Action Plan as the need to ‘continue to target resources to the most vulnerable’. Our partners continue to develop new products to achieve this aim, and also to support the emerging market through the Green Deal.

5.3 Improving Housing in Multiple Occupation

We continue to issue licences under the mandatory scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), whilst a revised fee structure has been approved to reflect costs of the licensing function. We have concluded a project to identify locations with concentrations of HMOs and to determine what policy responses we should pursue in future, including the potential use of discretionary licensing powers, to ensure effective regulation of these properties. Further, we are currently consulting on a proposal to introduce an additional licensing scheme in part of Central Ward in Weston Super Mare. We are also currently consulting on a policy to introduce three areas of restricted sub-division in Weston-super-Mare, in order to prevent the concentrated growth of HMOs in these areas.

5.4 Park Homes

Since the last Housing Strategy Review, the Mobile Homes Bill has been passed into law, bringing with it significant changes to the way we are able to manage and implement our Park Home policies. The Act puts into place new requirements for site owners, such as having to pay for a licence, an annual fee and maintaining other mandatory conditions. This Act also gives local authorities new powers, for example the ability to give out a Notice for improvement or to prosecute if the Act is not complied with.

The implementation of the Act in April 2014 will inevitably require much preparation at a local level. We will therefore be putting in place a new Action
Plan before April 2014, and conducting consultations across Park Home sites, in order to raise awareness in preparation for the new legislation.

5.5 Vulnerable Households

Community Connect Partnership

As part of our Delivery Plan, we will develop our joint work with the Health, Social Care and Public Health services through our Community Connect partnership, to target older people living in poor housing conditions. Community Connect is an initiative which targets specific communities, to make older and disabled people aware of the help that is available through both the council and its partners, including support for completing essential repairs and maintenance.

Care and Repair Contract

A new 3 year contract has been agreed with West of England Care & Repair, which enhances the existing services available for older people and expands agency services to home from hospital, move on support and a planned assessment centre for adaptations. There is a strong commitment from the Council to support the development of the agency through the life of the contract.

Disabled Facilities Grant

The coalition government continues to support major adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants and the Council historically has contributed over £600k each year in support of the programme. However, the considerable pressure on capital budgets means it will be increasingly challenging to maintain levels of performance with limited resources. We will therefore continue to explore the most cost effective ways of delivering adaptations, including tendering the delivery of bathing improvements and adaptations, and through the use of our new Home Improvement Agency Contract. Our Delivery Plan also establishes the need for us to evaluate the potential to introduce alternative funding options for works above the grant limit, and explore other options for top-up funding. These measures will help us achieve greater value for money, one of the key targets of our Delivery Plan.

5.6 Energy Efficiency

North Somerset Council is committed to supporting the eradication of fuel poverty and the provision of affordable warmth through energy efficient accommodation, for all households. To ensure progress towards this objective, the Council is working in partnership with several agencies across the health, environment and community safety sectors.

The Energy Act 2011 introduced legislation to launch the Green Deal initiative, which will replace the current funding regime for improving home energy efficiency, alongside funding provided through the Energy Company
Obligation (ECO). The role of Local Government in these schemes is still emerging but the formation of partnerships of local authorities and others is likely to be the preferred option for North Somerset.

The government requested Local Authorities to provide an updated report in relation to the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; this was submitted to the Department of Energy and Climate Change in April 2013 and contains our broad aims in relation to promoting home energy efficiency and working to develop Green Deal and ECO locally.

The Council is in the process of finalising their commitment to Climate Local, which is a Local Government Association initiative to support councils’ efforts both to reduce carbon emissions, and also to improve resilience to the effects of our changing climate and extreme weather.

6. Greater Opportunity, Greater Choice

In the Housing Strategy 2010 -2015, we explained that:

“The challenges we face in achieving this outcome include ensuring that we have a variety of housing options to meet different needs. We have particular pressures for finding suitable housing solutions for people with learning and other disabilities, as well as housing for a growing older population. Preventing youth homelessness and providing effective advice for those affected by high levels of personal debt are also important issues for us to address.”

These challenges remain, but again the environment in which we operate is changing.

6.1 Preventing and Tackling Homelessness

For the year 2012/13 we prevented 601 households from becoming homeless. This figure has been steadily increasing over the past few years. For the year 2010/11 it was 488 and 2011/12 it was 573. This is an overall increase of 23% since 2010/11. In addition to homelessness prevention the service also saw a marked increase in the number of customers approaching for housing advice. For the year 2012/13 the figure was 2477 which was an increase of 64% on the previous year’s figure of 1507. These trends would both suggest that there is an increasing need for our homelessness prevention services, and for more housing in general.

Whilst homelessness applications reduced from 268 for the year 2011/12, to 219 for the year 2012/13, the actual number of clients that the Council accepted a full homelessness duty to increased from 82 to 99 for the same years.

We have improved our prevention and homelessness services for single people and rough sleepers. Working in partnership with other Somerset
authorities we have launched a rough sleeper reporting line, adopted a rough sleeper reconnection policy and held a successful multi agency awareness raising event. We also now have a Tenancy Support Officer working within the Housing Advice Team and are able to provide emergency and intensive support to clients in order to help keep them in their homes.

There are still considerable challenges ahead however, as the Government continues to introduce significant changes to the benefits system through the Welfare Reform Bill. These changes are likely to impact on our Housing Advice and HomeChoice Teams and the work they do to prevent and tackle homelessness.

The HomeChoice Policy has already been updated to take into account the effects of the new social rent restrictions (Bedroom Tax). Working age claimants who are living in social housing and who under occupy their property by 2 bedrooms are placed in Band A. Similarly, working age claimants who under occupy by 1 bedroom are placed into Band B. This has been achieved following intensive work with local Registered Providers to identify those households affected.

The Housing Advice Team is also working closely with the Housing Benefit service and the Department of Work and Pensions to identify households who will be most affected by the Benefit Cap and Universal Credit, which are being introduced later in the year. It is intended that specific and targeted work will be carried out with those households most adversely affected in order to mitigate the impact of these reforms.

6.2 Improving Housing Options and Extending Choice

The Private Rented Sector

The Localism Act gives local authorities greater ability to discharge its statutory duties into the private rented sector, by offering 12 month assured short-hold tenancies. However, most private landlords with accommodation in North Somerset are reluctant to issue 12-month tenancies. This is usually due to concerns about rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. Therefore, we need to ensure that we are able to offer the right package of measures to incentivise landlords to work with us.

The development of the new gateway has enabled us to deliver a more efficient service, streamlining the triage/advice service and providing an effective means for the public to easily access housing options. Changes to the HomeChoice Register will impact on our allocations process, as priorities will change. These changes are discussed in more detail below.

We now directly provide a Guarantee Deposit Scheme, in order to help those who are statutory homeless and unable to raise a deposit to secure a property in the private rented sector. To complement this scheme, we will be reviewing the incentives we offer to Private Sector Landlords.
Along with our West of England partners, we have successfully bid for funding to implement a variety of initiatives across the West of England. The aim of the project is to bring together the skills and expertise of the local authority and third sector to encourage landlords to provide more decent properties that are affordable, to make tenants in receipt of LHA more appealing to landlords and to help existing tenants remain in their homes wherever possible. This will be particularly helpful to mitigate against increased demand for private rented accommodation as a result of the proposed construction of Hinkley C power station and complement funding for further initiatives to increase supply in this tenure, should construction take place.

HomeChoice

Demand for housing continues to grow, and as at March 2013 there were 6965 households on the North Somerset housing waiting list.

Following the Localism Act 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act, the HomeChoice Policy has been reviewed with the public, stakeholders and partners. A full public consultation was carried out and the Policy has been updated and will come into effect in Autumn 2013. The emphasis is on giving more priority to residents of North Somerset in housing need - applicants will need a local connection to North Somerset to be eligible to join the HomeChoice Register, and those with serious anti social behaviour or rent arrears will be excluded.

Due to the Welfare Reform Act there is also a strong emphasis on making best use of the available social housing stock by promoting downsizing throughout social housing.

6.3 Help for Vulnerable People

Supporting People and Community Services

The Supporting People (SP) local programme covers housing related support and supported housing services, and is funded as part of the Council’s general funds. At the time of update to this review, the Council is engaged in re-commissioning all housing related support and supported housing services. Also being re-commissioned are all voluntary sector support services. The re-commissioning is designed to improve service efficiency and value for money as well as access for service users and referrers to services.

We continue to have the same primary targets, of enabling people to remain independent in their own home, move to an appropriate home and develop or retain life skills. However, the number of contracted service providers will reduce. Those remaining will be expected to provide a more comprehensive, district-wide service across service user groups.

In order to establish the new comprehensive system approach for SP, a primary Comprehensive Floating Support Service (CFSS) has been contracted. This service will be the senior operator of the new SP Gateway,
which introduces web based access. Sister floating support services will be contracted for Older People and Mental Health - they will work closely with the CFSS to manage access and support.

Supported housing will be provided for Young People, the Homeless, those with Mental Ill-Health, Learning Disabilities, Substance misuse and Domestic Abuse, the latter also having an element of floating support to work in the wider community. Extra Care Housing for Older People will be improved through joint care and support contracting, along with the provision of more schemes. Support for Sheltered Housing will change to be based on needs assessment and floating support. Support for Ex-offenders and some substance abuse service users will be primarily through the IMPACT Early Intervention Accommodation project, in partnership with the CFSS and Private Sector Landlords.

In addition, we have undertaken positive development work on the Home from Hospital Partnership, which is an award-winning, multi-agency approach to support timely discharge from hospital for older and disabled people. The Council is still committed to proving more 'supported living' options for people with Learning Disabilities. This is in part funded by SP, Personalised Budgets and Adult Care. Accommodation options are provided by Registered and Private Sector Landlords.

All voluntary sector services for the Community are also being commissioned and these often link to SP services or individual service user needs, besides the general population. The commissioning principles remain; better value for money, improved access across the district and partnership working.

**Supporting Older People**

North Somerset has a large elderly population, and this is expected to increase significantly in the future. Census 2011 data shows us that 28.3% of North Somerset’s population are currently aged 60 and over, compared to just 22.4% nationally. The Council will need to make provisions for the impacts of a large ageing population, which will place pressure on services such as healthcare and supported housing, and will require further actions in order to avoid extra costs.

We continue to work with partners to ensure that sheltered housing is being put to best use. In order to meet additional need, we plan to work in future with specialist housing providers to deliver additional extra care housing in the District, where appropriate, and are currently working on three potential schemes.

We are committed to supporting the older person’s population by developing a range of choices in relation to housing and care and support. A large range of prevention, information, health and social care services are provided to frail older people in North Somerset, to support them to make their own choices and enable people to live in their own homes for as long as possible.
7. In Conclusion

Looking ahead, the Strategic Housing Service faces considerable challenges in delivering its Housing Strategy objectives. We can expect continuing demands to be placed on our services in the light of welfare reform, increasing homelessness and increasing pressures on the private rented sector. There is also a continuing and growing demographic pressure to prevent ill health and enable older and vulnerable people to live independently by tackling poor housing conditions. In the social housing sector the impacts of the higher rents charged through the Affordable Rent regime, the introduction of the under occupation benefit reductions and of direct payments of housing benefit to tenants, will need to be tracked closely to mitigate as far as possible detrimental impacts on communities and tenants.

All of this is at a time when the council and its partners face significant reductions in funding. We will continue to work with partners and to secure funding for initiatives and services to help in delivering outcomes that meet the needs of the community we serve.
### Ongoing Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet our targets for affordable housing delivery, including regeneration targets for Weston-super-Mare</td>
<td>Annually until 2015</td>
<td>Existing resources/planning gain/nil subsidy/Local Investment Plan.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>150 units per annum (600 units to 2014/15). To be confirmed following review of West of England DIIP</td>
<td>Exceeded delivery target in 2012/13 with 211 new affordable homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out a review of the Affordable Housing SPD</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>New Affordable Housing SPD in place</td>
<td>New Affordable Housing SPD out for consultation 9th May 2013, consultation due to end June 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify locations of clusters of multi occupied homes in Weston-super-Mare and develop appropriate policy responses</td>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>HMO strategy for Weston-super-Mare</td>
<td>Phase 1 – data analysis near completion. Phase 2 - community survey carried out in January 2013. Additional licensing scheme proposal going out for formal consultation in March 2013, consultation due to end 21st May 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Target Date</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Performance Measure</td>
<td>Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out research into the role the private rented sector plays in meeting housing demand and investigate intervention techniques to improve quality and security of tenure for its tenants</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources and Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team/Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Research completed and evidence used to inform policy</td>
<td>Letting agents survey carried out and analysed, including recommendations. Further research options to be investigated, including possible tenant’s survey. Further work ongoing until March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with internal and external partners to improve the delivery of housing options to people with learning disabilities</td>
<td>Ongoing until March 2015</td>
<td>Existing resources/LIP</td>
<td>HomeChoice and Housing Advice Team/Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>Number of residential/educational placements reduced, increase in alternative provision</td>
<td>Number of residential/educational placements reduced, increase in alternative provision. 4 properties developed in 12/13 housing ten adults with LD. Exploring additional opportunities for future years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Target Date</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Performance Measure</td>
<td>Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue our work to reduce fuel poverty and improve residential energy efficiency, through facilitating assistance and promotion work and specific targeting to priority groups</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Annual survey for NI187 and improvement in Stock Condition Survey results</td>
<td>Annual Survey no longer required, but work ongoing. Department of Energy and Climate Change revising definition of fuel poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and target action to achieve Decent Home Standard in the Private Sector.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Increase in the number of homes in Private Sector achieving this standard.</td>
<td>Completed. Performance target revised in light of data from Stock Condition Survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement actions from in HSU's informed plan, in relation to older people’s housing, care and support.</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Adult Social Services</td>
<td>Completion of actions in informed plan</td>
<td>Complete, further work ongoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with our planning colleagues in the development of sites for Gypsy and Traveller communities and ensure their effective management</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Existing resources and LIP</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>36 residential and transit pitches developed.</td>
<td>In 2012/13 a site for 24 pitches was identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Target Date</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Performance Measure</td>
<td>Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the incentives provided to Private Sector Landlords to secure accommodation for homeless households</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Existing Staff resources</td>
<td>HomeChoice and Housing Advice Team</td>
<td>Review complete and incentives in place</td>
<td>Ongoing work re. increasing supply in the Private Rented Sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the Lettings and Assessment Policy following the enactment of the Localism Bill</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Existing Staff resources. Budget set aside to cover any potential changes to IT systems</td>
<td>HomeChoice and Housing Advice Team</td>
<td>Review complete and necessary changes implemented</td>
<td>Consultations and implementation ongoing. Expected completion August 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement the Park Homes action plan, following the review, and respond to the scheduled government consultation paper on the future licensing of park homes</td>
<td>March 2012 TBC</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Action Plan implemented.</td>
<td>Tasks from Action Plan complete. Responded to CLG consultation. Consultation concluded, Mobile Homes Act passed 2013.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ongoing Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigate the possibility of developing a Disabled Facilities Grant Protocol with registered providers sub-regionally</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Existing resources HoH Group resource.</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Potential for protocol established, and protocol developed if appropriate.</td>
<td>No appetite to take this forward with Registered Providers, but still hopeful of coming up with an improved process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Completed Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carry out a Private Sector Stock Condition Survey</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Stock Condition Survey complete</td>
<td>Stock Condition survey complete, report issued and published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop new Private Sector Housing Delivery Plan based on the findings of the stock condition survey</td>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Private Sector Housing Team</td>
<td>Strategy/Delivery Plan in place</td>
<td>Consultation finished on Friday 22nd February. Delivery Plan completed end of March 2013, Delivery Plan now in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update our existing Affordable Housing Delivery Plan</td>
<td>Dec 2011</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>New plan in place</td>
<td>New plan in place, adopted May 2012. Annual review due Autumn 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Target Date</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Performance Measure</td>
<td>Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Alliance Homes and the HCA to investigate the feasibility of redevelopment within the Bournville Estate</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>Feasibility assessment undertaken</td>
<td>Focus of this has now changed, but we will continue to be involved in any new work when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and publish a Strategic Tenancy Policy, covering affordable rents, flexible tenancies, principles for changes to the HomeChoice register, and discharging the Homelessness Duty into the private rented sector.</td>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>Strategic Tenancy Policy published</td>
<td>Completed. Final Strategic Tenancy Policy published April 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out review of the Strategic Housing Service in light of the budget reduction programme</td>
<td>April 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Head of Housing</td>
<td>Review complete and implemented</td>
<td>Completed June 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities to better understand their needs for new site provision</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
<td>Existing resources</td>
<td>Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team</td>
<td>Consultation carried out and results used to inform site identification and development</td>
<td>Completed March 2012.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>