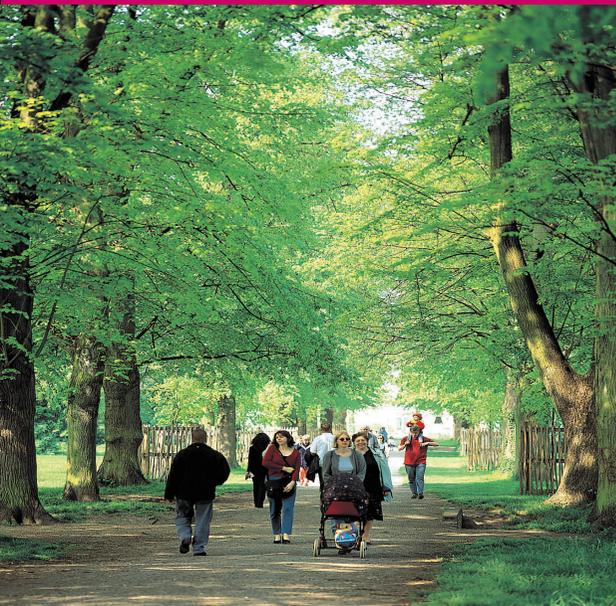


FITTER, FASTER, FOCUSED

# Merton's Housing Strategy 2008-2011

'Empower People & Shape Places'



[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)

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## **FOREWORD**

***By Councillor Linda Scott, Cabinet Member for Housing***

Housing is of paramount importance and has a vital role to play in addressing the needs of all our local residents.

In all spheres we have made significant progress. In the provision of new housing, for example we have delivered over 500 affordable homes for people in housing need, including homes for shared-ownership.

In tackling and preventing homelessness, we have made huge progress by helping people in housing need to access accommodation in the private sector, through the opening of 'Housing Options', a private sector Property Shop in Morden, and have extended our Rent Deposit Scheme to highly pointed households on our Housing Register.

We have helped improve the condition and energy efficiency of private sector housing through grants provided to vulnerable and low-income households. These included Disabled Facilities Grants, Small Repairs Grants, Coldbusters etc., and provided Empty Homes Grants to bring properties back into use.

Savill's recent Stock Condition Survey highlighted the need for £129m if our social housing is to meet the Decent Homes Standard. As a result, the Council is currently consulting on a stock transfer proposal which will bring in the necessary resources.

Our Strategy sets out clearly how we will work with our partners to meet the needs of our diverse community.

There is a lot to be done over the next three years, and our tasks will be made all the more challenging with the changing economic climate. However, I am confident that, with the commitment of our staff and that of our partners, we will be able to make significant progress in achieving our objectives and priorities.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Scott', written over a faint horizontal line.

**Councillor Linda Scott**  
Cabinet Member for Housing  
London Borough of Merton

## A. INTRODUCTION

There has been a whole raft of Government policy initiatives since we published the Housing Strategy in 2004. The regional housing role has been strengthened and the Mayor of London has now been given statutory housing power for the capital. Merton Council has made very good progress in consulting local residents about local needs, and developing plans to meet these needs.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of Merton's three-year Housing Strategy 2004-2007, which was assessed as 'fit-for-purpose' by the Government in 2004. It is now time for us to take a step back and review what we have achieved, to reconsider our priorities, and to develop our aims and objectives for the next three years, ensuring that the updated strategy aligns with the national, regional, sub-regional and local priorities.

## B. NATIONAL & REGIONAL HOUSING POLICIES

### ***Local Government White Paper***

The Local Government White Paper, published in October 2006, aims to give local people and the local community more influence and power to improve their lives, and to provide more freedom and power to local authorities to work with citizens in order to create strong and prosperous communities. The White Paper sets out seven key areas:

- Responsive services and empowered communities
- Effective, accountable and responsive local government
- Strong cities, strategic regions
- Local government as a strategic leader and place-shaper
- A new performance framework

- Efficiency – transforming local services
- Community Cohesion

The White Paper reiterates that the strategic housing role is at the heart of achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community. Local authorities will be required to take a more strategic housing role, and will be encouraged to align housing strategies with other local strategies.

The emphasis is on an evidence-based approach. Housing strategies will need to be based on evidence on local housing market and future needs, supported by the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

### ***Planning Policy Statement 3 "Housing"***

The Government recently published a planning and housing policy document (PPS3), in response to Kate Barker's Review of Housing Supply (more details of the PPS3 are set out on page 61).

A statement on Delivering Affordable Housing was also published at the same time, which aims to support the delivery of more high quality affordable housing within mixed sustainable communities.

### ***The Future of Housing Policy***

In February 2007, the Government highlighted four main challenges in housing policy over the coming years, through a speech on the future of housing policy to the Fabian Society. The challenges are:

- ***More homes in decent communities*** - Building more homes, in well-planned communities, will be vital to help first-time

buyers, who find it harder than ever to get on the housing ladder.

- **Greener homes** - Housing policy must play its part in tackling climate change as housing is responsible for 27% of national carbon emissions.
- **Making sure no one is left behind** - With many homeowners having benefited from the growth in prices in recent years before the economic downturn, the challenge is to make sure that no one is excluded from the benefits of owning housing assets, to help break down the barriers to social mobility.
- **Making social housing more responsive to each individual** - Taking into account individual circumstances.

### ***Housing Green Paper - Homes for the Future***

In July 2007, the Government published a Housing Green Paper, 'Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable'. The Green Paper sets out proposals to ensure delivery of its housing policy. Proposals include:

#### **More Homes**

- Additional homes planned in the new Regional Spatial Strategies, including extra homes in 29 New Growth Points, with more delivered on surplus public sector land.
- New Housing & Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) from 2008 to direct extra resources to councils delivering high levels of housing.
- More new homes to be delivered through surplus public sector land by 2016.

#### **Better Homes**

- Better use of infrastructure funding to improve local transport, schools and healthcare, with more drawn from the planning system, through proposals set out in a Planning-gain

Supplement Bill, to ensure local communities benefit from new developments.

- All new homes to be zero carbon from 2016 by strengthening building regulations, with funding for five new eco-town schemes, each to provide 5,000 - 20,000 new homes that are designed to reach zero carbon standards.

#### **More Affordable Homes**

- Encourage local authorities to invest public land for the development of new homes, through the establishment of Local Housing Companies.
- An increase in Government investment in social housing through the New Homes Agency (Housing Corporation and English Partnerships).
- Possible greater access by local authorities to Social Housing Grant, particularly when linked to council owned land.

### ***Towards the Mayor's Housing Strategy***

The draft Housing Strategy for London (published September 2007), is being revised by the new Mayor, to include priorities set out in his mayoral election pledges. The Strategy, once agreed, will become a statutory document under the Greater London Authority Act 2007, which gives new housing powers to the Mayor. The Mayor's vision, which will underpin all of his strategies, is focused on long-term economic growth, social inclusiveness and fundamental improvements in London's environment. Key elements of the Mayor's vision for housing include:

- Deliver 50,000 new affordable homes by 2011, but will allow boroughs more flexibility by removing the 50% target.
- Introduce the 'First Steps' housing scheme for first-time buyers, providing low cost, high quality housing at 20% below market value by releasing GLA owned brownfield land.

- Increase the supply of 'intermediate' housing by changing the social housing / intermediate split from 70:30 to 60:40.
- Cut the number of empty homes to one per cent by 2011, and undertake a London wide empty homes audit to identify empty homes for regeneration through a variety of incentives.
- Call for all new homes to be built to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes by 2010, and to Level 6 by 2016.
- Discourage housing development on back gardens.

The new Mayor also believes boroughs should have the freedom to negotiate on-site renewable targets and supports the introduction of the 'Merton Rule' into legislation. The 'Merton Rule' is the groundbreaking planning policy pioneered by the London Borough of Merton, which requires the use of renewable energy on site to reduce annual carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions in the built environment.

### ***John Hill's Review of Social Housing***

John Hill's Review 'End and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England', commissioned by the Government and published in February 2007, has concluded that social housing will continue to be the most appropriate form of tenure for people in need. He has, however, called for changes so that social housing will respond better to people's individual needs. Social housing should provide a safety net for the most vulnerable, but should also enable others to get on at work and in their lives generally (more details of the Review are set out in section B5 of this Strategy).

### ***The Cave Review of Social Housing Regulation***

The Government has commissioned Professor Martin Cave of the Centre for Management under Regulation at Warwick University to conduct an independent review to look at how the

regulatory system for social housing could be reformed, in light of recent development such as the Hills Review.

The Review concluded that regulation of social housing is necessary in order to better support tenants, drive up housing standard, and to reduce burdens on social housing providers. A number of objectives were outlined in the Review:

- Ensure continued provision of high quality social housing
- Empower and protect tenants
- Expand the availability of a choice of providers at all levels in the provision of social housing.

The following recommendations were made:

- A single regulator and single system of regulation for all social housing providers - RSLs, local authorities, ALMOs and private sector, to enable clear comparison of services and standards across the social housing domain.
- Government to give strategic directions to the regulator in relation to an overall strategy for rent setting and the standards to be applied to 'core housing function'.
- Core functions of social landlords, e.g. management and maintenance and anti-social behaviour issues, should be subject to regulation.
- All providers should have a new statutory duty to engage constructively with local authorities in respect of their convening and place-shaping function.

### ***The Housing and Regeneration Act***

The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 received Royal Assent on 22 July 2008. The Act establishes the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which brings together responsibility for housing land and funding, by combining English Partnership,

the Housing Corporation and other agencies, to deliver new housing to address the shortage of affordable housing for first-time buyers and families.

The HCA also has role in regenerating communities, and will base its regeneration approach on the Government's regeneration framework - Transforming Places; Changing Lives, to ensure decisions are made as locally as possible, and that access to jobs is a key decider in the location of new social housing.

The Act will also establish a new watchdog for social tenants - Tenants Services Authority (TSA), in response to findings of the Cave Review. The TSA will regulate social landlords, setting high management standards across social rented homes, listen to tenants' concerns, and can use its powers to ensure tenants are getting a good service. The Act also makes it easier for council to build council homes and allows some councils to opt out of the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system.

Empowering people is the cornerstone of the Government's recent White Paper Communities in Control and the TSA is just one way in which tenants will have a greater say in running of their communities.

### ***Communities in control: real people, real power - White Paper***

This White Paper, launched on 9 July 2008, aims to pass power to communities and give real control and influence to more people. Legislative changes required to progress the proposed policies will be progressed through the planned Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill (CEHER Bill), which is part of the draft 2008-09 legislative programme.

The White Paper is intended as a catalyst for change, and includes proposal of a 'Duty to promote democracy' for local authorities and an extension of the 'Duty to Involve' to new agencies and bodies. Consultation on a new Empowerment Fund to support third sector organisations to help local communities was also launched alongside the White Paper.

### **C. LOCAL PLANS & DELIVERY MECHANISM**

#### ***Merton's Community Plan 2006-2015***

Produced by the Merton Partnership following a great deal of consultation with local people, community organisations and local businesses, Merton's Community Plan reflects the priorities of local people, and covers five key themes:

- Sustainable communities
- Safer & stronger communities
- Healthier communities
- Older people
- Children and young people

There is a strong focus on building cohesive and sustainable communities, and the sustainable communities theme covers housing, the environment, the economy and transport. A 'refresh' of the Community Action is due to be completed by the end of 2008. In line with the policy direction set out in the Local Government White Paper, we have aligned our Housing Strategy 2008-2011 with the themes in Merton's Community Plan.

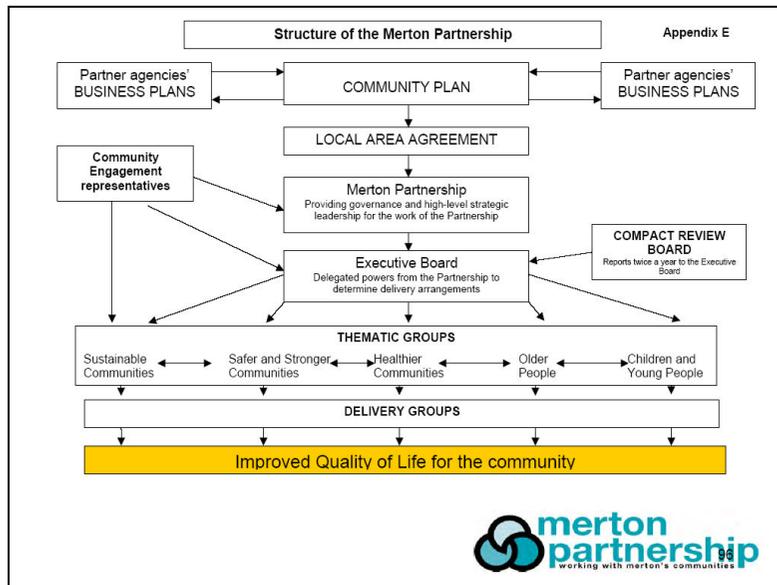
#### ***The Merton Partnership***

The delivery of Merton's Community Plan is the responsibility of the Merton Partnership. The Merton Partnership meets quarterly and is chaired by the Leader of the Council. It brings together key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

These include the Merton Chamber of Commerce, Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust, Merton College, Merton Police, Job Centre Plus, London South Learning and Skills Council, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Merton Race Equality Partnership, The Interfaith Forum, and Merton Unity Network. Each agency has ownership of the objectives and outcomes of the partnership.

The Merton Partnership has a three-tier structure, supported by an Executive Board chaired by the Chief Executive (see chart below). The Board advises the Partnership on matters of governance and ensures that the work of the partnership is given the leadership and capacity it requires.

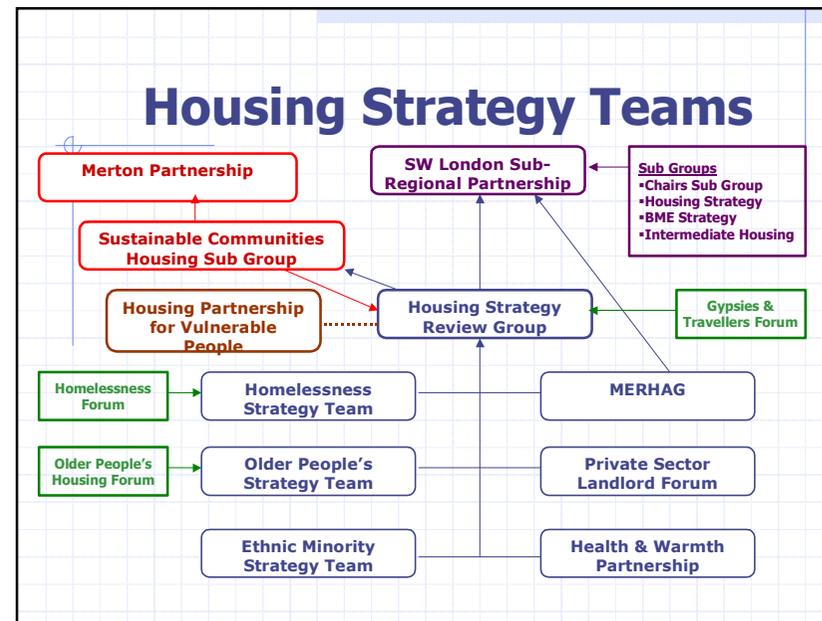
The Merton Partnership also co-ordinates five thematic partnerships that mirror the themes of the Community Plan and the Council's business plan strategic themes.



**Partnership Working in Housing**

There is a strong emphasis on effective internal and external partnership working to develop and deliver our Housing Strategy. We have developed our various housing strategies in partnership with stakeholders, through a multi-agency partnership structure that has now been well established.

The chart below illustrates the current partnership structure, which includes the recently established Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, and the work being undertaken at sub-regional level, through the South-West Sub Regional Housing Partnership, which involves Merton and six of our neighbouring boroughs.



***‘Bridging the Gap’ – Merton’s Local Area Agreement***

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three-year agreement between a local area and central government, relating to the delivery of locally negotiated priorities. The primary objective of the LAA is to deliver sustainable communities through better outcomes for local people, by enhancing efficiency, strengthening partnership working, and through more flexible funding arrangements.

Merton's LAA (2007-2010) has an overarching theme of **Bridging the Gap**. This relates to the gap between eastern and western parts of the borough, and also to communities and groups who are underachieving or disadvantaged. This theme is addressed within four LAA blocks - Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities, Healthier Communities and Older People, and Economic Development and Enterprise.

The Government has recently introduced a new LAA framework, which is now in place. The Merton Partnership is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the LAA, which now includes two Housing targets.

The LAA will deliver priorities of the Community Plan and sets out a number of outcomes, performance indicators and targets to measure the improvements. Merton's LAA has a number of stretch targets that may attract 'pump priming' grant in advance for enhanced performance, and will receive performance reward grant for delivery.

***The Local Development Framework (LDF)***

Merton's emerging Local Development Framework is the spatial manifestation of the Community Plan and once adopted, will replace the borough's existing Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The LDF will set out the planning strategy for the borough until

2018, which will provide a positive and proactive approach to managing development and change across the borough.

Local authorities are required to adopt an evidence-based approach, to ensure that the LDF is informed by a Strategic Housing Market Assessment and a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

Extensive consultation has already taken place on three spatial options. The option to focus growth in areas with high levels of deprivation is emerging to be the one favoured by the majority of consultees. Further consultation will be undertaken to ensure that the LDF reflects local concerns. The Core Strategy of the LDF is due to be adopted by March 2011.

***Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy 2005-2010***

A sub-set of Merton's Community Plan, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy aims to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods in the East of Merton and other areas in the borough. The strategy's vision is that:

"In the medium to long-term, the eastern wards will become more economically, locally and environmentally sustainable, so that the life chance inequalities between those who live in the east of the borough and those who live in the west are significantly reduced".

The designated Neighbourhood Renewal wards are Lavender, Cricket Green, Figges Marsh, Ravensbury, Pollards Hill, St Helier, Longthornton and Graveney. The Strategy also focuses on other local areas, primarily designated by Super Output Areas, which are not within these eight wards (e.g. High Path). Multi-agency action plans have been drawn up for these areas.

The strategy includes targets to achieve the Decent Homes Standard, and highlights the need to redress the particularly high proportion of rented affordable homes in east Merton.

### ***Children and Young People Plan 2006-2009***

The plan recognises that some children, young people and families are marginalised through poverty, racial and other discrimination, or poor health, and plans to reduce such barriers and help raise educational achievement for all children. In particular, the Plan focuses on reducing unequal achievement between different schools across the whole borough and discrepancies between ethnic origin and gender.

Strategic aims set out in the document include:

- Raising educational attainment
- Preparing children and young people for independence and economic productivity
- Developing better places for activities that children and young people enjoy
- Engaging them in decision-making and participation within the community

## **D. COMMUNITIES IN MERTON**

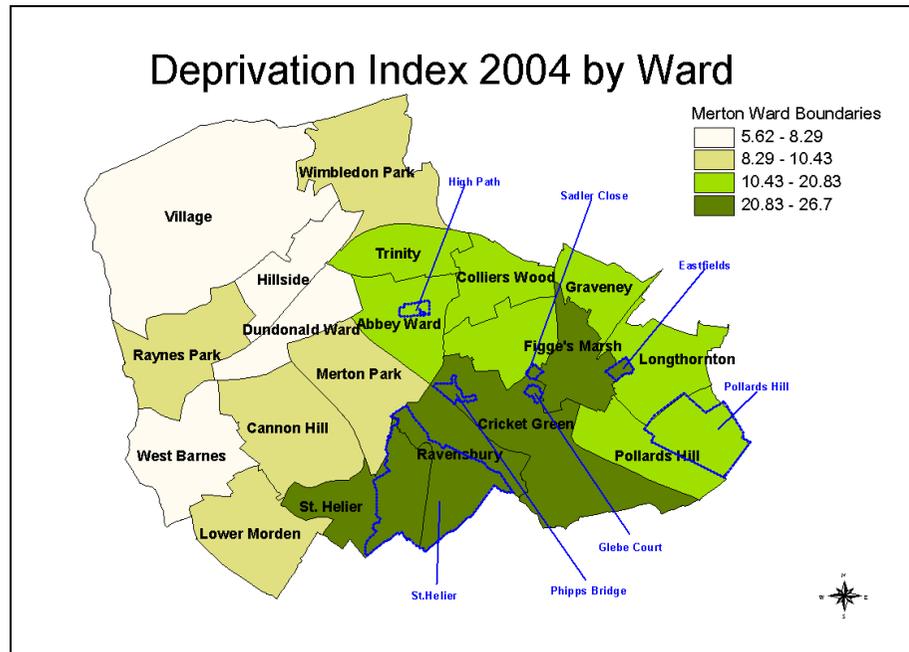
Merton's population is set to increase to 200,600 by 2011, with an increasing number of older people aged 85 and over, and more older people from ethnic minority communities entering retirement age.

Merton has three main town centres - Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden; with high levels of commuter flows in and out of central London. The West of the borough has good public transport, particularly Wimbledon, with easy access to central London and

via the Tramlink to Croydon. Most of the East of the borough is less well served. Merton has been consistently one of the top three safest London boroughs.

The borough is not amongst the most deprived boroughs in London. Average annual income in Merton in 2007 was £41,170, higher than the Greater London average of £38,781 (PayCheck 2006). Looking at median households income in London, the ward with the highest income level in London is Village ward in Merton at £47,257, compared to a London average of £33,083. And according to the Indices of Deprivation (IND) 2000 and confirmed by the IND 2004, Merton ranked 23rd least deprived out of 33 London boroughs.

However, this masks the widespread disadvantage and pockets of deprivation within the borough, and the polarisation between the more deprived wards in the East of the borough (Mitcham) and the affluent wards in the West (Wimbledon). The map below shows higher than average level of deprivation in East Merton.



The East-West divide is apparent in many areas:

**Income**

PayCheck 2007 data shows that average annual household income in wards in East Merton are lower than the borough average. The Figges Marsh Ward has the lowest average income of £32,051, compared to £53,866 for the Village Ward.

Merton's Housing Needs Survey (2005) shows a similar East-West divide in Merton for weekly income, with wards in the eastern part of the borough having incomes considerably below the borough average of £729. Cricket Green has the lowest average income level at £498 per week, followed by St.Helier at £512 per week and Lavender Fields at £516 per week. The

highest average income is estimated to be in the Wimbledon Park ward at £1,057 per week.

Households on low and middle income are more likely to be affected by the recent crisis in the financial market and the resulting 'credit crunch'. There is evidence that this has already led to increased unemployment, homes repossessions and homelessness amongst these households.

**Qualifications and Employment**

All of the eastern wards have higher proportions of people without any qualifications than the average for England. Higher rates of unemployment are recorded in the Mitcham wards. The wards of Cricket Green, Figges Marsh and Pollards Hill have unemployment rates well above the borough average of 2.9%. The wards of Wimbledon Park, Dundonald, Hillside and Village have the lowest unemployment rates in Merton.

**Health**

Female life expectancy at birth in the Cricket Green area of Mitcham (77 years) is more than eight years shorter than in the Hillside area of Wimbledon (85 years). There are greater concentrations of people with long-term limiting illnesses in the eastern wards, and the incidence of early deaths from lung cancer and heart disease is higher in the East of the borough.

The highest proportion of Low Birth Weight (LBW) infants was in Graveney (10.9%). This rate is significantly above the borough average. The LBW rates in the wards of Lavender Fields, Pollards Hill and West Barnes are also high. By contrast, Dundonald, Lower Morden and Village wards have well below borough average LBW rates.

## E. REVIEW OF HOUSING STRATEGY 2004-2007

### ***Action Plan Progress***

To inform the development of a Housing Strategy that will take us to 2010, we have reviewed our 2004-2007 Housing Strategy and found good progress have been made against targets set out in the three-year Action Plan. However, deprivation, which closely reflects housing tenures, remains an issue in several areas, particularly in the East of Merton.

Overall, 67% of actions set for the three years were either met or partly met, while 16% were not met. The remaining 17% have either been carried forward to 2007-2008 for completion, or were assessed to be no longer relevant.

The actions were developed to meet the following five priorities set out in the 2004-2007 Strategy:

1. Maximise the supply of new housing and improve housing choice
2. Support vulnerable people and prevent homelessness
3. Improve housing conditions
4. Develop sustainable communities
5. Deliver through effective partnerships

In terms of performance against the five priorities, we have made particularly good progress against Priority 5 and Priority 1, where 85% and 71% of actions were met or partly met respectively. For Priorities 2, 3 and 4, 68%, 61% and 64% of actions were met or partly met respectively.

### ***Key Achievements***

This section gives an overview of key achievements against the five priorities:

### Priority 1- Maximise supply of new housing and improve housing choice

- 429 new affordable and 93 shared- ownership homes developed between 2004-2007, above the target of 400 affordable homes for rent and shared ownership set for this period.
- Planning approval given for a new extra care scheme for older people.
- Rent Deposit Scheme extended to highly pointed households during 2004-2005
- Private Sector Property Shop opened June 2006.

### Priority 2 – Support vulnerable people and prevent homelessness

- Exceeded target to have no more than 15 single people staying in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (15 as at April 2007).
- Ten new units of accommodation for people with learning disabilities developed in 2006.
- Temporary accommodation strategy completed December in 2006.
- Provision of a minor repairs service for tenants aged 65 and over which was rolled out to whole borough.

### Priority 3 – Improve housing conditions

- The Government set a target for all council and housing association homes to reach the Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and required all stock-holding local authorities to conduct a stock options appraisal by July 2005. Merton's stock options appraisal, 'Community Voice – the future of Merton's homes', was submitted on time and signed-off by government. The appraisal results and evidence available at the time showed that Merton could meet the minimum

Decent Homes Standard within existing resources. On this basis the council decided:

- on a strategy of stock retention for the housing stock as a whole, as a means of meeting the Decent Homes standard
- further work be undertaken at local level to engage in discussion with residents on the ways in which the homes on their estate or area might secure improvement and modernisation over and above the 'Minimum Decent Homes' standard.
- However, a subsequent stock condition survey, carried out in 2007, showed that the real level of non-decency was still as high as 40% and that the Decent Homes standard could not be met within existing resources (see page 72 for more detail on the current position).'
- 809 older and vulnerable people households were given advice about home maintenance and living independently in 2006-2007 by 'Hanover', Merton's care and repair agency, which was well above the target of 312.
- Completed Affordable Warmth Strategy in January 2006, covering all tenures.

#### Priority 4 – Develop sustainable communities

- Training programme completed for tenants in 2004 to support them to sit on interview panels.
- Developed stand-alone Mediation Service in 2005, jointly with the London Borough of Sutton.
- New Tenant Participation Compact launched in 2006
- Customer Information Points introduced on 20 estates providing key information about services and staff contacts.
- Customer Panel and Leasehold Forums established in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

#### Priority 5 – Delivery through effective partnerships

- Multi-agency strategy teams covering issues on Older People, Ethnic Minorities and Affordable Warmth met regularly to oversee implementation of strategies.
- Landlord Forums held twice each year
- An Older Peoples Housing Forum was established in 2006 involving around 60 older Merton residents.
- Gypsies and Travellers Forum established in September 2005.
- Successful sub-regional bids made for Coldbusters and Empty Homes grants

#### ***Areas with Limited Progress***

As well as setting out our key achievements over the last three years, we have also highlighted here areas where we have not made as much progress as planned.

For example, we fell slightly short of the target to direct 15% of Affordable Housing Programme to BME RSLs, and 30% towards 3-bed plus homes. Targeting resources to these was not always possible due to site constraints and cost implications. One of Merton's BME preferred partners had also been inactive for a considerable period during 2004-07.

The plan to develop a model Sustainable Housing Scheme also encountered delays as the original site at Ravensbury garages fell through, although this will now be progressed through the Rowan High School site.

We have had limited success in progressing certain initiatives targeting the private sector. For instance, no household took up the 'Houseproud' equity-release scheme to improve their house condition in 2005-06 or 2006-07, although the scheme was widely publicised. It is believed that residents had concern about

the loan repayment arrangements. Similarly, an initiative offering homeowners a grant to bring empty homes back into use was not well taken up.

Although we had a lot of successes in engaging users from different client groups, including residents from ethnic minority communities, we had less success in engaging faith organisations. More will need to be done by Merton Housing to build on the work already undertaken by the Council through the Interfaith Forum.

## **F. MOVING TOWARDS 2011**

In developing the Housing Strategy 2007-2010, we need to take into account progress we have made, as well as lessons learnt from the implementation of our previous Housing Strategy. For example, when monitoring progress of actions in the 2004-2007 Action Plan, we found that not all actions were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART). We also encountered difficulties in tracking progress of some actions due to staffing changes.

In developing this Strategy and Action Plan, we have ensured that all targets and actions are 'SMART' and deliverable. As well as setting out who has lead responsibility for each action, we will improve communications with lead Council officers and with external organisations to ensure that actions are delivered regardless of staff changes. Our main aim is to deliver better outcomes for residents from our diverse local communities, and at the same time responding to Government priorities.

The five priorities set out in our 2004-07 Housing Strategy are still highly relevant to the work we do and will continue to remain key areas of work in our new Strategy for 2007-2010.

## ***Empower People and Shape Places***

As well as building on the work we have done against the five priority areas, we will need to reflect the progress made locally on improving services for specific client groups such as older people, children and young people and ethnic minorities, through Merton's Community Plan and other local plans, as well as the development of our Homelessness Strategy, Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy and Older People's Housing Strategy.

Government policies are also increasingly people focused with a common theme of giving local people more influence and power to improve their lives. We have made empowering people one of our key objectives of the Housing Strategy 2008-2011, incorporating the priorities of supporting vulnerable people and preventing homelessness.

One of the key concepts introduced by in the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" is that local authorities should act as a strategic leader and place-shaper for their local communities, and that the strategic housing role is at the heart of this place-shaper agenda. We have therefore set 'place-shaping' as another key objective in our Housing Strategy 2008-2011, as the provision of housing in terms of type, size and mix, and actions to improve existing communities, play a key role in this area.

In relation to partnership working, we have made huge progress in establishing a network of working groups that involve and engage external partners as well as users from different client groups. We will continue to deliver improvements to provisions and services through these partnerships, supporting the two key objectives of empowering people and shaping places.

### **Key Goals**

In Part III of this Strategy, we have set out in detail how we plan to Empower People and Shape Places through two key objectives:

#### ***A. Meeting the Housing Needs of Local People***

Under this objective, the needs of the client groups set out below are addressed.

- Households on Low and Middle Income
- Homeless Households
- Older People
- Ethnic Minorities
- Children and Young People
- Other Vulnerable People

#### ***B. Building Sustainable Communities and Shaping Places***

The topics outlined below are covered under this objective.

- Balancing Housing Market
- Affordable Housing
- Decent Homes & Quality Services
- Affordable Warmth, Energy Efficiency & Climate Change
- Healthier, Safer & Cohesive Communities

An Action Plan has been produced to provide a framework for delivering the improvements identified in the Strategy. The Action Plan is set out in Part II of this document.

In addition, we have identified through the review process a number of key goals, which are linked to the objectives set out in our Business Plan. These key goals represent the main delivery areas that this strategy will focus on:

1. Decent Homes and achieving full modernisation of stock (see Part III section B3)
2. Minimise use of temporary accommodation and prevent homelessness (see Part III section A2)
3. Promote home ownership and assist key workers, first-time buyers and households on low and middle income (see Part III section A1)
4. Ensure adequate housing land supply and identify housing needs and demand through a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (see Part III section B1) and promote affordable family homes (see Part III section B2)
5. Promote the development of more affordable family homes, including social rented homes and intermediate housing (see Part III section B2) and protect the existing stock of family homes in the private sector
6. Provide quality housing management across all tenures with increased focus on RSLs, including anti-social behaviour and stock rationalisation issues (see Part III section B3)
7. Empower people to build communities and promote cohesion (see Part III section B5)

***Implementation, Monitoring and Review***

In Part II of this Strategy, we have set out a list of all the actions we will undertake to help achieve our objectives to ‘empower people and shape places’, and the 33 priorities identified within these two objectives.

When setting targets and actions to help achieve our vision, we are ambitious in our approach yet at the same time conscious that we have to work within resource constraints. To help ensure that we will complete all key actions set out in the Action Plan, we have prioritised the actions as set out below:

- High: Actions that are key to the success of the Housing Strategy which we will ensure we complete by 2011
- Medium: Actions that are important which we will endeavour to complete by 2011
- Low: Actions that we aspire to complete subject to resources

The Action Plan will be monitored every six months and reports will be submitted to the Community and Housing Department’s Management Team and the Housing Strategy Review Group.

In order to ensure that the Housing Strategy will continue to respond to changes in national, regional and local policies, the Action Plan will be reviewed and revised on an annual basis.

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE A - MEETING THE HOUSING NEEDS OF ALL RESIDENTS</b>							
<b>A1 - HOUSEHOLDS ON LOW AND MIDDLE INCOME</b>							
1	Work with RSLs to increase the supply of new build 'intermediate' homes for sale and rent, ensuring a good mix to include family-sized homes	Deliver an average of 30% Intermediate Housing within the Affordable Housing Programme per annum, subject to site economic considerations and funding	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Delivered 30% of Intermediate Housing in 2008-2011	More housing options for households that are unable to access market housing
		..... Develop appropriate target for 'family' homes for intermediate housing, taking into consideration targets set out in the Mayor's Housing Strategy, local capacity, and the need to plan mixed and balanced communities	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Target developed, agreed and delivered	More housing options for families
2	Assist households on low and middle income, including key workers and first-time buyers, to access affordable home ownership options and rented homes	Monitor the performance of Tower Homes, the South West London Zone Agent for intermediate housing schemes	Annually	Strategy Manager	Medium	Analyse performance data through sub-regional Intermediate	Intermediate housing is fully utilised
		..... Analyse the take-up of home ownership initiatives, including Right-to-Buy, HomeBuy products, Key Worker	By April 2009	Strategy Manager	High	Housing Sub Group Analysis completed and recommendation	Intermediate housing products are accessible to all low and middle income

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		Living, Intermediate Rent and Social HomeBuy, and evaluate affordability of large family shared ownership homes and set targets for future provision of Intermediate Housing accordingly				s made	households
3	Deliver initiative for first-time buyers through the Rowan Road development scheme	Achieve 10% of all sales at the Rowan Road development to first-time buyers	By April 2010	Development Control Manager	High	10% of sales to first-time buyers achieved at the Rowan Road development	More housing options for first time buyers
<b>A2 - HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS</b>							
4	Continue to secure government funding to deliver homelessness prevention initiatives and to reduce homelessness	Make best use of government funding for homelessness prevention and reduction initiatives granted up to 2010 and to achieve full-spend	Ongoing	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	Full spend of Homelessness Grants achieved	Reduced level of homeless in Merton
		Bid for additional resources to fund initiatives through the CLG and other funding bodies	By April 2010	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	Funding bid prepared and submitted	More resources for homelessness prevention initiatives
		Provide a range of housing options for homeless households to prevent admission into TA or re-admission into	Ongoing	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	Halve the number of households in temporary accommodation	More housing options for homeless households and people leaving

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		hospital				to 87	hospital
5	Strengthen strategic partnerships and widen user involvement, to support the implementation of Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011	Engage the Homelessness Strategy Team to monitor the implement the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2008-13	Ongoing until 2013	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	6-monthly Action Plan monitoring reports submitted to the Homelessness Strategy Team	Strategic approach in tackling homelessness by involving a range of partners including users
		Engage a minimum of 10 users through the Homelessness Forum	Ongoing	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	A minimum of 10 users engaged through the Homelessness Forum	Service Users being consulted and involved in decision making
6	Provide a range of temporary accommodation for homeless households and provide them with support to prevent social exclusion	Implement Temporary Accommodation Strategy Action Plan	Ongoing	Housing Advice Manager	Medium	Completed actions set out in the TA Strategy	Improve quality of life of homeless households in temporary accommodation
		Increase supported move-on accommodation for young people by a minimum of 6 units in 2008-2011	Ongoing	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	Medium	Move-on accommodation increased by 6 units in 2008-2011	More housing options for young people needing support
<b>A3 - OLDER PEOPLE</b>							
7	Provide more housing choice for older people by	Ensure all new housing to be developed to Life-time Homes standard, subject	Ongoing	Development Control Manager / Development	High	Delivery of Life-Time Homes maximised	Increase housing choice for older people

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<b>No</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>High / Medium / Low</b>	<b>Success measure</b>	<b>Desired outcome</b>
	increasing non-institutionalised housing provision, including additional Extra Care housing, and designated housing for older people in the community	<p>to the suitability of sites</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Ensure 10% of all new housing to be wheelchair accessible, subject to the suitability of sites</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Delivered 33 Extra Care homes</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Identify successful models of designated housing for older people in the community</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Work with RSLs and developers to inform Planning Site Proposals for future housing developments</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>.....</p> <p>By March 2009</p> <p>.....</p> <p>By March 2009</p> <p>.....</p> <p>By March 2010</p>	<p>Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Development Control Manager / Development Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Development Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Strategy Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Development Manager / Strategy Manager</p>	<p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Delivery of wheelchair accessible units maximised</p> <p>.....</p> <p>33 Extra Care homes completed</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Engaged older people in agreeing a suitable model for a new older people scheme</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Identified suitable site through Planning Site Proposals</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Increase housing choice for older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Increase housing choice for older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Increase housing choice for older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>More non-institutional housing available and more housing for frailer older people</p>
8	Improve accessibility of housing and related support and advice services for older people, by strengthening links with other	<p>Assist at least 60 older people aged 65 and over to live at home per annum.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Develop and implement eligibility criteria for accessing older people's</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>.....</p> <p>By June 2008</p>	<p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Housing Needs &amp; Enabling Manager</p>	<p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p>	<p>At least 60 older people provided with assistance to live at home</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Eligibility criteria developed, agreed and</p>	<p>To enable more older people to live independently at home</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Housing for older people is prioritised for</p>

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
	agencies, in particular the links with health and social care organisations, to help more older people live independently at home	<p>housing</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Organise two training sessions for advice agencies, to improve quality and consistency of housing advice given to older people.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Maximise spend of grant funding such as Disabled Facilities Grant up to £500,000 and Small Repairs Grant up to £200,000 to older people, subject to eligibility criteria and OT recommendations</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Provide grant funding to a local Home Improvement Agency</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>By March 2009</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Director Age Concern</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Environmental Health Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Strategy Manager / Supporting People Manager / Adult Social Care</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p>	<p>implemented by Nominations Panel</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2 training sessions organised for advice agencies</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Spend of DFG and Small Repairs Grant maximised</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Grant funding provided to assist older people</p>	<p>those most in need and supported schemes have the right mix of needs level</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Consistent high quality housing advice for older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Older people helped to live independently at home through assistance with small jobs, home improvements, energy efficiency and home safety</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Older people provided with assistance</p>
9	Engage older people in the	Implement Older People's Housing Strategy and	By December 200	Strategy Manager	High	Actions completed and	Improved housing options for older

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<b>No</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>High / Medium / Low</b>	<b>Success measure</b>	<b>Desired outcome</b>
	development, implementation/ monitoring/ review of actions to meet strategic objectives set out in the Older People's Housing Strategy	<p>update Action Plan</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Hold at least three Older People's Housing Strategy Team meetings and three Housing Forum meetings per annum</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Co-ordinate at least three meetings of the Older People Housing Advice Network per annum</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Bid for external funding for a Housing Advice Co-ordinator to be based in the Third Sector</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>Strategy Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Strategy Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Merton Seniors/ Strategy Manager</p>	<p>.....</p> <p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>Action Plan updated</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Meetings held to involve older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Housing Advice Network meetings held to improve consistency and quality of advice</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Bid submitted</p>	<p>people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Older people involved in the implementation and review of the Older People's Housing Strategy</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Accessible consistent and high quality advice for older people</p> <p>.....</p> <p>More resources for Merton to improve advice provided to older people</p>
<b>A4 - ETHNIC MINORITIES</b>							
10	Address high levels of homelessness amongst ethnic minorities	<p>Update Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Provide outreach work to two community groups, including an Asian group</p>	<p>By March 2009</p> <p>.....</p> <p>By March 2009</p>	<p>Strategy Manager</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Housing Advice Manager</p>	<p>High</p> <p>.....</p> <p>High</p>	<p>Action Plan updated</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Outreach work to 2 community groups completed</p>	<p>Actions developed to address needs</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Reduced levels of homelessness amongst ethnic minority communities</p>

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
		Achieve objectives and targets of the BME Video Research Project as detailed in Project Plan  ..... Establish BME Youth Housing Forum	By March 2009  ..... By March 2009	Strategy Manager  ..... Strategy Manager	High  ..... Medium	Objectives of BME Video Research Project completed  ..... BME Youth Forum established	Raise awareness of homelessness issues amongst those most at risk  ..... Engage young people in developing prevention initiatives
11	Promote community cohesion through partnership working, and by facilitating joint working between community groups, particularly groups representing different ethnic minorities and faith communities	Develop joint housing projects with a focus on BME groups that promote community cohesion and bid for funding  ..... Undertake Equalities Impact Assessments on large proposed housing developments  ..... Implement 'Housing' actions contained in the Community Cohesion Strategies for the Council and the Merton Partnership	Ongoing  ..... Ongoing  ..... By March 2009	Strategy Manager  ..... Development Control Manager  ..... Strategy Manager	Medium  ..... High  ..... Medium	Funding bid for community cohesion projects submitted  ..... Equalities Impact Assessment completed for large housing developments  ..... Actions completed	An integrated approach to providing services for older people  ..... New developments do not have a negative impact on existing communities  ..... Community Cohesion considerations embedded into all areas of the Housing Service (evidenced from team plans and

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
		..... Housing to implement agreed actions to reach Level 5 of the Equality Standard	..... By March 2009	..... Strategy Manager	..... High	..... Actions completed	..... service based EIAs) ..... All actions successfully implemented
12	Improve understanding of the housing needs of ethnic minority communities, including migrant workers newly settled in Merton	Assess the change in local migrant population and possible impact on housing needs	By March 2010	Corporate Equalities Team	Medium	Assessment undertaken	A good understanding of the housing needs of ethnic minority communities and new groups of migrant workers
		..... Research the reasons for low take-up from the Asian community of housing services	..... By September 2009	..... Strategy Manager	..... Medium	..... Research completed and results used to inform strategy development	..... Better understanding of reasons for low take up of supported housing amongst the young Asian community
		..... Consider findings of the Pan London Gypsies and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment and develop actions addressing needs identified by the research	..... September 2009	..... Principal Planner / Strategy Manager	..... High	..... Results of research analysed and used to inform Site Proposals	..... More accommodation options for Gypsies & Travellers

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
		<p>Monitor RSLs' 'Method Statement' on working with BME RSLs and monitor Affordable Housing Programme outcomes for BME RSLs annually</p> <p>.....</p> <p>See Action 1 for target on delivering more family-sized new social rented homes.</p>	Ongoing	Development Manager	Medium	RSLs' Method Statements and Affordable Housing Programme outcomes for BME RSLs monitored annually	BME RSLs supported by 'mainstream' RSLs in their development and management roles More larger homes developed to better meet needs of ethnic minorities
<b>A5 - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>							
13	Provide suitable accommodation with support for homeless young people to enable them to live independently	Develop 6 units of high support accommodation for young people, subject to availability of revenue funding	By September 2010	Development Manager	High	Delivered a minimum of 6 units of high support homes for young people	Enables young people with support need to move on to independent living
		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
		Work with providers to secure supported accommodation for homeless 16 or 17 year olds	Ongoing	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	Additional supported accommodation for homeless 16 or 17 year olds identified	Ensure no 16-17 year olds are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation
.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	
		Carry out annual analysis of young persons accommodation panel to identify any under supply	By July 2008 and annually thereafter	Strategy Manager	Low	Analysis completed	Unmet demand for supported housing identified to inform future development bids

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
		Move on 15 young people from temporary supported housing to permanent tenancies per annum	Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	15 young people provided with permanent tenancies	Enables homeless young people to move on to independent living
14	Adopt a strategic approach to young people's housing and related services with a focus on preventing homelessness	Develop a Young Person's Housing Strategy	By March 2009	Strategy Manager	Medium	Strategy agreed and published	Strategic approach to addressing young person's housing issues
		Pilot a mediation service for 16 and 17 year-olds	By March 2009	Housing Advice Manager	High	Pilot mediation service established	Reduce homelessness through prevention
		Work with at least 10 schools, youth clubs and agencies to deliver a Peer Education Programme on homelessness awareness	By March 2009	Strategy Manager	High	Delivered Peer Education Programme to a minimum of 10 schools / youth clubs	Reduce homelessness through raising awareness
15	Understand and address the impact poor housing and poverty have on children's lives	Hold focus groups for parents and young people to investigate how poor housing affects children and the results used to inform the development of the Children and Young Persons Housing Strategy	By September 2008	Strategy Manager	High	Focus groups conducted and a research report produced	A better understanding of how poor housing affects children and a more integrated approach to addressing these issues developed

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
<b>A6 - OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE</b>							
16	Research housing needs of vulnerable people and identify priorities for future housing provision and needs for support	Complete research into vulnerable peoples' housing needs and the results used to inform strategy development	By September 2009	Strategy Manager/ Supporting People Manager	High	Research report produced	A good understanding of the long term supported housing needs of vulnerable people which informs annual development bids
17	Ensure vulnerable people can access housing and housing related services	Review client record information every six months and report and publicise findings to service users, stakeholders, Councillors and staff	6-monthly	Supporting People Manager	High	Client record reviewed and results publicised	There is a clear picture of how vulnerable people are accessing support
		Develop rent deposit scheme for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems	By March 2009	Supporting People Manager	Medium	Rent deposit scheme developed	People with learning disabilities/mental health problems can access private market housing and move on accommodation to live independently
		Carry out annual review of outcomes of the Mental	By March 2009	Supporting People Manager	Medium	Annual review completed	Better understanding of

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		Health Housing Panel					the unmet housing needs of vulnerable people which can inform bids for additional resources
18	Work with RSLs and other organisations to make best use of existing housing, and to provide suitable and affordable housing solutions for vulnerable people	Develop ten units of move on accommodation with Ability Housing for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, subject to Housing Corporation funding	By Sept 2009 and annually	Supporting People Manager / Development Manager	High	10 units of move-on accommodation developed	Increase move on provision for people with mental health problems & learning disabilities
		..... Increase housing options for vulnerable people, such as the delivery of learning disability scheme at Durham Close, Cliveden Road, Haselmere Road, Orchard Hill and Burgess Close	By March 2010	Supporting People Manager / Development Manager	High	Additional housing options for vulnerable people delivered	More housing provision for vulnerable people
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE B - BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES</b>							
<b>B1 - BALANCING HOUSING MARKETS</b>							
19	Increase the supply of new housing by identifying land supply, maximise land use by	Deliver an average of 370 homes in Merton per annum (minimum), of which 352 should be new build	Annually	Principal Planner	High	Delivered an average 370 additional homes per year	More market and social homes for residents in Merton

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	levering in resources to renew and regeneration neighbourhoods, and ensure that new homes meet new requirements for energy efficiency and reduction of carbon emission.	Utilise results of Land Supply and Site Capacity Study to inform the preparation of the Site Development Proposals	By March 2010	Principal Planner	High	Results of Study analysed	To maximise use of limited land for housing development
		Develop sustainable housing scheme on Rowan High School site	By March 2010	Development Control Manager	High	Sustainable housing scheme developed	Sustainable housing developed and contributed towards Merton's Community Plan objective of reducing carbon emissions by 15% by 2015
		All new affordable housing schemes in receipt of public subsidy must meet Level 3 of the Housing Corporation's Sustainability Code	By March 2011	Development Manager	Medium	Sustainable housing schemes developed	
20	Ensure a good mix of new housing to meet local housing needs, by considering all available evidence on housing supply and demand in the local housing market, and by taking into account existing housing stock mix in local areas	Collect up to date housing market and housing needs information through a local Housing Market Assessment, feeding into a sub-regional HMA and have regard to a Regional Housing Market Assessment for London	By March 2009	Strategy Manager	High	HMA completed	Improved information on the local housing market
		Develop appropriate dwelling mix targets at neighbourhood level for Merton's Local Development Framework	By March 2010	Strategy Manager	Medium	Targets developed and agreed	Good mix of housing which meets needs

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		to help achieve the right mix to meet identified demand and needs  ..... Evaluate new social housing schemes at neighbourhood level and where appropriate require payment in kind in areas of deprivation	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Proposed housing schemes evaluated	Created more mixed and balanced communities
21	Make best use of private sector housing, to increase the supply of quality accommodation, through bringing empty homes back into use	Bring empty properties back into use by engaging a minimum of 50 landlords through the rent deposits scheme  ..... Organise annual home ownership fair	By March 2009  ..... Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager  ..... Development Manager	High  ..... High	A minimum of 50 landlords engaged  ..... Home ownership fair organised	Better use is made of private sector and empty homes to meet housing need in the borough  ..... Borough residents are informed about home ownership options
<b>B2 - AFFORDABLE HOUSING</b>							
22	Maximise supply of affordable housing, including intermediate housing options for households on low and middle income	Develop appropriate affordable housing target for Merton on all new housing developments, taking into consideration targets set out in the Mayor's Housing Strategy, local capacity	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Target developed, agreed and delivered	More affordable housing units are developed to meet housing need

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		and the need to plan mixed and balanced communities					
		Lower site size threshold from 15 units to 10 units	Ongoing	Principal Planner	High	Affordable housing negotiated on all sites capable of 10 or more units	More affordable housing units are developed to meet housing need
		Develop appropriate target for 'family' homes for social rented and intermediate housing, taking into consideration targets set out in the Mayor's Housing Strategy, local capacity, and the need to plan mixed and balanced communities	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Target developed and agreed	More housing options for families on low and middle income
		Deliver 10 under-occupation moves in Year One	By March 2009	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	10 under-occupation moves achieved	More affordable family homes available to meet needs
		See Action 1 for Intermediate Housing target within the Affordable Housing Programme per annum					More options for households unable to access private market housing

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23	Promote mixed communities and ensure a good mix of tenures in all areas by redressing current imbalances of social housing supply in east and west Merton	Utilise 'Commuted Sum Payments' and target public subsidies to encourage dispersed development of affordable housing schemes, avoiding areas of high concentrated social housing	Ongoing	Development Manager	High	Public subsidies utilised to address geographical imbalances of social housing supply	There is a good mix of tenures across the borough
24	Ensure the plan to re-balance social housing supply geographically meets the aspirations of households in housing need, and has synergy with the Council's Spatial Development Strategy and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy	Utilise the results of the supplementary study into the needs and aspirations of households in need	By Sept 2008	Strategy Manager	High	Results of study used to inform the Local Development Framework and the Site Proposals	There is a good mix of tenures across the borough
<b>B3 - DECENT HOMES AND QUALITY SERVICES</b>							
25	Take forward the Council's proposals for stock transfer as the means of attracting the investment	Develop offer document	By December 2008	'Better Homes' Project Manager	High	Offer document developed	Production of fit-for-purpose offer document
		..... Carry out statutory consultation	..... By March 2009	..... 'Better Homes' Project Manager	..... High	..... Statutory consultation	..... Consultation that meets statutory

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	necessary to fully modernise the Council's homes					undertaken	requirements, explains the terms of the proposed transfer, and encourages and considers residents' views
26	Improve the condition of private sector homes and ensure that more vulnerable households in the private sector will live in decent homes	Increase the proportion of vulnerable people living in private sector decent homes by an average 0.5% each year (baseline 68.5% in 2005) by targeting grants support to these households	Ongoing	Environmental Health Manager / Strategy Manager	High	Proportion of vulnerable people living in private sector homes increased by 1.5% in 2008-2011	Better and safer private sector homes for vulnerable people
27	Improve housing management services across all tenures, addressing quality of services, anti-social behaviour, the 'Respect' agenda, and increase engagement of tenants and residents	Monitor Partnering Agreement for repairs, maintenance and voids	Annually	Property Services Manager	High	Performance of contractor monitored	Improved housing managements for tenants
		Develop and implement Communications and Consultation Strategy	By March 2009	Consultation and Communications Manager	High	Strategy developed and implemented	More tenants participate in the development of the housing management service and in decision making processes
		Develop and implement Action Plan to address	By March 2009	Tenancy Manager	Medium	Action Plan developed and	Improved quality of life for council

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		anti-social behaviour and the 'Respect' agenda on Council estates				implemented	tenants and leaseholders
		Monitor performance of preferred partners through annual assessments	Annually	Development Manager	High	RSL performance data analysed	Improved housing management service for RSL tenants
		Consider the benefits of stock rationalisation for Merton at MERHAG	By March 2009	Development Manager	Medium	Stock Rationalisation considered by MERHAG	Improved management of HMOs
		Promote Licensing Scheme for HMOs and achieve 7 licence registrations	Ongoing	Environmental Health Manager	Medium	Achieved 7 licence registrations	
<b>B4 - AFFORDABLE WARMTH, ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CLIMATE CHANGE</b>							
28	Encourage and provide advice on energy efficiency and affordable warmth across all tenures to reduce fuel poverty and CO2 emissions	Update the Affordable Warmth Strategy Action Plan	By March 2009	Strategy Manager	Medium	Action Plan updated	Plans are developed to continue to deliver energy efficiency initiatives in Merton
		Six-monthly monitoring of Service Level Agreement for Creative Environment Network (CEN) to deliver energy efficiency advice	Annually	Strategy Manager	High	Monitoring meetings held and any performance issues	Free energy efficiency advice provided to residents

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						addressed	
29	Target available assistance and advice on energy efficiency initiatives to households most in need, and to areas with high levels of fuel poverty	Target households identified by CEN's mapping exercise  ..... Support local and sub-regional and local energy efficiency schemes and maximise spend of grant funding such as 'Coldbusters' up to £300,000	Ongoing  ..... Ongoing	Strategy Manager/ Creative Environmental Networks  ..... Environmental Health Manager	High  ..... High	Results of mapping exercise analysed and used to inform grants administration Spend of Coldbusters Grant maximised	Resources are targeted towards households most likely to suffer from fuel poverty  ..... Homes, particularly those most likely to experience fuel poverty are made more energy efficient and fuel poverty is reduced
30	Encourage and ensure the use of greater renewable technology to reduce reliance on fossil fuels	Investigate the feasibility of establishing Combined Heat and Power Network	By March 2011	Principal Environment Manager	Medium	Feasibility work completed	Housing contribution to meeting target of cutting CO <sub>2</sub> emissions across the borough by 15% by 2015
<b>B5 - HEALTHIER, SAFER AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES</b>							
31	Adopt a joined-up approach to place-shaping by working with the Merton Partnership Sustainable Communities	Develop and run the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group and produce regular reports to the Sustainable Communities Thematic Group (SCTG)		Strategy Manager	High	Work programme developed for Housing sub group and reports to SCTG produced	The Housing Strategy is better integrated with other Council strategies

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No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
	Thematic Group/ other partnerships, to ensure synergy between housing and other key contributors to sustainable communities						
32	Identify ways to improve links between social housing policy and work opportunities, and promote social mobility and choice amongst social tenants by encouraging them to own a stake in their homes and to improve flexibility for moves across London	Assess take-up of Social Home Buy in Merton and its likely benefits to local areas to the households concerned	By September 2009	Strategy Manager	Low	Report on take- up of Social Home Buy completed	More social housing tenants own a stake in their homes and are enabled to be more socially mobile
		..... Improve intelligence on the links between housing needs and other social exclusion factors at a neighbourhood level, through analysis of data/ information contained in documents such as the Neighbourhood Strategy, Neighbourhood Plans, Health Improvement Plan	By March 2010	Strategy Manager	Medium	Results of data analysis used to help develop initiatives to tackle 'worklessness'	Better understanding of the relationship between people in housing need and in social housing tenancies and social exclusion
		..... Evaluate potential of the pan London Capital Move Scheme to promote mobility	By March 2009	Housing Needs & Enabling Manager	High	Pan London Capital Move Scheme proposal	Social housing tenants are able to move out of Merton and

**HOUSING STRATEGY REVIEW 2008-2011  
PART II - ACTION PLAN**

No	Priority	Action	Timescale	Lead	High / Medium / Low	Success measure	Desired outcome
						evaluated and recommendation for Merton produced	tenants in other areas are able to move into the borough
33	Work with partners and adopt a targeted approach to address issues such as poor health, child poverty, low educational attainment, community safety and cohesion, in deprived local areas or neighbourhoods, particularly areas with high proportion of social housing	Develop a model for monitoring sustainability in areas with high a high proportion of social housing, based on best practice models already adopted e.g. Moat Housing Group's Sustainability Index	By December 2009	Strategy Manager	Medium	Model for monitoring sustainability developed through the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group	Model established to help monitor sustainability at a local level

## A. Meeting the Housing Needs of Local People

We aim to place the needs and aspirations of local residents at the heart of our work, and make this a people-focused and responsive strategy.

Significant progress has been made locally on improving services for specific client groups such as older people, children and young people and ethnic minorities. The Merton Partnership now includes a new thematic group for Older People, as well as one for Children and Young People, and key improvement deliverables have been developed through the Local Area Agreement. The Council has in place a Children and Young People's Plan (2006-2009), a Supporting People Strategy, and has recently developed an Older People Strategy 'Celebrating Age - Valuing Experience'.

There is also a well-established structure set up by the Council to support the work for vulnerable client groups. A number of partnership boards are in operation focusing on the needs of specific groups. These include the Health and Well-Being Partnership Board for Older People, the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board, the Mental Health Partnership Board, the Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment Partnership Board, and the Housing Partnership Board for Vulnerable People.

In Housing, we have developed a Homelessness Strategy, an Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy and an Older People Housing Strategy, all focusing on the needs of specific client groups. Our Affordable Warmth Strategy also focuses on the needs of

vulnerable households. We will build on this work and have set out housing and related issues concerning these client groups in this Strategy.



## A1. Households on Low and Middle Income

### Strategic Context:

Despite a recent down-turn in the housing market, people on low or middle income are still experiencing difficulties getting on the housing ladder, because of more than 10-years' of house price increases since the early 1990s, and the recent withdrawal of 100% mortgages by high street lenders due to the 'credit crunch'. The 'buy-to-let' phenomenon found in many areas has also placed pressure on housing supply. According to Government statistics, as many as 90% of households would like to own their own home at some point (British Social Attitudes BSA Survey 2000-2001).

However, fewer and fewer first-time buyers are able to get a foot on the property ladder, with a significant affordability gap between what people earn and the prices of homes, and the lack of affordable mortgage finance. There is also a growing wealth gap between those who own their own homes and are enjoying the benefits of increased equity, and those who don't.

The Government also recognises that high house prices places a barrier for many key workers to access housing in areas such as London. This was seen as a key reason for recruitment and retention problems in essential public services like health and education. Although the current credit crunch has led to a significant housing market slow-down, affordability remains an issue for first-time buyers and households on low and middle income, as the reduction in house prices has not significantly reduce the affordability gap.

Low and middle income households who are in housing need, but not in sufficiently high priority to access the limited number of social-rented homes available each year, are unable to find housing solution without assistance.

The UK has one of the highest home ownership rates in Europe, with 70% of households in England owning their own home at present (source: CLG). The Government supports further growth in homeownership to meet people's aspiration. It is also increasingly recognised that home ownership can improve life chances, equality, change the ethos of dependency and reduce long-term poverty.

The Government recognises the significant demand for intermediate home ownership schemes, and has introduced various initiatives over the last few years to help bridge the gap between social renting and full ownership, building on the well-established 'Right-to-Buy' and 'Right-to Acquire' schemes for council and RSL tenants respectively.

A Home Ownership Task Force was set up following the launch of the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003, to consider a range of initiatives aimed at helping people into home ownership.

A number of low-cost home-ownership initiatives were introduced by the Government in 2005, as part of its five-year Housing Plan – 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All', to help key workers, first-time buyers and households on low and middle income to buy their own home. These various HomeBuy schemes and a Key Worker Living Programme include:

- New Build HomeBuy – enables households to part buy, part rent a new build home, usually owned by an RSL.

- Open Market HomeBuy – enables households to buy a share of a home on the open market with an Equity Loan. The scheme has recently been expanded to include the purchase of new homes in the private sector.
- Intermediate Renting - as part of the Key Worker Living Programme, RSLs offer homes for rent, with the rent set at a level between that charged by social and private landlords.
- Social HomeBuy – enables council and RSL tenants to buy a share, at a discount, of the home they live in.
- First-Time Buyers’ Initiative (FTBI) - targets key workers and other low-income households.

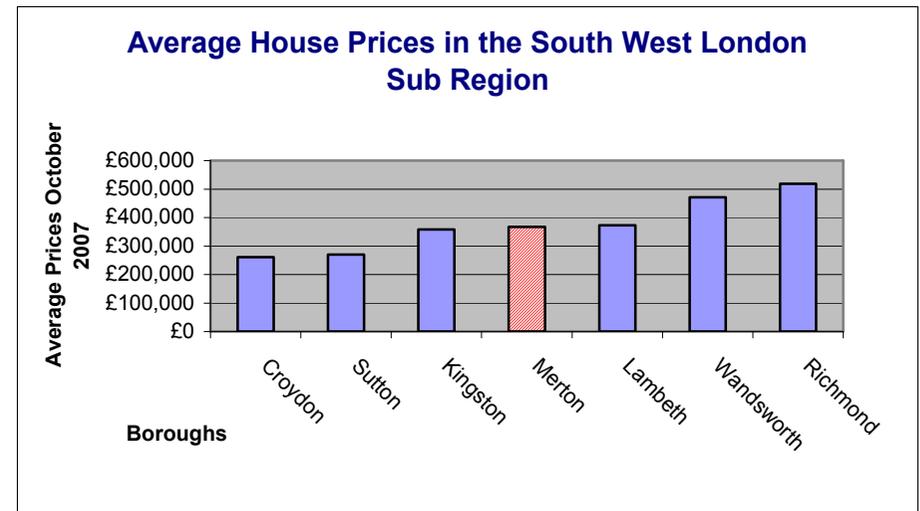
In 2006, a Shared Equity Task Force was set up to consider how the Government could assist ‘intermediate’ households into home ownership using shared equity products.

## What we know:

Research undertaken nationally estimated that 1.3 million households have incomes too high to qualify for housing benefit but too low to buy two and three bedroom homes at the cheaper end of the market. Slower growth in young adult incomes in the 1990s relative to average incomes has driven a reduction in home ownership amongst the under 30s.

Merton’s Housing Needs Survey (2005) shows that 1,040 existing households in housing need could not afford market housing, and the findings suggest that over half of housing need identified in the borough could be met by ‘intermediate’ housing.

Property prices in Merton are almost 50% higher than the average for England and Wales. Prices ranked 11th highest amongst London boroughs, and the 4th highest amongst the seven boroughs in the South West Sub Region in 2006.



Source: HomeTrack

The average property price in Merton was £377,000 in October 2007, a 28% increase from the previous year, with the average price of a detached property costing £1.65 million, and a maisonette or flat costing £257,000. There is however geographical disparity, with prices in the western part of Merton much higher than in the east. For example, the average house price in the SW19 (Wimbledon) area for 2007 was £484,900, compared to £251,300 in the SM4 (Morden) area and £210,950 in the CR4 (Mitcham) area.

According to the TUC analysis of official statistics, the cost of buying a home in London has gone up four times faster than

average earnings between 1997 and 2007. House prices have risen by 309% whilst average earning has only gone up by 41%. Latest data shows that a first-time buyer in Merton would require a household income of £59,310 to purchase a flat or maisonette in Merton, assuming that they have a mortgage of 3.5 times household income and an average savings of £14,237. However the average household income of £41,170 (PayCheck Data - June 2007) is 31% lower than the amount needed.

The table below shows that house prices in Merton are unaffordable to most first-time buyers in Merton.

<b>Economic Status</b>	<b>Total no of households in each profession</b>	<b>Amount a FTB can afford with 3X mortgage and 10% deposit</b>	<b>Amount a FTB can afford with 3.5x mortgage and 10% deposit</b>
Lower Managerial	7,571	£145,210	£169,410
Higher Professional	13,511	£133,180	£155,380
Lower Managerial & Professional	34,094	£94,880	£110,690
Intermediate	15,195	£73,910	£86,230
Small Employer	8,952	£65,610	£76,540
Lower Supervisory /Technical	6,995	£87,700	£102,320
Semi Routine	11,855	£55,370	£64,590
Routine	7,231	£44,470	£51,880

**Source: HomeTrack**

Renting a home in the private sector is also unaffordable for many households. Average monthly rents for private rented

property (Sept - Nov 2006) ranged from £800 for a 1-bed flat to £1,322 for a 3-bed property.

Households on low and middle income are more likely to be affected by the recent crisis in the financial market and the resulting 'credit crunch'. There is evidence that this has already led to increased unemployment, home repossessions and homelessness amongst these households.

## What we have done

### *Right-to-Buy*

The Council continues to assist council tenants into home ownership through the 'Right-to-Buy' scheme. There were a total of 122 council homes sales in 2004-2005 and 75 in 2005-2006. Some RSLs tenants also qualify for the 'Right-to-Acquire'. In Merton, 4 RSL tenants have accessed ownership of their homes through this since April 2006.

### *Intermediate Housing Options*

In Merton, 'intermediate' housing consists mainly of shared ownership schemes and some housing for key workers.

We take part in the Open Market Homebuy initiative, which offers a 25% interest free loan to help Council and RSL tenants (or those registered on Merton's New Starters Register with at least 30 points), to purchase a home on the open market. Applicants must be earning at least £25,000 a year.

We run the New Build Home Buy scheme, which is a shared-ownership scheme where the purchaser initially buys between a 25% to 75% share of a new RSL home, and pays rent on the remaining share. Applicants must be a council or RSL tenant,

earn between £20,000 and £45,000 a year and be a first-time buyer.

Assistance is also available to key workers<sup>1</sup> through the Key Worker Living Scheme (KWL), where they are provided with an equity loan of up to £100,000, with the lender sharing in any rise or fall in the value of the property over the course of the loan. The Intermediate Rent option is also available to key workers, enabling them to rent a new RSL property at 80% of the market rent.

The table below shows the number of applications and the number of properties sold or rented in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

	Applicants		Homes Sold / Rented	
	05-06	06-07	05-06	06-07
Open Market HomeBuy	Not Known	16	4	13
New Build HomeBuy	Not Known	127	29	21
KWL New Build HomeBuy	233	137	46	9
Intermediate Rent	Not Known	31	Not Known	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>311</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>55</b>

**Source: Tower Homes**

<sup>1</sup> Key workers are public sector employees employed in the following occupations - Education, Health Service, the Police, the Prison Service, the Probation Service, Local authority Planners, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Educational Psychologists.

### **Social HomeBuy**

The Government introduced the Social Homebuy Initiative to enable social tenants who do not have the Right to Buy or Right to Acquire, or who cannot afford it, to buy an equity share in their home, with the benefit of a discount. Participation in the scheme is voluntary. At present, two RSLs operating in Merton - London & Quadrant Housing Trust and Moat Housing Group, offer Social HomeBuy to their tenants.

### **Sub Regional Intermediate Housing Strategy**

Merton is a member of the South West London Housing Partnership, along with six other boroughs – Croydon, Lambeth, Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. This partnership developed an Intermediate Housing Strategy in 2006, following more than a year's work.

The Partnership has appointed Tower Homes as 'Zone Agent' for the South West Sub Region, to administer the sales of all key worker and HomeBuy (New Build & Open Market) schemes.

The Partnership has agreed that overall, priorities should be given to applicants whose incomes fall within the following bands:

- Households on low income of below £30k p.a.
- Households with middle income of £30k - £45k p.a.

For schemes in Merton, applicants are prioritised as follows:

- Priority 1: Council Tenants
- Priority 2: RSL Tenants
- Priority 3: Accepted homeless cases
- Priority 4: Applicants on Housing Register (prioritised by points)

The Partnership has a Service Level Agreement with Tower Homes, outlining services to be delivered, including promotional work, research and monitoring of take-up, and setting out service standards expected.

### ***First-Time Buyer Initiative***

Working with English Partnership, Merton is progressing a pilot scheme on the Rowan High School site to develop sustainable green housing. 10% of new homes developed through this scheme will be earmarked for first-time buyers through the First Time Buyer Initiative (FTBI).

Around 50% of the homes made available through the FTBI initiative will be for key workers. The remaining homes will be made available to households identified as priorities by the London Region.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### ***Priority 1***

Increasing the supply of intermediate housing in Merton will benefit households on low and middle income needing a housing solution, and will help 'shape places' by creating more mixed and balanced communities. This will be achieved through building more 'intermediate' homes within our overall affordable housing programme. Research will be undertaken to identify demand for intermediate housing by bed-size, to help inform future development of new 'intermediate' homes.

### ***Priority 2***

We will work with Tower Homes, the South West London Zone Agent, to promote and administer HomeBuy products and key-worker schemes. We will monitor the performance of Tower Homes in partnership with other boroughs in the South West Sub Region, through a sub-regional Service Level Agreement that Tower Homes has entered into.

Take-up of the various home-ownership initiatives will be monitored, including Right-To-Buy scheme for council tenants, HomeBuy, Key Worker Living, Intermediate Rent and Social Homebuy in the borough.

### ***Priority 3***

We will work with English Partnership on a pilot scheme at the Rowan High School site in Merton, to develop sustainable green housing and to deliver shared equity homes for households on low and middle income. 10% of new homes on the site will be set-aside for First-Time Buyers. This is an example of how Merton can shape places through innovative housing development.

We have taken on this project as part of the Government's initiative to challenge developers to limit the building cost of homes to £60,000, which will help bring down the sale price. Merton is the only London Borough piloting this initiative.

The English Partnership's First-Time Buyer Initiative (FTBI) will provide financial assistance to first-time buyers to purchase at least 50% of a new home, and in return will retain a share of the future sale proceeds. Homeowners can move up to full ownership by making additional payments.

## Priority Areas:

1. Work with RSLs to increase the supply of new build 'intermediate' homes for sale and rent, ensuring a good mix to include family-sized homes.
2. Assist households on low and middle income, including key workers and first-time buyers, to access affordable home ownership options and rented homes.
3. Deliver initiative for first-time buyers through the Rowan Road development scheme.

## A2. Homeless Households

### Strategic Context:

The 2002 Homelessness Act placed a requirement on local authorities to develop a homelessness strategy, which should be reviewed every five years. The Government also brought an end to bed and breakfast use for homelessness families with children or expectant mothers, except in an emergency and even then for not more than six weeks.

Recent Government thinking on tackling homelessness was outlined in a strategy '*Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives*' (June 2005), emphasising the importance of prevention. Key measures to tackle homelessness include:

- Wider range of preventative measures
- Increase access to settled homes
- Halving households living in temporary accommodation by 2010
- Tackling social and personal causes of homelessness
- Provide support for vulnerable people

In November 2006, the Government announced that local authorities should end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B) for 16 and 17 year-olds who are homeless by 2010, unless there is no alternative and then for periods not longer than 6 weeks. More recently, it announced the development of a network of supported lodgings schemes across the country for young homeless people, providing varying degrees of support.

In January 2006 the Audit Commission inspected Merton's Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Service. It was assessed as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement for the following reasons:

- Applicants have good access to the service.
- The service is sensitive to vulnerable applicants.
- Housing advice is of good standard.
- Homeless households or those threatened with homelessness are given realistic housing options without having to go into temporary accommodation.

The Audit Commission also identified the following areas of weaknesses:

- A lack of preventative outreach work among ethnic minority communities.
- Overall quality of temporary accommodation is low with no temporary accommodation strategy in place.
- No resettlement support for residents leaving temporary accommodation.

We have since developed a Temporary Accommodation Strategy and consulted ethnic minority organisations on the type of housing advice service they want. Regular advice surgeries have been set up, at Asylum Welcome, a local organisation working with refugees.

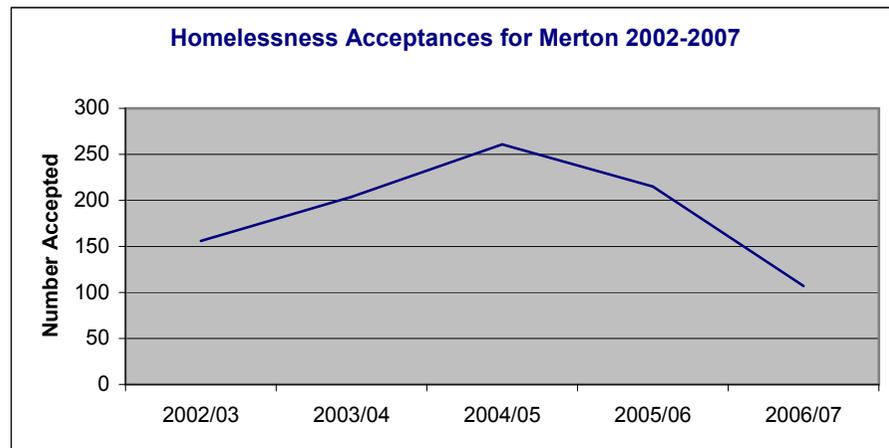
Our Homeless Forum held in June 2007 also identified that we need to better engage with homeless customers in order to improve our homeless services and better understand the reasons behind homelessness, and that we should look for innovative ways to do this.

## What we know:

### *Homelessness Acceptances*

Nationally, homeless acceptances have fallen steadily since 2004, with a 17% reduction in 2006-2007 alone. Temporary accommodation use has also reduced nationally by 10% between 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. At April 2007, 75% of homeless households in temporary accommodation were households with children.

The number of homelessness acceptances in Merton was the lowest in London during 2006-2007. The long-term trend in homelessness acceptances in Merton reflects the downward national trends, with the number of acceptances reduced from 215 in 2005-06 to 107 in 2006-2007, a 50% reduction.



The main reason for home loss during 2006-07 was parents or relatives no longer able or willing to accommodate the household, making up 51% of all acceptances. Households

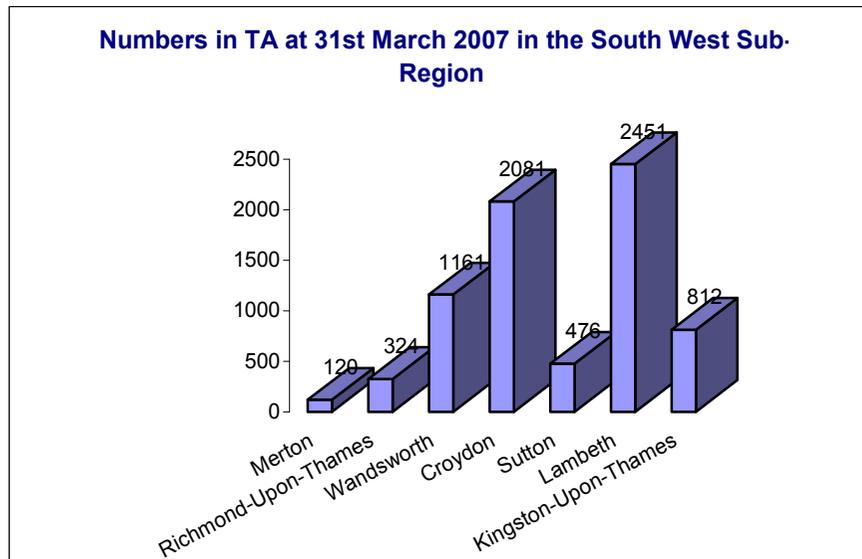
fleeing violence made up 10% of homeless acceptances and loss of private rented accommodation 9%.

However, there is evidence to suggest that the recent credit crunch may already have an effect on homelessness in Merton. In 2006-2007 there were 18 approaches to the Housing Advice Team resulting in 12 homeless applications, compared to only 2 applications from households threatened with repossession due to mortgage arrears in 2005-06.

### *Temporary Accommodation*

Merton has the lowest number of households (120 households – April 2007) in temporary accommodation amongst all London boroughs. Of these, 65% had dependent children, which compares with a national figure of 75%. This is 13% decrease from the same period in 2005 and this downward trend continues.

There is a lack of move on accommodation for young people in supported housing. Young people have difficulties accessing private rented accommodation because of the restriction of Housing Benefit (and the new Local Housing Allowance) for under 25s to the cost of a single room in a shared house only. There is also a need to support young people in maintaining tenancies.



### Homelessness Applicants

The number of 16 and 17 year olds who approach Merton for homelessness assistance is on the increase. During 2005-2006, the second largest group assisted were 16 and 17 year-olds (19% or 40 young people) and this continued in 2006-2007 when they made up 28% of all homeless acceptances. As at the end of December, there were 8 homeless 16 and 17 year olds placed in B&B type accommodation.

Ethnic minority households continued to be over-represented in homelessness acceptances in Merton compared to their share of the population. In 2006-07, they made up 55% of all acceptances but only 34% of the population in Merton. This is particularly pronounced amongst Mixed and Black households, with Black Africans making up 17% of all acceptances, compared with their 3% share of the population.

## What we have done:

Merton published a Homelessness Strategy in 2003, which was assessed as amongst the top five in London. The Strategy Action Plan was implemented with the input of the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Team. Achievements of the strategy include the following:

- Established a Homelessness Forum to engage stakeholders working with homeless people
- Set up a Private Sector Property Shop in 2006 to help homeless households access homes in the private sector.
- Offered assistance through rent deposits to households moving into the private sector as an alternative to temporary accommodation.
- Developed a 'Sanctuary' scheme to help people experiencing domestic violence to retain their homes
- Reconfigured our temporary accommodation at Hall Place into self contained annexes
- Introduced Choice Based Lettings in April 2006, offering more flexibility and choice for those in housing needs
- Ensured all homeless households in temporary accommodation have floating support

We are making steady progress to meet the target to reduce temporary accommodation use by half by 2010 (to 87 households), through housing advice and our successful 'Rent Deposit Scheme' scheme. We are also meeting the Government target to have no households with children or pregnant women in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than 6 weeks.

Merton's Housing Advice Team advise residents on issues such as security of tenure and tenant rights, notice to quit and

possession orders as well advice on how to find alternative accommodation. In 2006-2007, the Team successfully prevented 501 households from becoming homeless.

Merton's Housing Benefit Service has improved greatly. The average time to process new claims for housing association and private sector tenants was 39 days (December 2004), down from 42.5 days. By the first quarter of 2008 this dropped to 29.7 days for all new claims.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We are now conducting a review of Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008, with a focus on homelessness prevention, increasing housing options for homeless households and the widening of user involvement. These priorities are set out in more details below, and will be supported by Merton's emerging Homelessness Strategy (2008-2011) and its Action Plan.

### **Priority 4**

Merton receives funding from a number of Government sources to run homelessness initiatives in the borough. These included an annual Homelessness Grant of £100,000 provided by the CLG, which we use for prevention initiatives, such as rent deposits to help homeless households access homes in the private sector; a Sanctuary Scheme to assist people at risk of domestic violence; and a Rent & Mortgage Rescue scheme. The CLG has recently agreed an annual Homelessness Grant of £120,000 for Merton for three years from 2008-09. In addition, a £100,000 grant was awarded to Merton for the reduction of overcrowding and £36,000 for Merton and Sutton councils to jointly run a Homelessness Mediation Scheme.

The above funding is time-limited, but essential to the successful delivery of homelessness prevention initiatives and to reduce homelessness. We will seek to maximise the use of grant funding, and will continue to secure resources for future years.

### **Priority 5**

We will strengthen the strategic approach to prevent homelessness, by widening involvement of stakeholders and users. A new Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 will be developed through the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Team and in consultation with the Homeless Forum. The strategy will focus on preventing homelessness amongst young people and ethnic minorities and involving users.

### **Priority 6**

We will reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation by ensuring these households bid for permanent homes under the Choice-based Lettings (CBL) scheme. The level of support provided to households in temporary accommodation will be improved. Support will also be extended to those households recently moved into permanent accommodation. We will also provide better information to ensure clients are aware of other support services available to them.

We will improve the quality of our temporary accommodation by monitoring standards regularly and by assessing the level of repairs needed to bring them up to standard. We will also consider replacement schemes where appropriate. These priorities are all outlined in Merton's Temporary Accommodation Strategy, supported by an Action Plan. In addition, we will seek to address the issue of lack on move-on accommodation for young people.

## Priority Areas:

4. Continue to secure Government funding to deliver homelessness prevention initiatives and to reduce homelessness.
5. Strengthen strategic partnerships and widen user involvement, to support the implementation of Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011.
6. Increase housing options, including suitable temporary accommodation for homeless households, and provide them with support to prevent social exclusion.

## A3. Older People

### Strategic Context:

The principles of prevention and promoting independence underline recent government policy for older people across the disciplines of housing, health and social care.

The Government had set the strategic framework 'Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing' in 2001, which identified 5 key areas for improvement in housing: diversity and choice; information and advice; flexible service provision; quality; and joint working.

In 2006, the Department of Health and the Department of Work and Pensions published the report "A Sure Start to Later Life", which aims to end inequalities for older people through better social care and the provision of comprehensive services that can empower older people and improve their quality of life.

One of the most important action points arising from this report was the task of developing a national Housing Strategy for Older People. This task fell on the Housing and Older People Development Group (HOPDEV), which is a Government advisory group led by Baroness Andrews.

The emerging Strategy will consider the following:

- Seek new and protect existing funds to improve marginal private housing stock.
- Establish a national fund for social equity release.
- Focus medium-term goals on preventative measures in people's existing homes.

- Undertake research to establish geographical framework of need.
- Build capacity for independent housing and support advocacy in partnership with Third Sector organisations.

### What we know:

More than a quarter (27%) of Merton's population were people aged 50 and over, and those aged 65 and over make up nearly 13% of Merton's total population. 15% of this group are people from ethnic minority communities. More people from ethnic minority communities will enter retirement and the number of older people aged 85 and over is projected to increase.

67% of all older person households are owner-occupiers, with another 10% renting in the private sector. As of July 2008, 19 Merton residents currently in Adult Placements are people aged 55 and over, representing a quarter of all current placements.

Merton's joint Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey (June 2005) showed that vulnerable households, including older people, were more likely to be living in unfit housing. The Survey shows that special needs households in general stated a requirement for a wide range of adaptations and improvements to the home (shower unit, downstairs WC and single level accommodation).

Through research and consultation undertaken as part of the development of our Older People's Housing Strategy, we know that older people in Merton would like to receive more support to help them maintain independence and remain in their own home. They need more help to keep their homes safe and warm, and to bring their homes up to standard. They also need more

accessible advice and quality information, with a focus on promoting early planning for housing solutions before they reach retirement age.

## **What we have done:**

The first Older People's Housing Strategy for Merton was launched during the 'Celebrating Age' Festival in October 2006. Older people undertook the fieldwork of a quantitative research on the housing and related needs of older people, as evidence to support the development of the strategy, resulting in responses from over 1,000 respondents.

The implementation of the strategy is being co-ordinated by the multi-agency Older People's Housing Strategy Team, chaired by Age Concern Merton. Merton's Strategy also contributed to the development of a national Housing Strategy for Older People by HOPDEV.

Building on the success of our Older People Housing Strategy, Merton Council will be publishing its first crosscutting Older People Strategy, 'Celebrating Age – Valuing Experience', which focuses on Active Ageing.

An Older People Housing Forum was set up in November 2006, to give older people in Merton a 'voice', and to involve them in the implementation of the Older People's Housing Strategy. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Forum were elected from amongst its 60 members.

A 15-unit sheltered scheme for Black African and Caribbean elders opened in Mitcham in April 2006. We have also engaged partners and older people on the proposal to develop of a new

33-unit Extra Care Housing scheme, and involved them in the selection of our development partner Housing 21.

Merton Council has received a national award for the Merton Intelligent Monitoring System (MIMS), which uses new technology to alert agencies of potential emergent of pre-critical situations. The system is managed by MASCOT Telecare, Merton's community alarm service. MASCOT also offers emergency assistance, which enables older people to live independently in their own homes.

There is specific budget within our Housing Revenue Account, set aside to provide adaptations for council tenants, where this is considered preferable to a move to alternative housing. This budget has been increased to £420k in 2008-2009.

We maintain a successful partnership with 'Hanover' to provide care and repair services and other low-level support for older people and other vulnerable clients, and have recently obtained funding to help older people with loft clearance prior to insulation work.

A number of events have been held to promote energy efficient initiatives, and we have secured funding to use 'Energy Champions' in the community to help raise awareness amongst the hard-to-reach.

More recently, we have published 'Housing Matters', a housing options Directory for older people. As well as advice on housing options, the Directory also promotes early planning, and includes an up-to-date list of organisations providing advice and support in Merton.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have successfully engaged older people and organisations working with them in the development and implementation of Merton's first Older People Housing Strategy (2006-2009). In this section, we have included key priorities already set out in the Older People's Housing Strategy as well as other priorities that have arisen since its publication. More detailed priorities and actions are outlined in the Strategy and its three-year Action Plan.

### **Priority 7**

We need to increase the provision of non-institutional housing that incorporates modern technologies such as Telecare, to increase choice and help older people maintain independence. This will be achieved by delivering more Lifetime Homes as well as wheelchair accessible units.

We plan to develop more designated housing for older people in the community with appropriate support, working with private developers and RSLs, to identify the most appropriate model of housing through researching best practice elsewhere and through consultation with older people.

### **Priority 8**

The Strategic Review of Social Care undertaken in 2007 aims to maximise resources for support services for older people and to improve quality of services, by working with and supporting the Third Sector. Targets have been set to increase the number of older people provided with support at home, to reduce the number moving into residential or nursing care homes, and to increase the number of people receiving Direct Payment for care and support services.

We will work closely with health agencies, to identify opportunities for more joined-up services at local level. These will deliver housing advice and related services at strategic health centres, through the 'Better Healthcare Closer to Home' programme being developed by the Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust (SMPCT).

There is a high demand for low-level support and preventative services to help older people remain in their own homes. The challenge is to secure more resources for these types of services, and to support agencies such as 'Hanover'. MASCOT Telecare will continue to provide essential support services to all older residents. Older people will be given advice and assistance to access grants for home improvements and repairs.

A more co-ordinated approach is required to prioritise access to older people's housing. We will develop eligibility criteria for accessing older people's housing, including access to mix-tenure housing schemes, with homes for rent, sale or shared ownership. This will ensure supported housing schemes for older people will be able to accommodate a mix of needs.

### **Priority 9**

We will continue to engage stakeholders in the implementation, monitoring and review of Merton's Older People Housing Strategy, by strengthening the multi-agency Older People's Housing Strategy Team. We will seek increased representation from users through the Older People Housing Forum and other working groups - such as the Housing Advice Network - set up recently to improve the quality and consistency of advice given to older people.

Practical support will be given to the Older People's Housing Forum, to assist with its development and to help the group

become fully independent. Ongoing support will also be given to the Housing Advice Network, which aims to design and run a training programme for advice workers in Merton, and to seek external funding for a Housing Advice Co-ordinator to develop this area of work.

### Priority Areas:

7. Provide more housing choice for older people by increasing non-institutionalised housing provision, including additional Extra Care housing, and designated housing for older people in the community.
8. Improve accessibility of housing and related support and advice services for older people, by strengthening links with other agencies, in particular the links with health and social care organisations, to help more older people live independently at home.
9. Engage older people in the development, implementation, monitoring and review of actions that meet the strategic objectives set out in the Older People's Housing Strategy.

## A4. Ethnic Minorities

### Strategic Context:

Britain is now a more diverse society ethnically, racially and culturally. The Government recognises that whilst diversity has brought about enormous economic benefits, the change has also created policy challenges in meeting the specific needs of ethnic minorities, and potential risks posed to community cohesion.

Ethnic minorities are around three times as likely to become homeless compared to the rest of the population and are at disproportionate risk of social exclusion. This is confirmed by a piece of research commissioned by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) in 2005 on ethnic minorities and homelessness.

The research identified a number of risk factors that lead to higher level of homelessness amongst this client group. These include poverty, unemployment, low educational achievements, overcrowding, stress, ill health and social isolation. These factors reduce the housing options of ethnic minority households and make them disproportionately vulnerable to homelessness.

The Government responded to this by providing financial support to voluntary and community groups working in partnership with local authorities, through the Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund (EMIF), to help deliver innovative projects that aim to reduce levels of homelessness amongst ethnic minority groups. Merton has secured £42,000 through this fund to run a BME Video Research Project focusing on youth homelessness, engaging young people in peer research and peer education.

The CRE's new Housing Code of Practice also recommends that local authorities seek year-on-year reductions in any significant over-representation of particular racial groups among those accepted as homeless or those threatened with homelessness.

The likely arrivals of new ethnic minority communities resulting from the latest EU expansion may impact on community cohesion and pose new challenges for local authorities to meet their housing needs. There is also an increasing emphasis on the integration of new and existing ethnic minority communities to prevent the growth of extremism.

The Government set up a Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2006 as a fixed term Governmental advisory body, to find ways to prevent segregation and extremism. There is also the Communities and Faiths Directorate within the CLG which leads on community cohesion, addressing housing themes such as homelessness and ethnic minorities, overcrowding and poor house conditions.

A £6 million Pathfinder Fund was launched by the CLG in October 2006 to tackle extremism and radicalisation in local communities. Merton is identified as one of 26 priority local authorities in London, and has won £75k of funding to work with local Muslim communities, to encourage leadership from the faith community and help build their capacity.

Housing is regarded as a key service area in the promotion of cohesion and bringing communities together. Issues relating to housing include choice in lettings and how it contributes to tensions in communities; the housing market and how it dictates choice; and the recognition that impact assessments are required for regeneration schemes.

Understanding how population has changed will also help anticipate tension. The Institute of Community Cohesion, based at Coventry University, is now piloting a data-mapping project to help local authorities understand their local communities. This project will initially be led from Housing, looking at maximising use of local intelligence.

Local authorities are also expected to improve their understanding of needs of existing ethnic minority communities, including that of Gypsies and Travellers. The Housing Act 2004 has placed a new duty on local authorities to undertake Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies and Travellers in the local area.

## **What we know:**

The housing needs of ethnic minority communities in Merton are clearly set out in the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy and its Research Report. Analysis of Merton's Housing Needs Survey 2005 showed the profile and needs of ethnic minority households have not changed significantly from that presented in our Strategy.

We know that 20% of all households in Merton are ethnic minority households, and population projection shows that more people from ethnic minority communities will enter retirement over the next 4 years.

All ethnic minority groups, except Indian households, are more likely to be in housing need more likely to be homeless, and more likely to be living in deprived areas.

Pakistani/Bangladeshi households have the biggest average household size, followed by Asian Other, Other, and Black African households. Linked to this, the Survey found that ethnic minority households, in particular Asian households, are more likely to require larger homes, and likely to have to wait longer for an offer of social housing because of the shortage of larger homes.

The proportion of special needs households amongst Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi households is notably above the equivalent figure for White British households.

Homelessness amongst second generation of Gypsies and Travellers has also been identified as an issue.

## **What we have done:**

Merton published its first Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy in May 2004, following a programme of consultation and community engagement, through a multi-agency partnership established to oversee its development. The work of this partnership was recognised nationally as an example of good practice.

The Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team has established a number of sub-groups to assist in the implementation of actions contained in the Strategy Action Plan. Achievements to date include the following:

- The development of a sheltered scheme in London Road, Mitcham, with 15 units for Black African and Caribbean elders.

- Support for smaller BME RSLs such as Millat Asian Housing Association and Tamil Community Housing Association, to help build their capacity.
- Work with the Gypsies and Travellers community through hosting a conference in 2005 to engage key stakeholders; the setting up of a Forum; and successfully obtaining Government funding to improve Merton's permanent caravan site at Brickfield Road.
- Developing a video research project to identify reasons behind the over-representation of BME clients in homeless applicants. The project involves young people in peer research and education.

Merton has led on the development of a Sub-Regional Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy for the South West London Housing Partnership. This Strategy, published in September 2007, contains a three-year Action Plan, which sets out key actions required to address ethnic minority housing issues in the 7 boroughs of the South West London Sub Region (Croydon, Lambeth, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth).

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

Having published our Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy in 2004, Merton is now leading on ethnic minority issues for the South West London Housing Sub Region and the delivery of the Sub Regional BME Strategy. Over the next three years, we will continue to implement the policy agenda set out in our local Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy, and will work with partners to develop actions for the future. We will also share best practice with other boroughs in the sub region, to ensure that the sub-

regional work will add value to what we do locally. Our key local priorities for the next three years are set out below:

### ***Priority 10***

Addressing the over-representation of ethnic minorities amongst homeless applicants is a key priority for Merton. Initiatives already planned included outreach work by the Housing Advice Team to BME community groups; and outreach work to young people in supported accommodation with specialist advice and family mediation.

The multi-agency Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team will update the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Action Plan, and will manage the CLG funded BME Video Research Project through its Research Sub Group. We will ensure that the project delivers its planned objectives and outcomes, which include the production videos by young people on the research findings, a Peer Education programme delivered by young people using the videos as an educational tool; and the establishment of a BME Youth Housing Forum.

The project will help the Council and its partners understand the reasons why BME young people become homeless and will inform prevention initiatives.

### ***Priority 11***

We will work with our partners on the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Team to promote community cohesion, working with Moat Housing Group and Merton's Regeneration Team on a mapping project. We will undertake impact assessments on large proposed housing developments, and will monitor the impact of Choice-based lettings on community cohesion.

We will work with established groups on social housing estates, particularly in areas where there is a high proportion of Muslim residents, to help build their capacity and encourage community leadership, through projects financed by the Government's Pathfinder Fund.

**Priority 12**

Mapping the changes in migrant population in the local area is key to improve our understanding of the changing housing need of ethnic minorities in Merton. We will work with local stakeholders, and have regard to good practice initiated by national bodies such as the Institute of Community Cohesion, to update the profiles of our local community.

We will research the reasons for low take-up amongst the Asian community of supported housing, and will consider findings of the Pan London Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment. Actions will be developed to address needs identified by the research.

The issues of overcrowding and higher level of need for family-sized homes amongst ethnic minorities will be addressed by setting aside 35% of the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) for three-bed plus homes, and we will continue to target 15% of the NAHP to BME RSLs, by increasing the number of homes they own or manage in Merton.

**Priority Areas:**

10. Develop best practice for addressing high level of homelessness amongst ethnic minorities.
11. Promote community cohesion through partnership working, and by facilitating joint working between community groups, particularly groups representing different ethnic minorities and faith communities.
12. Improve understanding of the housing needs of ethnic minority communities, including migrant workers newly settled in Merton, and to address these needs through working with partner organisations.

## A5. Children and Young People

### Strategic Context:

The Government announced in November 2006 that local authorities should end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B) by 2010 for 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, unless there is no alternative, and then for periods not longer than 6 weeks.

There should also be improved access to homeless mediation and supported lodgings schemes for young people and a new youth homelessness scheme. The new scheme brings together the voluntary and community sector to offer a more holistic approach to tackling youth homelessness

The Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy aims to tackle the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy and each local area has a strategy to address this. In housing terms this means ensuring young parents have access to appropriate supported accommodation and there is a Government target that there should not be any 16 and 17 year-old teenage parents living in unsupported accommodation.

Ending child poverty is also a key focus of the Government. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has in a recent speech spoke of the need "to bring together charities, voluntary sector, local councils so that at the heart of building a better Britain is the cause of ending child poverty". The Government aims to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it by 2020

### What we know:

Children and young people make up 25% of the Merton population and the number of those aged 19 and under is set to increase.

Youth homelessness is high compared to other groups and in Merton during 2006-07, 59 16-24 year olds were found to be statutory homeless and of these 28% of all acceptances were 16 or 17. Youth homelessness can be associated with a disrupted family life, parental abuse or neglect, strained relationships with family members, leaving care, overcrowding, teenage pregnancy or having to leave the parental home.

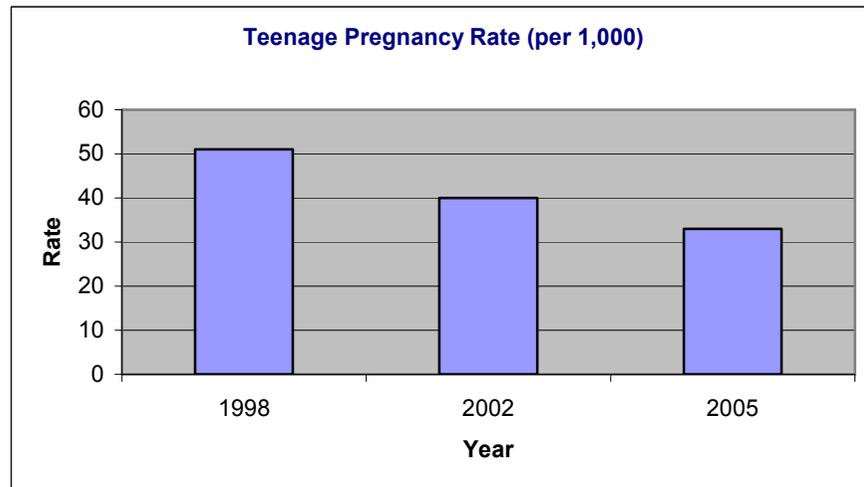
Of the 731 households that approached our Housing Advice Team during 2006-07, 194 (27%) were between the ages of 16-25. Of these 50 were 16 and 17 year-olds, 44 were of no fixed abode and 38 were seeking accommodation.

Young people can face particular problems in accessing market housing due to low incomes, lack of deposits, Housing Benefit restrictions to single rooms rents and selectivity of landlords.

We have 81 units of temporary supported housing for young people where they receive help from support workers about benefits, education and training. Young people do experience difficulties in moving on from supported housing particularly due to the reasons above.

Teenage pregnancy is also an issue facing young people. In 2005, the teenage pregnancy rate in Merton was 33 for every

1,000 of the female population aged between 15-17 (Office of the National Statistics). This was lower than the national average of 41. There is evidence of a steady fall in the teenage pregnancy rate in Merton, from 51 per 1,000 in 1998, to 40 in 2002 and 33 in 2005. Higher teenage pregnancy rates are found in Figges Marsh, Cricket Green and Lavender Fields wards.



**Source: Office of the National Statistic (ONS)**

Another issue that local authorities will need to address is the impact poor housing has on children's lives. Shelter estimated in 2006 that more than one million children in England live in poor housing. This has a long-term impact on their health and an impact on their life chances due to the effect on learning and education.

There is a close association between families living in social housing and child poverty. One measure of child poverty is the percentage of households with dependent children and no adults in employment. In Merton, the highest proportion of such

households is in the eastern part of the borough, in wards with high proportions of social housing - Cricket Green (29%), Figges Marsh (25%), Lavender Fields (25%) and Ravensbury (23%).

Unemployment is particularly high amongst lone-parent households. 9 out of 20 wards have more than 50% of lone-parent households not in employment (48% average). The highest percentage is in Cricket Green (61%) and Ravensbury (61%), followed by St.Helier (60%) and Abbey (58%).

## **What we have done:**

We have established a Young Persons Nominations Panel in 2005, which better matches the housing and support needs of young people with available and appropriate housing. The panel also helps us better understand needs that cannot be met.

Except in a very small number of cases we have met the target to have no 16 and 17 year-old teenage parents in unsupported accommodation, although we have started research into the supported housing needs of young parents to ensure we have adequate provision and the right type of accommodation and support.

We have a commitment to moving on 15 young people each year from temporary supported housing schemes into permanent tenancies. Housing advice and support has been improved for young people by developing monthly housing surgeries at Insight, a voluntary sector organisation that works with young people. Floating support is also offered to all young people in temporary accommodation.

We have successfully obtained funding to run a BME Video Research Project. The research focuses on homelessness and

aims to identify reasons behind the high rate of homelessness amongst BME young people. A pilot project undertaken by students from Merton College has been completed, producing an award-winning video.

## Plan for 2008-2011:

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### **Priority 13**

One of our key priorities is to increase the provision of supported accommodation for young people and to review the suitability of our supported accommodation to meet the needs of young people.

We will continue to provide move on accommodation using Council and RSL stock for young people leaving temporary supported housing and work with Merton Young Single Homelessness Forum (MYSHF) to identify funding for move on schemes in the private sector.

Research into our current provision for teenage parents will be completed to inform the need to develop new services or improve our current services.

### **Priority 14**

A Children and Young Persons Housing Strategy will also be developed with a focus on homelessness prevention and a Young Persons Housing Forum will be established to help develop this.

Outreach work to young people in supported accommodation will also be undertaken to help prevent unplanned pregnancies, improve homelessness prevention work by providing specialist advice and family mediation, and work with schools to deliver a Peer Education programme by using videos made by young people on homelessness as an educational tool.

### **Priority 15**

We will gather information on the impact of poor housing and child poverty on young people, through working with schools to conduct focus group research. Joint actions with other key agencies will be developed to address the outcomes.

We will keep abreast of housing policy development on poor housing and young people and child poverty, both nationally and regionally through the Mayor's London Housing Strategy, to ensure that we learn from and adopt good practice from elsewhere to help address these issues.

## Priority Areas:

13. Provide suitable accommodation with support for homeless young people to enable them to live independently.
14. Adopt a strategic approach to young people's housing and related services with a focus on preventing homelessness.
15. Understand and address the impact poor housing and poverty has on children's lives.

## A6. Other Vulnerable People

### Strategic Context:

The Supporting People programme, established in 2003, provides grants to organisations to help and support vulnerable people to live independently.

A new Government Strategy for Supporting People published in 2007 focuses on the following:

- Keeping service users at the heart of the programme.
- Building on the already successful partnerships with the Third Sector.
- Delivering effectively in the new local government landscape.
- Working towards better efficiency and less bureaucracy.

The Government sees a key role for local authorities to support vulnerable people, by leading local partners in securing integrated local services for them, with Supporting People services delivered through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) framework.

This vision is set out in the Local Government White Paper, which also outlines the Government's aim to enable local authorities to champion the interests of disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

### What we know:

Merton Council currently funds a total of 1,388 supported housing units including floating support, for vulnerable people with special needs, through the Supporting People programme.

Client groups supported through the programme include people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, physical disability, older people, ex-offenders, single homeless and homeless families, young people at risk or with support needs, teenage parents, and women at risk of domestic violence.

The Housing Needs Survey 2005 shows the proportion of special needs households amongst Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi households is notably above the equivalent figure for White British households. However, there is a low take-up of Supporting People programme from Asian households. The Survey also shows that vulnerable households are more likely to be living in unfit housing.

We know that people with mental health problems have particularly difficulties coping in their rented homes, as without appropriate support, tenancies are more likely to break down. People with mental health problems are also less likely to live in owner-occupied accommodation. The 2005 Housing Needs Survey, conducted by Fordham, showed that households where one or more members had a mental health problem, were 3 times more likely to live in social housing.

Vulnerable households are more likely to experience fuel poverty (UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001), as people most affected by it include those on low income, the elderly, and people who are ill

or with disabilities. Fuel poverty is commonly defined as being where people spend more than 10% of their income on heating. In Merton, the joint Housing Needs and Stock Conditions Survey (2005) found that households occupying the least energy efficient homes tend to be vulnerable, live alone and have lower incomes.

Households unable to heat their cold homes have increased risk of illnesses (respiratory, blood pressure, arthritis etc.), and more likely to suffer falls, as well as social isolation. In Merton between 2000 and 2005, there was an average excess of 60 deaths per year.

Merton's joint Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey (June 2005) showed that vulnerable households are more likely to be living in unfit housing. Of the 10,545 vulnerable households occupying private sector homes, 32% were living in non-decent homes.

## **What we have done:**

In 2005, we published a Supporting People Strategy. The Strategy sets out 7 key objectives:

1. Improve the needs analysis with a special emphasis on people excluded from services, and services to the BME community.
2. Improve our partnership working with services providers, stakeholders, support agencies and service users.
3. Work with other boroughs to develop accessible services for people across borough boundaries.

4. Increase resources towards generic floating support services and ensure balanced provision of accommodation-based services and floating support.
5. Improve communications with an emphasis towards service-users and access to services.
6. Set high standards for quality and value for money in the service review programme and performance monitoring.
7. Use the budget creatively, linking with other funding streams for multi-dimensional needs and ensure the overall programme is cohesively linked with other corporate plans and wider partnerships.

We have secured an increasing number of units of new-build homes from Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), to be used as move-on accommodation for special needs client groups such as people with alcohol or drug dependency or ex-offenders. To address needs of clients with mental health problems, we have produced a Mental Health Housing Strategy.

A number of homes are being developed for people with learning disabilities. These include 4 new homes at Durham Close and 3 new homes at Cliveden Road, and at least 10 units at the Doliffe Close sheltered scheme are to be re-designated for this client group. There is also a plan to redevelop the existing outdated residential care home in Haselmere Road, which will result in 8 new homes for people with learning disabilities, along with a range of other general needs family housing.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

**Priority 16**

A lot of work has already been done to understand the housing and related needs of older people and people with mental health problems, through the development of our Older People and Mental Health Housing Strategies and the associated research undertaken.

There is still a gap in knowledge about the housing and related needs of other vulnerable client groups including ex-offenders, teenage parents, and people with substance misuse problems. We will undertake research on these client groups, and will adopt good practice models and research toolkits.

**Priority 17**

We will assist people with mental health problems and those with learning disabilities to access suitable housing in the private rented sector, by developing a rent deposit scheme.

Current provision of care and support for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities will be reviewed, in response to a need to provide care and support that is flexible and responsive to clients' changing needs, as identified by the Mental Health Housing Strategy.

We will strengthen links with key agencies and other partners such as the Primary Care Trust, the Probation Service, and other London boroughs through sub-regional working.

**Priority 18**

We will work with RSLs to provide more new-build move-on accommodation for special needs client groups such as people with mental health problems, people with learning disabilities.

We will work with RSLs to make best use of existing housing, by identifying suitable homes in the open market for RSLs to acquire and improve to a suitable standard, to be used as supported accommodation for vulnerable households. We also need to explore how to make better use of the private rented sector to provide supported lodgings and group homes for vulnerable people.

**Priority Areas:**

- 16. Research housing needs of vulnerable people and identify priorities for future housing provision and needs for support.
- 17. Ensure vulnerable people have access to housing and housing-related services.
- 18. Work with RSLs and other organisations to make best use of existing housing, and provide suitable and affordable housing solutions for vulnerable people.

## B. Building Sustainable Communities and Shaping Places

Through this strategy, we aim to take up the challenge of shaping local communities by working collaboratively with other local agencies, and by contributing to the Council's work on building sustainable communities. Housing can make specific contributions to this work.

By continuing to ensure a good mix of intermediate housing and social rented homes when developing new affordable housing, we will contribute to shaping places in Merton. We also need to meet the challenge of the evolving strategic housing role, which has a new focus on addressing housing demand as well as need. Promoting a good balance of market and social housing in local areas will help build mixed communities.

The place-shaping role is of course not restricted to new housing developments. Improving house conditions as well as good management of existing housing will help improve the quality of life of local communities. This applies to social housing run by the Council and RSLs, as well as private sector housing.

Nor is the place-shaping role restricted to improving physical attributes only. Housing issues are closely linked with other socio-economic issues, and social housing tenants are disproportionately affected by social exclusion. This strategy will also aim to work with other agencies to adopt an integrated approach to build safer, healthier and more cohesive communities.



## B1. Balancing Housing Market

### Strategic Context:

Building more homes of good design, in well-planned communities, supported by high quality social, physical and economic infrastructure, is one of several key strands of national housing policy and is an important part of a local authority's place-shaping role. These policy directions are clearly set out in the recently published Housing Green Paper '*Homes for the Future*', and in the Mayor's draft Housing Strategy, which emphasises the need to build more homes of the right type in the right place.

The Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) also sets out clear guidance for local planning authorities to develop stronger policies that will help increase the provision of a wide choice of high quality new housing, both affordable and market housing, and to help create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities in all areas.

The guidance stipulates that local authorities should:

- Ensure a rolling 5-year supply of sustainable and deliverable housing sites, and bring additional brownfield sites back into use.
- Undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment and a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to provide evidence for the LDF.
- Increase design and environmental standards of new homes and neighbourhoods, moving towards zero carbon development.

- Support more family housing, including more play spaces, parks and gardens for children.
- More flexibility to determine how and where new homes should be built, and be able to set own standards for density.

The Housing Green Paper published in July 2007, sets out a requirement for local authorities to identify enough land to deliver homes needed over 15 years, and announced a new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) for councils delivering high levels of housing.

A Planning Policy Statement on Climate Change has also been published recently, emphasising the need for housing policy to play a part in tackling climate change by reducing carbon emission of new housing. The Mayor of London has also set out in his draft Housing Strategy a target to reduce carbon emissions from housing by 30% by 2025.

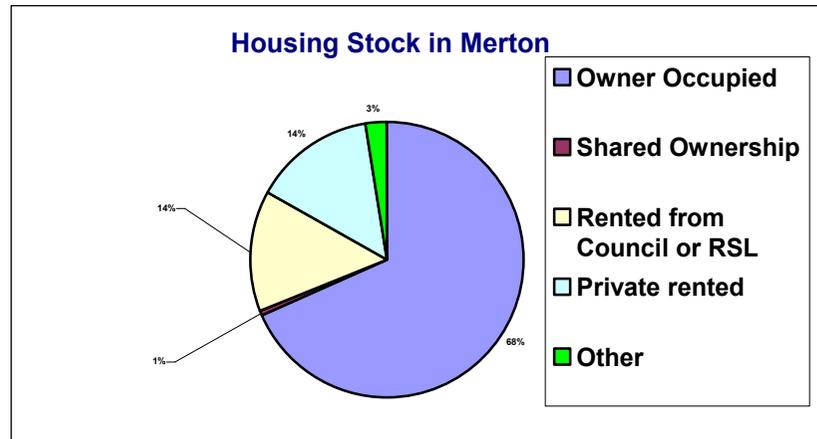
A good quality, well maintained private rented sector is essential to meeting housing needs in Merton. This sector is increasingly used to accommodate homeless households and others in housing needs opting for a quicker housing solution into quality accommodation. Assisting more households into the private rented sector also helps bring empty properties back into use.

### What we know:

Merton has a vibrant housing market with a large private housing sector making up 85% of all housing stock. 68% of all Merton households are owner-occupiers and 14% are renting privately.

Merton faces multiple housing challenges. More homes are needed in all tenures, especially family housing for affordable

rent and shared ownership. Housing affordability is an issue that affects many households in Merton. More details on house prices and income ratio are set out in section A1.



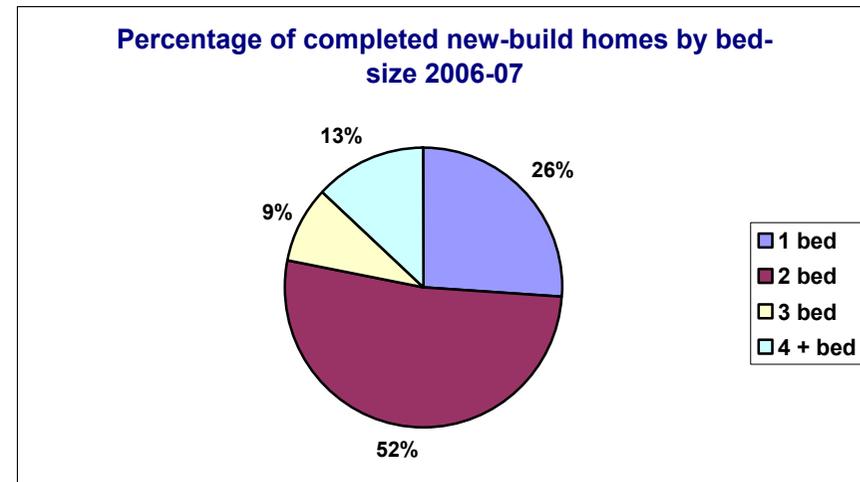
Source: Census 2001

## What we have done:

### Planning for New Housing

There was a significant rise in the number of housing units built in Merton between 2003-2006. A total of 2,136 housing units, which include affordable and market housing units, were completed during this period. This showed a 142% increase when compared to the previous 3 years (2000-2002), and makes up 42% of all housing units built between 1992-2006.

The chart below shows the percentage of new-build homes completed in Merton in 2006-07 by bed-size. More than three-quarters of homes built were smaller homes with 1-bed or 2-beds. Just over one in five homes built were family homes with 3 or 4 bedrooms.



Source: London Development Database

Merton is at present developing a new Local Development Framework, and has consulted on a Spatial Strategy, which proposes to focus future physical and economic growth in key areas. Its aim is to reduce imbalances between different parts of Merton, and in the Area of Intensification in Colliers Wood as identified by the London Plan.

The LDF will be adopted from April 2011 onwards, and will set out Merton's planning policies for housing over the next 15 years.

### Green Homes

Responding to the 'green' agenda, Merton is developing a Climate Change Strategy, which will set out how the borough will achieve the target of cutting CO2 emissions across the borough by 15% by 2015. Under consideration is revision of current planning policy, so that all new residential developments will have to cut their emissions by at least 10%.

### ***Access to the Private Sector***

With nearly 6,000 households currently on Merton's Housing Register waiting for social housing, but less than 500 units becoming available each year, the private rented sector is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the housing needs of many.

Through its rent deposit scheme Merton is increasingly using the private sector to boost supply. There were 82 private sector lettings during 2006-07. This gives those in housing need an opportunity to access housing solutions more quickly, as well as the choice to location and type of accommodation. This scheme also helped bring properties back into use that may otherwise remain empty.

The majority of private rented homes available to housing needs clients through our Private Sector Property Shop are 2-bed and 3-bed homes (totalling 81%). This provides a valuable supply of homes that are in great demand, and particularly helps meet the needs of ethnic minorities households, who are more likely to require bigger homes.

A Private Sector Landlord Forum was set up in early 2005 to improve communications between landlords and the Council. The Forum also plays a role in increasing access to private rented homes for households in housing needs.

### **Plan for 2008-2011:**

Looking to the future, the London Plan has set a target for Merton of 370 additional homes a year for the next 15 years, of which 352 should be newly-built homes. When planning for new housing, we will need to ensure a mix of size, type and tenure,

and take into account the key role of the private rented sector in meeting housing demand and needs. We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

#### ***Priority 19***

We need to ensure adequate supply of housing to meet housing needs and demand in Merton, delivering a minimum of 370 homes a year, and ensuring the right quality and mix of housing, aligning with Merton's emerging Local Development Framework.

Following completion of a study to identify 15 years' land supply in Merton and the completion of a Site Capacity Study, we will utilise the findings to inform the preparation of the Site Development Proposals.

We will look for opportunities to renew and regenerate neighbourhoods when developing new housing, by maximising the value of the investment that new housing brings.

We will work with English Partnership on the Rowan High School site in Merton to develop sustainable green housing. This is a pilot scheme, which will be used as a blueprint for future developments. Sustainable features on Rowan Road site include locally sourced materials such as timber; sustainable urban drainage; external water recycling, and a 'biodiversity within landscape' strategy. There will also be renewable features on site, which includes Photovoltaic, CHP & MVHR systems and Biomass.

#### ***Priority 20***

We will promote mixed tenure by using planning policy to ensure that new developments should consist of a mix of market, social rented and intermediate housing. In terms of size of new

housing, based on current available evidence, we aim to achieve the following mix:

	1- bed	2- beds	3- beds	4+ beds
Overall Mix for all tenures	35%	25%	15%	25%

The PPS3 states that local authorities should ensure that large strategic sites should achieve a mix of households as well as a mix of tenure and price. It does however allow more flexibility for smaller sites, where local authorities need only have regard to “the existing mix of housing in the locality”, with the emphasis on creating mixed communities.

We will gather more robust evidence of needs and demand for housing by undertaking a Housing Market Assessment, and have regard to the London-wide Housing Market Assessment to be conducted by the Greater London Authority (GLA).

### **Priority 21**

We will continue to assist households to access private sector housing through the Rent Deposit Scheme and Homeownership initiatives. We will seek to extend the Rent Deposit Scheme to a wider range of client groups, including non-priority homeless households, in order to assist more households needing a housing solution to access the private rented sector.

We will continue to work with private landlords by strengthening the Private Landlord Forum, and widening engagement, to promote good practice and improve standards of management in the private rented sector. We aim to help landlords build capacity

by providing them with up-to-date information on legislation and access to training.

### **Priority Areas:**

19. Increase the supply of new housing by identifying land supply, maximise land use by leveraging in resources to renew and regenerate neighbourhoods, and ensure that new homes meet new requirements for energy efficiency and reduction of carbon emission.
20. Ensure a good mix of new housing to meet local housing demand and needs, by considering all available evidence on housing supply and demand in the local housing market, and by taking into account existing housing stock mix in local areas.
21. Make best use of private sector housing to increase the supply of quality accommodation, through bringing empty homes back into use.

## B2. Affordable Housing

### Strategic Context:

The shortage of affordable homes, particularly in London, continues to impact on the level of homelessness and overcrowding, and on the number of households living in unsuitable housing.

Kate Barker's Review of Housing Supply (2004) recommended an increase in the provision of social rented housing to deal with the growth in need for social housing and the consequence of the loss of stock through the 'Right to Buy' and 'Right to Acquire' programmes.

The Government has since published the Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3 Housing), outlining its affordable housing policy based around three themes:

- Provide high quality homes in mixed communities for those in need.
- Widen the opportunities for home ownership.
- Offer greater quality, flexibility and choice to those who rent.

The London Mayor's draft Housing Strategy includes a London-wide target of 50% of all additional housing to be affordable. 70% of these should be social rented homes and the remaining 30% to be intermediate housing. There is also a proposal to increase family-sized social rented homes from 35% to 42%.

The Mayor's Draft Housing Strategy has indicated that a more focused and targeted approach to intermediate housing will be

adopted, with the aim of increasing the supply of larger intermediate housing units and developing a good quality intermediate rented sector.

The recently published Housing Green Paper proposed to increase the number of homes built through the affordable housing programme, and fund more shared ownership and shared equity homes, to include the delivering of additional shared ownership homes without grant by using public sector land.

The Government aims to unlock the potential of surplus council land to aid the delivery of more new homes. The Housing Green Paper sets out a pilot to create 14 Local Housing Companies to manage the development of new homes on public land. Local authorities may be also offered greater access to Social Housing Grant.

### What we know:

#### *Housing Stock*

The Government defines 'Affordable Housing' as social rented homes and intermediate housing that are provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

Social rented homes are let through the Council or through RSLs on secured or assured tenancies at affordable rents, and 'intermediate' housing is sub-market housing where costs are above target rents for social housing, but are affordable by households on incomes of less than £59,000 (London Plan Housing SPG).

Merton has a relatively small proportion of social housing when compared to other London boroughs, making up only 14% of all housing stock in the borough (April 2006). There are around 11,150 affordable homes in total, comprised of 6,600 council-owned properties, and 4,450 homes owned by RSLs.

In Merton, 'intermediate' housing is principally shared ownership housing and includes some housing for key workers. Access to intermediate housing is targeted mainly to people on low (below £30k) and middle (£30k - £45k pa) annual income.

**Geographical Distribution of Affordable Homes**

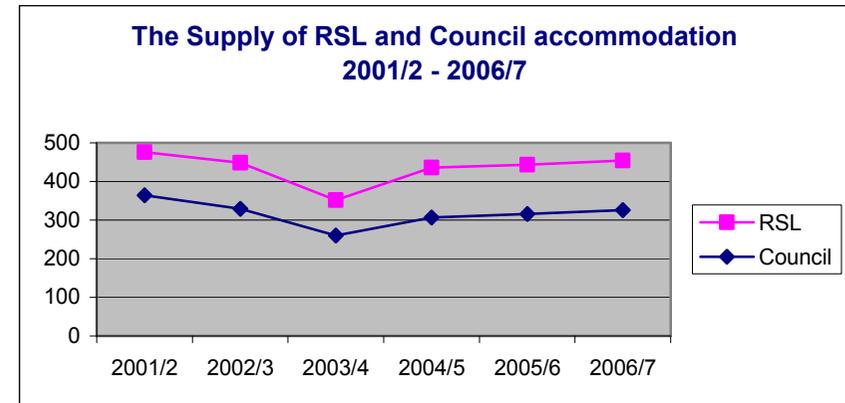
Wards in the East of Merton have a higher proportion of social rented housing than those in the West. The proportion of social housing is particularly high in Cricket Green, St Helier, Figges Marsh and Ravensbury where over 25% of households are living in social housing.

Analysis of affordable housing schemes in the development pipeline over the next 3 years (2007-2008 to 2009-2010) shows that 46% of the estimated 440 new homes will be built in West Merton and 54% in East Merton.

**Housing Needs**

With house prices and private sector rents becoming more and more unaffordable, an increasing number of households in Merton are unable to find solutions to their housing needs. As at February 2008, there were 5,189 households on Merton's Housing Register seeking to access social housing. A total of 6,615 households were on the Housing Register when council tenants seeking a transfer were included. This is an increase of 730 since April 2007 (12%), and an increase of 37% since 2004.

There is an insufficient supply of social rented accommodation in Merton to meet needs. The supply of council and RSL homes has declined since 2001-02, while demand has increased.



In 2006-07, there were 454 council and RSL homes available for renting compared to 476 in 2001-2002. This means that only those in the greatest need can be assisted each year. During 2006-07, only 8% of those on Merton's Housing Register were offered a council or RSL home.



Of the 454 homes available for letting in 2006-2007, 326 were council homes and 128 were RSL homes.

The Housing Needs Survey (HNS) 2005 estimated a shortfall of around 1,848 affordable homes per annum in the borough. There are shortages of all sizes of accommodation, although the greatest shortfall relative to supply is for four-bed homes.

Using an affordability methodology, the survey estimated that 1,040 existing households in housing need (i.e. living in unsuitable housing and requiring a move) could not afford market housing, making up 71% of all households living in unsuitable housing. This represents around 1.3% of all existing households in the Borough.

Further analysis of the Housing Needs Survey suggests that over half of housing need identified could be met by 'intermediate' housing. However, the majority of these households could only afford the cheapest 'intermediate' housing (i.e. prices close to social rents).

'Intermediate' housing costs less than open market housing. It covers homes acquired through low-cost home ownership schemes, as well as rented homes where the rent falls between market and social housing rents.

The survey also shows that households living in the Eastern wards in Merton are more likely to be in housing need, with Lavender Fields ward showing the greatest need.

### ***Sub-Regional Nominations***

There is a perceived mismatch between the spatial distribution of housing need and that of housing capacity within sub regions in London. The Housing Corporation, which funds the building of

new affordable homes, expects local authorities within sub-regions to share lettings that arise on new affordable homes within their areas.

In response, the South West London Housing Partnership, which covers seven local boroughs (Croydon, Kingston, Lambeth, Merton, Richmond, Sutton, Wandsworth), adopted a Nominations Protocol in May 2003. Under the protocol, homes built in a borough that exceeds its notional contribution to needs (based on Housing Needs Indicator) are made available to other boroughs in the sub-region. 75% of these 'excess' nominations, with the exceptions of certain types of housing such as supported housing, are re-distributed through a sub-regional lettings 'pool'.

Merton has 9% of the South West London sub-region's housing capacity between 2007-2017, but only 8% of housing needs, and is therefore expected to be a small net 'importer' of household nominations from other boroughs in the South West London Sub Region.

## **What we have done:**

### ***Supply of New Affordable Housing***

New build affordable housing is often secured through the borough's planning policy on affordable housing, on sites that exceed the site size threshold of 15 units. Between 2004 and 2007, 601 affordable homes were built in Merton. This made up 30% of total residential completions (on sites above 15 units) and met the target contained in our existing Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and Housing Strategy 2004-2007.

We have maximised the development of affordable housing through 'planning obligations' negotiations. 51% of affordable homes completed in this period were built as a direct result of Merton's affordable housing planning policy. Of these, 86% of completions were social rented homes and 12% were intermediate properties.

However, completions of new homes are partially offset by the loss of existing social housing units. The Council lose a large number of homes through the 'Right to Buy' scheme, although the number of sales has fallen significantly. There were sales of 122 council homes to tenants in 2004-2005, 75 sales in 2005-2006, but only 38 sales in 2006-2007. In addition, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) also sell a number of homes to their tenants through the 'Right to Acquire'. Whilst these programmes enable more social tenants to become homeowners, it adds to the challenge faced by the Council, as we endeavour to increase the supply of affordable homes.

### ***Sub-Regional Nominations***

Merton has contributed new-build units to the sub regional nominations pool. For the 2003-06 period, we have committed to provide 86 units of housing for out-of-borough tenants. To date, we have let a total of 21 homes, including homes in Manor Road, Miles Road, Meopham Road, Green Lane and Hubert Close.

For the 2006-08 period, we have so far committed 30 homes to be let to out-of-borough tenants, although contributions by Merton to the sub regional nominations pool during this period is subject to further negotiations.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### ***Priority 22***

Through the LDF and in response to the requirements of PPS3, we will set our overall target for affordable housing on all new housing developments above size threshold. This takes into account the 50% affordable housing target set for London as a whole, as outlined in the London Plan and the Mayor's Housing Strategy, as well as local capacity, and the need to plan mixed and balanced communities.

We intend to lower the current size threshold of 15 units to 10 units. This will increase the number of sites where the provision of affordable housing is required and lead to a more dispersed provision of social housing.

We will also consider the adoption of the London target set out by the Mayor, (subject to findings of a local Sites Capacity Study) by providing 30% intermediate housing within our overall affordable housing programme, to help promote mixed and balanced communities. New build intermediate housing options include New Build HomeBuy and the Key Worker Living Scheme.

We will set a target for increasing the proportion of new build family-sized homes that are affordable, taking into account the 42% and 16% targets proposed by the Mayor of London for social rented homes and intermediate housing respectively.

Reducing under-occupation amongst social tenants also helps release much-needed affordable family-sized homes. We will

utilise the CLG's £100,000 'overcrowding' grant to Merton to encourage under-occupiers to move to smaller homes, thereby releasing family homes for overcrowded households. We have set a target for Year One only, as Merton is part of CLG's Pathfinder involving all London boroughs to develop an Overcrowding Strategy and an Under-Occupation Strategy, which will influence future target setting once completed.

**Priority 23**

High land value in the western part of Merton makes it difficult for affordable housing providers to compete for land opportunities, and as a result currently almost two-thirds of affordable housing is located in the eastern part of the borough.

We will encourage development of more affordable housing schemes in areas of existing low social housing. We are however aware that RSLs developing affordable housing schemes in areas with high land value are likely to face issues of financial viability. To overcome this, we will use flexibility, as allowed under the London Plan in exceptional circumstances, to allow off-site provisions of affordable housing. This will be used to prevent concentration of social housing in areas where there is already a high proportion of this tenure, by encouraging provision on a site in a suitable alternative location. Where an alternative site cannot be found, we will accept financial contribution or cash in lieu from developers.

Cash in lieu, or Commuted Sum Payments accepted through this can be used to subsidise proposed schemes in areas with high land value, where developers can demonstrate 'additionality' to the scheme through financial appraisals (e.g. where the number of family homes can be increased), to ensure their financial viability.

We will also prioritise needs of Merton's residents and aim to achieve the supply and demand targets within the South West London Sub Regional nominations programme.

As the Housing Needs Survey 2005 has identified that the majority of households needing intermediate housing could only afford these homes at entry-level price, i.e. homes that cost well-below market price, we will balance our affordable housing programme to ensure that more intermediate housing will be developed in East Merton to ensure affordability, in view of the significantly higher housing costs in West Merton.

**Priority 24**

We will need to better understand the aspirations of households in housing need through further research, to inform our plan to re-balance social housing supply geographically and to ensure that we provide a choice of locations for these households.

We recognise that the re-balancing of affordable housing distribution will have particular impact on certain communities. For instance, we know that ethnic minority households are more likely to live in the more deprived wards in East Merton, where there is a particularly high level of housing needs (Housing Needs Survey 2005). The HNS 2005 also confirmed that ethnic minorities are more likely to be in housing need and/or experience homelessness and social exclusion.

Whilst a move to a more affluent area will result in many benefits, such as increased employment opportunities, such a move alone will not address all issues faced by socially excluded households. We therefore need to ensure that households moving to new localities have access to a support networks.

We must ensure the re-balancing agenda has synergy with the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, which targets resources to these more deprived eastern wards, and the Council's Spatial Development Strategy, which plans to focus future growth mainly in East Merton.

### Priority Areas:

22. Maximise supply of affordable housing, in particular family-sized housing, including intermediate housing options for households on low and middle income.
23. Promote mixed communities and ensuring a good mix of tenures in all areas by redressing current imbalances of social housing supply in east and west Merton.
24. Ensure the plan to re-balance social housing supply geographically meets the aspirations of households in housing needs, and has synergy with the Council's Spatial Development Strategy and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

## B3. Decent Homes & Quality Services

### Strategic Context:

Local authorities has been set a target to bring all social housing up to a minimum set of decent home criteria by 2010.

The Government's definition of a decent home is one that meets the 4 criteria below:

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing – the fitness standard.
- It is in a reasonable state of repair – i.e. not having key building components or electric and gas heating that are old and need replacing.
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services, such as a reasonably modern kitchen with adequate space and layout; appropriately located bathroom and toilet; adequate noise insulation; and adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort – with effective insulation and effective heating.

The Council's strategic housing role goes beyond meeting the needs of social tenants, and plays a key role in maintaining standards in the private sector. The 2004 Housing Act reflects this and brought in a range of measures for local authorities to protect the most vulnerable residents and create a fairer and better housing market. The main elements of the Act include a new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which

replaces the housing fitness standard, mandatory licensing for larger higher-risk Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and discretionary powers to license smaller HMOs.

The Government's Decent Homes target also stipulates that local authorities should increase the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector, (including households of families with children), who live in homes that are in decent condition to 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2010.

As well as delivering a quality housing management service to council tenants, the Local Government White Paper 'Strong & Prosperous Communities', also emphasised that local authorities will need to deliver quality housing management services across all tenures, ensuring that landlords are responsive to tenants and are actively involved in the 'Respect' agenda.

The White Paper is likely to bring about a new statutory duty for local authorities to secure the participation of residents, and to target disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, faith groups and disabled groups. There is also an emphasis on simplifying community consultation with a Comprehensive Engagement Strategy to reduce the risk of consultation overload.

### What we know:

#### **Council Homes**

As at 1st April 2007, Merton Council's stock comprises 6,400 tenanted properties and 2,597 leasehold properties. It also provides estate services for 780 freehold properties.

A stock condition survey on council homes was carried out in the early part of 2007. The survey was based on a 30% sample,

selected to cover all dwelling types, including blocks and street properties. This provided a higher degree of accuracy in the 'cloning' process used to calculate our overall position than the previous survey undertaken in 2001.

The survey showed that the level of non-decency, at 40% (as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007) was significantly higher than the previous forecast of 20%. The survey also predicted an increase in non-decency to 70% by 2010 if appropriate investment is not made.

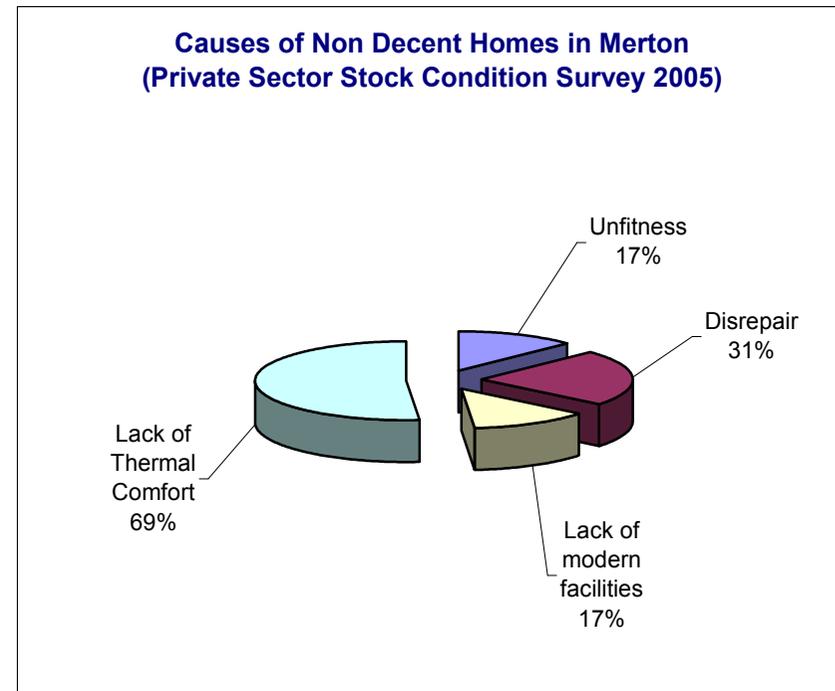
The cost to achieve and maintain the Decent Homes Standard over the next five years is estimated at £35.9m, against estimated resources of £28.5m, which also includes the budgets for essential repairs and maintenance works. It is clear, therefore, that Merton does not have sufficient resources to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010, nor even over the next ten years.

The Decent Homes Standard is however a low standard and does not meet tenants expectations of fully modernised homes. The cost of this over 10 years is projected at £129m against Merton's budget of £51m over the same period.

### **Private Sector Homes**

86% of Merton's housing stock is private sector housing, made up of the owner-occupied sector (72%) and private rented accommodation (14%).

Merton's joint Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey (2005) showed that an estimated 30% (23,272) of Merton's private sector homes do not meet the decent homes standard. The main reason for homes not meeting the standard was inadequate thermal comfort. This was the case in 69% of properties.



**Note: Percentages add up to more than 100 because some dwellings fail on more than one criterion.**

Of the non-decent private sector homes in Merton, private rented dwellings are most likely to be non-decent (40%), and single pensioner households are more likely to be living in non-decent homes, especially ones that do not have modern facilities.

### **Vulnerable Households**

Merton's joint Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey (June 2005) showed that vulnerable households are more likely than other households to be living in homes that do not meet the decent homes standard. There are 10,545 vulnerable households occupying private sector homes, of which 7,182

(68%) live in homes that met the decent homes standard, and 32% live in non-decent homes.

***Housing Management Services***

A survey of council tenants undertaken by Kwest in 2006 showed that 65% of the 748 respondents were satisfied with the overall service provided by the Council's Housing Service. Other findings include:

- 64% were satisfied with the overall repairs service.
- 67% rated estates services as very good or fairly good.
- 54% were satisfied with opportunities to take part in management & decision-making.
- 38% (311 respondents) were satisfied with landlord's response after reporting anti-social behaviour.

**What we have done:**

***Council Homes***

Decent Homes

Merton continues to meet the target for the number of homes made decent:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
2005/06	531	537
2006/07	412	412

However, it is now known that the level of non-decency is significantly higher than previously estimated (see page 72).

Stock options

In recognition of the emerging position on decent homes and the increase in subsidy repayments to the Government year on year,

it was decided in 2007 that we look again at the options for attracting the additional investment required to achieve full modernisation of the Council's homes.

In April 2007, a cross-party Stock Options Task Group was set up to do this and in the summer of 2007, a 'test of opinion' consultation was undertaken with council tenants and leaseholders on the various models for stock transfer and the type of new RSL landlord preferred.

Both the results of this consultation exercise and the views of a cross-party Stock Options Task Group informed the council's decision-making process, resulting in the unanimous decision of the Council in November 2007 to consult residents on a stock transfer proposal. The proposal was formally agreed by the Government Office for London in February 2008.

The council also decided to set up a steering group comprising Councillors from all three political parties, tenants, leaseholders and officers. The main role of the steering group was to consider and make a recommendation (April 2008) to Cabinet on the preferred model of new RSL landlord.

Tadworth

During the course of 2006/07, we consulted residents on the potential for the transfer of housing stock on the Tadworth estate, which lies outside the borough of Merton. Raven Housing Trust (RHT) managed all of the stock in this area with the exception of the 164 tenanted and 62 leasehold properties still owned by Merton.

The consultation culminated in a ballot of tenants and leaseholders on the Tadworth estate in May 2007. On a turnout of 75.9%, 74.2% of tenants voted in favour of stock transfer. The

transfer took place in December 2007 and resulted in £2.4m of repairs and major improvements for the three years following transfer.

### ***Private Sector Homes***

Between April 2005 and March 2007, we made 486 private sector properties occupied by vulnerable people 'decent', which is well above Government target. We achieved this through targeting grants, such as Disabled Facilities Grant and Small Repairs Grant, to vulnerable people and focused on making homes more energy efficient.

'Hanover', Merton's Home Improvement Agency, helps older and disabled people remain independent at home through giving advice on home improvements and repairs, and assists them with repairs work. During 2006-2007, they gave advice to 809 households and helped 84 households with repairs work. The service was promoted across the borough through talks and meetings with voluntary and community groups.

Merton, along with other boroughs in South West London, was awarded funding from the London Housing Board for energy efficiency grants. Between April 2005 and March 2007, 169 vulnerable households benefited from loft and cavity wall insulation through the Coldbusters scheme.

### ***Housing Management Services***

In relation to council housing, performance has improved significantly over the last three years, to place Merton in the top quartile of Local Authority Housing performers. Some of our key achievements include:

- Transferred Tadworth Estate to Raven Housing Trust in December 2007 generating a capital receipt of £3.9m.

- Achieving our in-year decent homes target of making 412 previously non-decent properties decent in 2007-08.
- Developing further initiatives to improve the quality of our repairs and maintenance service and provide greater value for money:
  - The procurement of a new "partnering" contract for repairs and maintenance, which went live in June 2008.
  - Appointments for key trade areas to meet customer demands.
  - Implementation of a new asset management software database to help forecast future works and inform our decent homes and major works programmes.
- Greater focus on anti social behaviour. By December 2007, 88% of cases had been interviewed and 98% received action plans within agreed timescales.
- Reducing turnaround time of empty properties, from 44 days in March 07 to 29 days as at December 2007.
- During the first nine months of 2007-2008 Estate Services teams successfully removed 100% of 500 reported acts of graffiti on estates, compared to our target of 98%.
- The repairs satisfaction data illustrates increased levels of satisfaction. 95.4% of 1,099 respondents said they were satisfied with their last repair and 95.4% said they were satisfied with the overall repairs service.

Contracts were renegotiated with the main repair contractors, so that they are paid a performance-related bonus, based on achievement of agreed KPI's, rather than an attendance allowance basis. This resulted in improved performance, and contributed to higher satisfaction levels and a lower average cost of repair.

Our Estate services team achieved Chartermark status, in recognition of the excellent service provided. We established a Customer Panel, comprising over 450 tenants and leaseholders, to increase and improve resident consultation and participation. We also set up a Leasehold Forum in 2007, with over 150 leaseholders expressing interest in joining.

A series of service improvement workshops was conducted, resulting in over 100 actions being agreed and implemented.

To help deliver quality housing management services across all tenures, the Merton Housing Association Group (MERHAG) has established the Housing Management and Allocations Sub Group in 2006. The aim of this sub-group is to improve information and best practice sharing between the Council and RSLs operating in the area, particularly with regard to re-housing, choice and the Respect Agenda.

Following the implementation of the Housing Act, Merton Council can issue licences for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the private sector to ensure that they meet certain standards. So far, Merton has licensed 25 HMOs in Merton.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### **Priority 25**

Merton does not have the resources to meet the Decent Homes target of 2010. However Merton recognises that the Decent Homes Standard is a minimal standard, and has aspirations to provide fully modernised homes. The cost of this over 10 years is

£129m whilst Merton would have less than half of the required funding available over the same period.

The Council has therefore taken the decision to formally consult tenants and leaseholders on a proposal to transfer Merton's homes to a Registered Social landlord. Government Office for London has formally approved this as way forward for Merton and as a consequence has agreed that Merton does not now have to meet the Decent Homes target until 2015.

In April 2008, the Council agreed the stock transfer model recommended by a steering group, comprising of councillors from all three parties, officers and tenants and leaseholders, as the form of landlord they feel will be the best fit for Merton. The agreed model involves working with an existing RSL to form a subsidiary, which will become the new landlord if tenants opt for stock transfer. A shadow board will be established and an offer document developed along with a full consultation and communications programme. This will culminate in ballot currently planned for Spring 2009.

### **Priority 26**

We will increase the proportion of vulnerable households living in private sector decent homes by at least 0.5% each year, by providing them with advice on how to access grants such as Disabled Facilities Grant and Small Repairs Grant, and other forms of assistance to improve energy efficiency.

To do this, we will work in partnership with the voluntary sector and community groups, in particular the Creative Environmental Network (CEN) and Merton's Home Safety Partnership, to give advice about national and local energy efficiency grants and ways to make homes more thermally efficient and identify non decent homes

There will be a targeted programme of presentations by the Home Improvement Agency to community and voluntary groups to promote awareness of home maintenance and available grants, particularly to those working with vulnerable clients and ethnic minority residents.

**Priority 27**

We will implement our partnering arrangement with one single contractor, for repairs, maintenance and voids services for the whole borough, to provide an improved and 'value-for-money' repairs and management service that will better meet the needs of our customers.

We will complete a Consultation & Communication Strategy, and will develop and implement an Action Plan to address anti-social behaviour on Council estates, to include effective responses to the Respect Agenda.

To help raise the standard of housing management services provided by RSLs, we plan to monitor their performance through an annual assessment. The assessment will look at lettings, tenants satisfaction, voids turnaround and repairs. Over time, the assessment will be further developed to include nuisance, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and other hate crime issues, and the delivery of excellent services that will positively contribute to the sustainability of neighbourhoods.

A report on RSL Stock Rationalisation was produced by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) in March 2007, and commissioned by the Housing Corporation. This calls on all RSLs to examine their patterns of property ownership to address housing management issues caused by widely dispersed housing stock, remoteness of housing managers from tenants,

lack of involvement in neighbourhoods and multi-landlord estates.

Social housing estates in Merton (such as Phipps Bridge, which is owned and managed by four different providers), are likely to benefit from stock rationalisation. This would produce improvements in operational efficiency, service delivery, community engagement, and would contribute towards place-shaping and neighbourhood regeneration. We will pursue this agenda through the Merton Housing Association Group (MERHAG).

We will continue to strive to improve management standard in the private rented sector. As well as running a Licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), we will hold a regular landlords forum to help improve the quality of private rented homes and of services provided by private landlords.

**Priority Areas:**

- 25. Take forward the Council's proposals for stock transfer as the means of attracting the investment necessary to fully modernise the Council's housing and meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- 26. Improve condition of private sector homes and ensure that more vulnerable households in the private sector are living in Decent Homes.
- 27. Improve housing management services across all tenures, addressing quality of services, anti-social behaviour, the 'Respect' agenda, and increase engagement of tenants and residents.

## B4. Affordable Warmth, Energy Efficiency & Climate Change

### Strategic Context:

The Government's Draft Climate Change Bill 2006 aims to set in statute the UK's existing target to reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by 60% by 2050 and establish a 'credible emissions reduction pathway'.

The Government has made clear that Housing policy must play its part in tackling climate change by developing greener homes as housing is responsible for 27% of national carbon emissions. The Mayor of London also highlighted the challenge to link housing and climate change in his draft 'Towards a Mayor's Housing Strategy'.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1996 requires local authorities to improve energy efficiency in residential accommodation by 30% over 10-15 years. The London Mayor's Energy Strategy also stipulates there should be no property in the private sector with a SAP rating of below 30 by 2010 and below 40 by 2016, and that CO<sup>2</sup> emissions are reduced by 15% by 2015.

Thermal comfort is a component of the Decent Homes Standard (see B3). To meet the Decent Homes Standard a home must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort - with effective insulation and effective heating.

Vulnerable households are more likely to live in poor housing and experience fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is commonly defined

as households spending more than 10% of their income on warmth.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 aims to end fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010 and all households by 2016.

The Government has also set a number of health related targets such as reducing inequalities in health outcomes by 2010.

### What we know:

We know that emissions from residential homes make up almost 30% of total carbon emissions. The SAP rating of a property indicates its energy efficiency on a scale of 1-120 (with properties rating 120 being the most energy efficient). The average SAP rating of private sector properties in Merton is 52 compared with a London average of 53. The ratings are better in the RSL and council sectors where they are 66 and 65.5 respectively.

We also know from the Joint Stock Condition and Housing Needs Survey 2005 that in the private sector:

- Homes occupied by lone parents have on average a higher SAP rating (57).
- Homes occupied by pensioners have on average a lower rating (49).
- Households with the lowest SAP ratings are more likely to live alone, be vulnerable and have lower incomes.

The main factors affecting warmth in the home (source: Energy Savings Trust 2007) are:

- The need for cavity walls and loft insulation, as 35% of heat is lost through walls and 25% through the roof.
- The need for more efficient heating or programmable systems.
- The need for double-glazing as 15% of heat is lost through draughts.

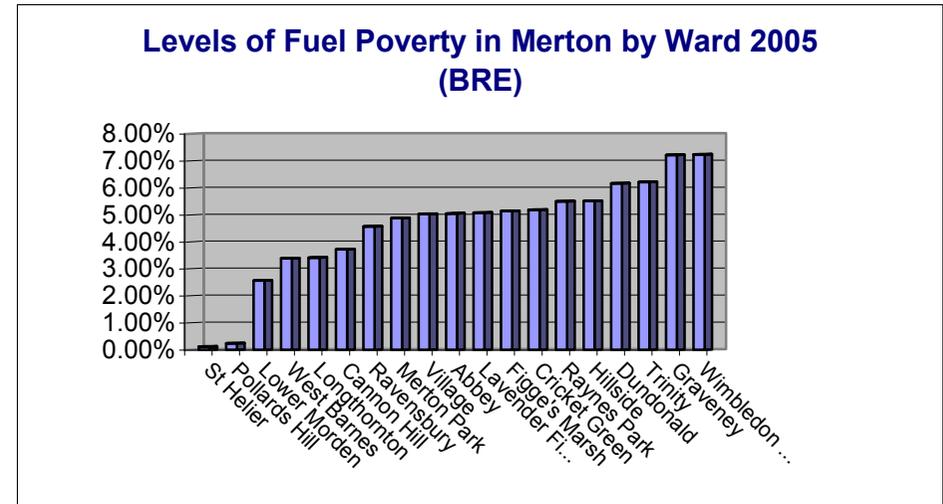
The Joint Housing Needs and Stock Condition Survey (2005) showed that 31% (23,681) of private sector dwellings in Merton have cavity walls but of these 65% (15,393) have no insulation. 9% (6,973) of private sector properties have no loft insulation and 72% (55,358) have insulations of less than 250mm (the current recommended standard). 77% (59,220) of private sector properties have some double-glazing and 87% (66,796) have central heating.

2001 Census information informs us that across all tenure, 10% of Merton's properties do not have central heating, and private sector properties are the least likely to have central heating and more likely to be heated by room heaters.

Being unable to afford to heat homes adequately can adversely affect health and lead to respiratory problems and raised blood pressure, resulting in a greater risk of strokes and worsening arthritis. It can also have a negative impact on children's education if there is only one warm room to complete homework. Most at risk of fuel poverty are households on low incomes, the unemployed, people with a disability or who are chronically ill, single parents and the elderly.

Rising fuel prices are likely to have a major impact on fuel poverty and Energywatch has found that between 2003-6, gas prices increased by 98% and electricity by 41%.

Building Research Establishment data (2005) found that 5% (3,900) of Merton households were in fuel poverty and wards most affected were Wimbledon Park (7%), Graveney (7%) and Trinity and Dundonald (6%).



## What we have done:

The London Borough of Merton pioneered the nationally recognised 'Merton Rule', a ground-breaking planning rule initially established for non-residential properties. The Rule requires the use of renewable energy on site to reduce annual carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions in the built environment. We have gone on to pave the way for the requirement to be extended to residential units.

Responding to the 'green' agenda, Merton is developing a Climate Change Strategy, which will set out how Merton will

achieve the Community Plan target of cutting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions across the borough by 15% by 2015.

In May 2007 Merton revised its planning policy and the Council now requires that all residential units (including conversions) and all non-residential development should incorporate on-site renewable energy equipment in order to reduce the predicted carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10%.

In December 2006 we completed an Affordable Warmth Strategy for all tenures, developed by Merton's Health and Warmth Partnership with representatives from the PCT, Local Authority, Community groups and not-for-profit organisations. A major focus of the strategy is to provide advice and information on energy efficiency and target available grants and assistance to those most in need.

We operated 2 energy efficiency schemes in Merton during 2006-2007. Both the Heat Streets scheme (run jointly with Powergen) and the Coldbusters scheme (run jointly with CEN), provided free and discounted loft and cavity wall insulation and draught proofing and made nearly 300 homes more energy efficient. The 'Here to Help' Scheme run with British Gas provided free insulation and benefit checks to Council tenants. During 2006-07, there were 463 lofts insulations and 226 cavity wall insulations through this scheme.

We worked closely with Creative Environmental Networks (CEN), a not for profit organisation concerned with environmental issues. CEN ran a 'visiting service' in March 2007 where residents, mainly from Longthornton ward, were given a range of advice in their own homes about energy efficiency and available assistance.

CEN also provide advice and information about all aspects of energy efficiency, including home energy checks, and operate a referral scheme for those requiring individual assistance. A leaflet promoting their service has been widely distributed to voluntary and community groups and GP surgeries.

In April 2006, 12 Energy Champions from community and voluntary organisations were recruited to identify and refer households likely to be in fuel poverty to the South West London Energy Advice Centre.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### ***Priority 28***

Making homes more energy efficient both reduces fuel poverty and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We will continue to promote the work of energy advice providers widely across the borough, in particular to households in receipt of benefits. Training and talks will be given to community and voluntary groups on how to identify households in fuel poverty.

We will review and update the Affordable Warmth Strategy and an event will be organised to raise awareness about the impact of fuel poverty and assistance available.

We will continue to provide assistance to residents in Merton through the following schemes:

- The Here to Help scheme with British Gas will continue in 2007-2008 for Council tenants providing loft insulation, window renewals and installing energy efficient boilers.
- The Coldbusters scheme will continue for private residents.
- Discounted energy efficiency measures will be offered to all residents through the Warm Zones Scheme (see below for more information).

**Priority 29**

We will be working with CEN and Warm Front to map households or homes that would benefit from energy efficiency measures, and also to map areas where there are high levels of fuel poverty.

We will target information about grants and discounts and general energy efficiency advice to these households and areas through mail outs and home visits, and through working with local voluntary and community groups, RSLs and other stakeholders.

A Warm Zones Scheme will also be established in targeted areas to provide a holistic service to residents and offer free and discounted energy efficiency measures. It will also identify vulnerable residents and match them with other available assistance and help with benefit claims to maximise their income.

**Priority 30**

We will reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by encouraging other forms of heating and renewable energy which use less fossil fuel, and will offer grants for wind turbines.

A key element of Merton's draft Climate Change Strategy is the use of a District Heat and Power (DHP) Network using Combined Heat and Power (CHP) systems. We will investigate the feasibility of introducing CHP, a fuel-efficient energy technology that uses by-product heat, therefore being a more efficient way of generating electricity. The first DHP Network is intended in Mitcham.

Greater use of renewable technology will be achieved through the implementation of the new planning rule. A proportion of the Small Repairs Grant will also be made available to households in Merton to install renewable technology. In addition we will be investigating options to develop a low carbon emission scheme for affordable housing in Merton.

**Priority Areas:**

28. Encourage and provide advice on energy efficiency and affordable warmth across all tenures to reduce fuel poverty and CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

29. Target available assistance and advice to households most in need, and to areas with high level of fuel poverty.

30. Encourage and ensure the use of greater renewable technology to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

## B5. Healthier, Safer & Cohesive Communities

### Strategic Context:

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong & Prosperous Communities', published in 2006, emphasised the role of local authorities as strategic leader and as 'place-shaper' of local communities. It is the role of local authorities to align services locally by bringing together various agencies to address issues such as community safety, health, and community cohesion.

There is a strong emphasis in Merton's Community Plan on building cohesive communities within Merton. The lessening of health and socio-economic inequalities within the borough is also a major goal.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, published in December 2006, seeks to enact many of the provisions set out in the Local Government White Paper, and contains a number of measures designed to enhance patient and public involvement in health and social care.

The overarching ambition of the Government's White Paper is to secure better outcomes for residents in places. To support this vision, the Government will introduce an area-based and outcome-focused performance framework called the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) by 2009, replacing the current CPA regime.

As the CAA will focus on outcomes, it will need to reflect the perspectives and experience of users and the community, and

take into account the views and concerns of vulnerable people. As the CAA will not focus on performance of individual organisations, outcomes delivered locally will need to reflect the work of all agencies.

The new LAA framework introduced in 2008 acted as the vehicle for local authorities to negotiate with Central Government the outcomes and targets to be delivered locally in collaboration with partners.

Linked to the sense of 'place' emphasised by the Government is the knowledge that areas with high proportions of social housing often have higher level of deprivation, and social housing tenants are disproportionately affected by worklessness, low educational attainment and poor health.

John Hill, in his Review of Social Housing commissioned by the Government, concluded that whilst social housing is still an appropriate option for the most vulnerable in society, there were still a number of issues that need addressing.

Hill believes that Housing should not be the end of support to enable people further progress in their lives, but for too long it has been considered in isolation, rather than in relation to other services.

There is also evidence that living in social housing makes it harder for people to get a job.

Recommendations from the Hills Review include:

- Social housing must work better as a platform for social and economic mobility.

- Social housing policy should be more closely linked to work.
- More needs to be done to co-ordinate support, and to bring advice on housing together with advice on jobs and training.
- Need to promote more movement to enable people to take advantage of work opportunities.

Hill also believes that owning a major asset such as a home gives people the security and confidence to invest in the future, and helps promote social mobility. He has recommended that the Government should look at more flexible ways of offering tenants the opportunity to own a stake in their home.

The 'Capital Moves' initiative, promoted by the GLA, London Councils, the Housing Corporation, the London Housing Federation and London's social landlords, aimed to improve housing mobility through the delivery of a pan-London Choice-based Lettings scheme.

## What we know:

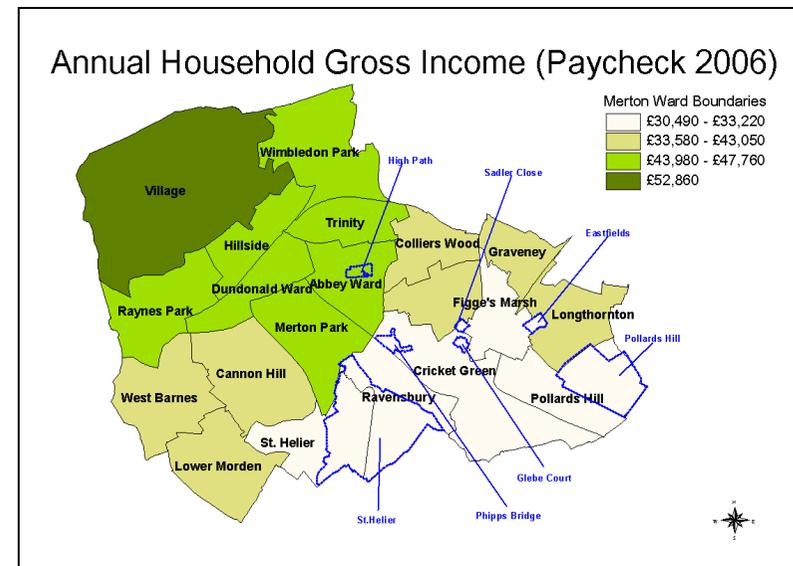
We know that lower socio-economic groups are more likely to rely on social housing, and more likely to experience illness, disability and death from nearly every cause, than the more affluent. Poor housing impacts on life expectancy, and unemployed people are much more likely to suffer poorer mental and physical health than those employed.

One measure of child poverty is the percentage of households with dependent children and no adults in employment. In Merton, the highest proportion such households is in the eastern part of the borough, in wards with high proportion of social housing -

Cricket Green (29%), Figges Marsh (25%), Lavender Fields (25%) and Ravensbury (23%).

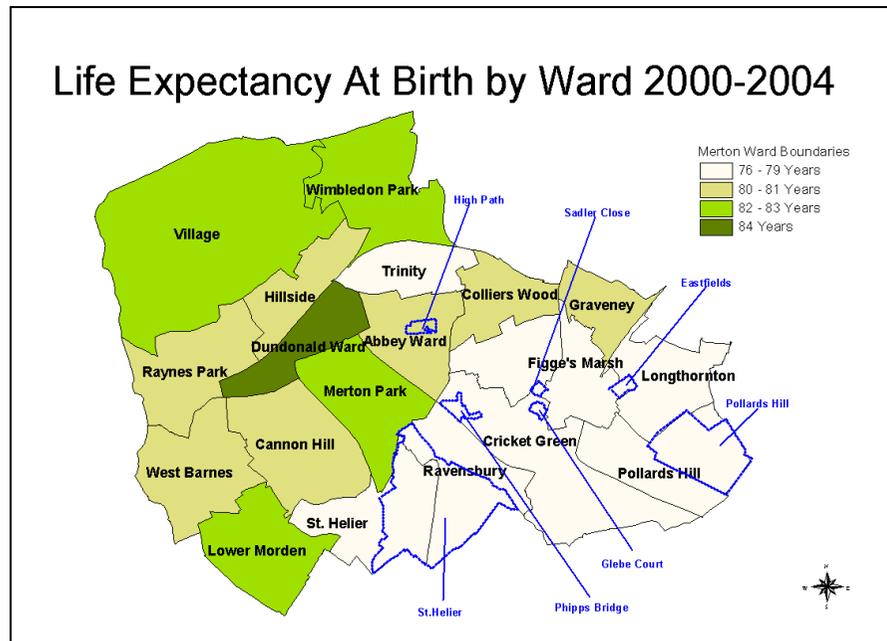
Unemployment is particularly high amongst lone-parent households. 9 out of 20 wards have more than 50% of lone-parent households not in employment (48% average). The highest percentage is in Cricket Green (61%) and Ravensbury (61%), followed by St.Helier (60%) and Abbey (58%).

Average weekly income in the eastern part of the borough is considerably lower than the borough average of £729. Cricket Green has the lowest at £498 per week, followed by St.Helier (£512) and Lavender Fields (£516). The highest average income is estimated to be in the Wimbledon Park ward at £1,057 per week. The following map, which shows annual income data, confirms this East-West divide and shows all larger council estates in Merton are located in areas with below average annual income.



There are large differences in life expectancy between wards within Merton. Life expectancy in the eastern wards of Figges Marsh, Ravensbury, Longthornton and Cricket Green are well below that borough average of 76.9 years. The western wards of Merton Park, Wimbledon Park, Village and Dundonald are significantly above borough average. The following map shows that the larger council estates in Merton are all located in areas with below average life expectancy.

Life expectancy is largely determined by the causes of death and age at death in those aged 55 and over. Risk factors for shorter life expectancy include poor housing conditions, environmental factors, risk of accidents, poor diet and physical inactivity.



Rates of Low Birth Weight (LBW), a measure of infant health (under 2,500gm), also vary across the Merton wards. LBW rates occur at their highest in Graveney, Lavender Fields and Pollards Hill, and lowest in Dundonald, Lower Morden and Village wards.

The East of the borough is 14% more likely to suffer burglaries, 41% more likely to see criminal damage and 64% more likely to experience fly tipping and other forms of anti-social behaviour. There is a marked difference between the levels of crime, anti-social behaviour (including enviro-crime), recycling, cleanliness and fires between wards in the East and the more affluent wards in the West of the borough.

## What we have done:

Merton Housing plays a key part in delivering the sustainable communities agenda being pursued by Merton Council and its partners. In 2006, we have established a formal link between Housing and the work of the Merton Partnership through the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, reporting to the Sustainable Communities Thematic Partnership, which is one of five thematic groups of the Merton Partnership.

Our contribution to health, community safety and community cohesion includes the following:

- Increased the number of vulnerable people living in decent homes in the private sector.
- Supported the work of the Health and Warmth Partnership.
- Maintained links with the Health and Well-Being Network for older people

- Increased the level of engagement with tenants and leaseholders, including the establishment of a Customer Panel.
- Reviewed Anti-Social Behaviour policy and procedures for Council tenants.
- Introduced a Choice-Based Lettings scheme in 2006 to increase choice and flexibility to households needing to access social housing.

Following the publication of our Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy in 2005, a number of Neighbourhood Plans have been developed to help turn the vision of the strategy into real actions. Neighbourhood Plans are already in place in the Phipps Bridge and Abbey areas, with two more plans for Lavender Fields and Ravensbury having been completed.

Merton Council has produced a Community Cohesion Strategy in 2006, setting out clear objectives for promoting cohesion in Merton. There is also a Crime and Drugs Strategy (2005-2008) which sets out actions to improve community safety.

There have been focused multi-agency works in local areas, led by the SMPCT, to improve the health of these communities. Area-based initiatives targeting East Merton were introduced. These include the following:

- The 'Better Healthcare Closer to Home' programme provides a framework for delivering acute, primary care and community health and social care within a geographical context.
- Community Development and Health Training to build capacity of disadvantaged communities to develop skills and knowledge about health and well-being.

- The Merton Healthy Living Initiatives (MHLI) to reduce health inequalities through a multi-agency programme of health improvement.
- Outreach provision of health drop-ins to reduce teenage pregnancy.

## **Plan for 2008-2011:**

We have identified the following priority areas for the next three years:

### ***Priority 31***

We will consolidate the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, and will strengthen its link with the Merton Partnership through a review of membership, governance and the formulation of a detailed work programme.

We will continue to undertake strong joint working with local partners, including the Health Authority and Primary Care Trusts, the voluntary sector, Social Care agencies, RSLs and the business community to deliver shared strategic housing objectives, by sustaining our local Housing partnerships.

We will raise the work profile of the Health and Warmth Partnership through the Healthier Community Thematic Group, to ensure that affordable warmth and home safety issues are discussed through the Merton Partnership. We will also widen participation by involving RSLs in the Health and Warmth Partnership, to help increase awareness amongst RSL tenants.

We will work with our partnerships to develop housing outcomes and targets for Merton's new Local Area Agreement, learning from best practice in other areas with similar issues to Merton.

**Priority 32**

RSLs have for many years been delivering 'housing plus' services to their tenants, which include community development and employment training initiatives. We will share best practice with RSLs through MERHAG, with the aim of increasing employment advice and employment training initiatives for social tenants.

We will have regard to emerging national policy on priority status for social tenants wishing to move in order to access job opportunities, and will develop a policy response locally.

We will monitor take-up and assess the impact of Social Homebuy amongst RSL tenants in Merton, and will work with RSLs to consider widening access to more social tenants in Merton.

Merton will evaluate the potential of the pan London 'Capital Moves' initiative, which proposes that a proportion of Merton's social housing vacancies should be let through a pan London Choice-based Lettings scheme, to help improve mobility for Merton residents and other Londoners.

**Priority 33**

We will work with partners to better target resources at neighbourhood level, addressing links of social housing with unemployment, poor health and low educational attainment. To do this we will negotiate more targets and outcomes set by other agencies directed at local areas shown to be most in need.

If the transfer of council housing stock was agreed following consultation, we will seek to ensure that the new RSL landlord would continue to contribute to the sustainable communities agenda.

Area based health initiatives need to be developed further to take account of evidence of effective interventions and additional geographical areas of deprivation.

The Moat Housing Group has recently developed a Sustainability Index, which is a tool to monitor sustainability at neighbourhood level, and will be piloting it on the Pollards Hills Estate. This will help service providers to assess the impact of local initiatives on sustainability. We will work with Moat Housing Group and other RSLs to explore the feasibility to extend this work to other neighbourhoods.

**Priority Areas:**

31. Adopt a joined up approach to place-shaping through work with the Merton Partnership Sustainable Communities Thematic Group and other partnerships to ensure synergy between housing and other key contributors to sustainable communities.
32. Identify ways to improve links between social housing policy and work opportunities, and to promote social mobility amongst social tenants by encouraging them to own a stake in their homes, and improving flexibility for moves across London.
33. Work with partners and adopt a targeted approach to address issues such as poor health, child poverty, low educational attainment, community safety and cohesion, in deprived local areas or neighbourhoods, particularly areas with high proportions of social housing.

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