

Housing Strategy 2012-2015

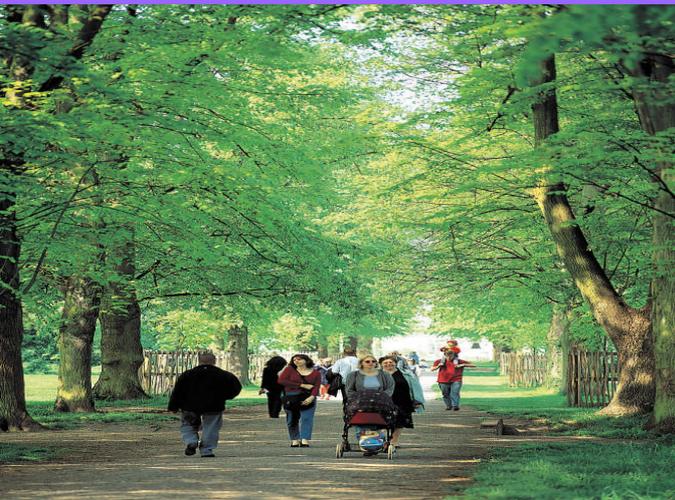


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FOREWORD

By Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Welcome to the London Borough of Merton's Housing Strategy for 2012-15. I hope you'll agree that it's an enabling document, which demonstrates both vision and pragmatism in setting out our shared aims and objectives for improving the quality, availability and accessibility of housing in our Borough.

Creating and working to a Housing Strategy in London is always a challenge, and now more than ever due to a number of factors: among others, it's harder to get onto the ownership ladder, local house prices are still rising across the Borough, there is less government funding for new social rented homes. We're also at a time of change, with new legislation being produced for housing tenancy arrangements, benefits payments and localism.

This strategy is designed to meet these challenges. It is also written when Merton for the first time no longer owns its own stock. This means that Merton will and must continue to work closely with all housing providers: registered providers in the social rented sector, private landlords, and others. I believe the strategy has both the flexibility and the strength to do all this.

Merton's Housing Team recognise, as I do, that housing is much more than a roof over our heads: it's a fundamental part of our lives, and contributes to our health, our ability to work, our children's education and our own wellbeing. Effective, pragmatic provision of housing is also integral to achieving Merton's regeneration ambitions, which is why we have developed this strategy in dialogue with stakeholders and partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

I hope that you are as encouraged by this strategy as I am, and that it offers you a clear explanation of how Merton will tackle the challenges ahead. Please let me know if you have any comments: I look forward to working with you all in implementing it.

Councillor Nick Draper
Cabinet Member for Community and Culture
London Borough of Merton

Introduction

Following the conclusion of Merton's Housing Strategy 2008-2011, a review was undertaken to assess key outcomes delivered over the last 3 years, and to identify key objectives and priorities for the new Housing Strategy 2012-2015. The review is timely given the raft of policy changes being brought in by the Coalition government, and provides an opportunity for the council to consider how best to respond to these changes.

The new Housing Strategy for 2012-2015 outlines local housing needs and demand as well as housing supply, identify gaps in services and provisions, and set out how to make best use of scarce resources to meet needs. With drastic cuts in public expenditure and an increasing number of households affected by the current economy situation in the UK and Europe, it is becoming increasingly challenging for local authorities to meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable households and households on low income, hence strategic planning now plays an even more crucial role.

Although it will be challenging to deliver services to meet needs in the next three years due to significant reduction in public expenditure, the radical rethink in government policies does present opportunities for housing authorities to think innovatively and seek different models of delivery. The Housing Strategy 2012-2015 was formulated with this in mind.

The Coalition Government published its housing strategy, *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*, in November 2011. The main focus of the strategy is to get the housing market moving again and to lay foundations for a more responsive and stable housing market in the future. In it, the government

also announced its intention to increase the caps on Right to Buy discounts to enable more tenants to achieve their ambition for home ownership, while ensuring that replacement 'Affordable Rent' homes are built.

Merton's Housing Strategy has been formulated in line with the priorities set out in the government's Housing Strategy. We have also taken into account the statutory requirement for our local Housing Strategy to be in "General Conformity" with the London Housing Strategy. Consultation on the Mayor's Strategy was completed in March 2012. Initiatives and actions included in the strategy include the delivery of 50,000 new affordable homes in London, more resources for the First Steps programme to help low and middle income households to access homeownership.

The Mayor is also taking steps to end rough sleeping in London by end of 2012, address overcrowding and under-occupation, and the introduction of the Pan London Mobility Scheme, which requires boroughs to contribute 5% of their affordable homes available for let to the London pot on a reciprocal basis. As from April 2012, the GLA has taken on the HCA's statutory powers and functions as applied in London.

The Housing Strategy also reflects changes in the council as it progresses towards Merton 2015 and becomes a smaller local authority, and will consider how housing outcomes can be maximised for local people with reducing resources. The Housing Strategy is a key supporting document for Merton's Core Strategy, and helps to influence the future affordable housing build programme by informing and evidencing planning decisions, through the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, and through the Affordable Housing Policy and housing Bed-size Mix Policy set out under Objective 1 the Strategy.

The research work undertaken on accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers also provide the council's Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy with evidence required to plan for additional caravan sites over the next 15 years.

The Housing Strategy will also deliver outcomes that contributes to Merton's Sustainable Community Plan 2009-2019, not only towards objectives set by the Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership, which covers housing issues, but also towards objectives set by the other 3 thematic groups of the Merton Partnership, namely the Health & Wellbeing Board, Children's Trust, and the Safer & Stronger Communities Partnership, as the Housing Strategy contains priorities and actions to meet the needs of older and vulnerable people, young people, and has a focus on socio-economic regeneration that will contribute towards safer and stronger communities.

As well as contributing to the Sustainable Community Plan 2009-2019 and the LDF Core Strategy, the Housing Strategy 2012-2015 will also support the delivery of key borough plans such as Merton BME Forum's BAME Strategic Plan, the emerging Regeneration Delivery Plan, and MPH's Community and Economic Development Plan.

Housing Needs & Housing Market in Merton

Demographics

Merton's population is estimated to be 208,000 (Projections based on ONS mid year population estimates 2008) and projected to increase to 223,700 in 2019, with a total of 80,578 households (HSSA 2010). The number of households in Merton is set to increase to 86,800 by 2016 (8%) and 92,400 (15%) by 2016, with much of the increase expected to be of single person households. Single person

households currently make up 36% of all households, but will increase by 7,800 by 2016, making up 42% of all households. Lone parents households are also set to increase by 9%.

Housing Stock

Merton's social housing stock is amongst the lowest in London at 14% of total stock. The London average is around 22% with social housing stock as high as over 59% in large boroughs such as Southwark. The profile of stock differs between owner-occupied and social housing in Merton, with 58% of social housing and 63% of private rented homes being flats compared to only 24% in the owner-occupied sector. Social housing and private rented homes also typically contain fewer rooms than those that are owner-occupied.

Housing Tenures

Of the 78,884 households in Merton at the time of the Census 2001, 70% (56,405) are owner-occupiers, 14% (10,970) are social housing tenants and 16% (12,892) are renting privately. Latest GLA estimates show that in 2010, the number of Merton households has increased to 84,640, with social housing tenants now making up 13% (11,376) of all households.

Housing Needs

There is high level of housing needs amongst Merton residents. Merton's Housing Needs Survey identified a need to develop an additional 1,848 affordable homes per annum between 2005 and 2010 if all housing need in the borough were to be met. The 2010 Merton Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) showed that across Merton, around 17.2% of households are unsuitably housed, equivalent to 13,860 households (including owner-occupiers), with much of the unsuitable housing being in the eastern part of the borough. The Assessment has taken into account migrations into and out of Merton and estimates show an average net loss of about 2,000 persons between 2002 and 2006.

There are now over 7,500 households on Merton’s Housing Register, up from 6,350 in April 2011. Around 42% of households on the Register fall within the statutory “reasonable preference” categories which councils have to give priority to when allocating social housing.

Overcrowding and Under-Occupation

A total of 12.4% of households in Merton lived in overcrowded conditions at the time of the 2001 Census. Merton’s Housing Needs Survey 2005 showed 15% of social rented households being overcrowded compared to 9% in the private rented sector and 2.2% in the owner-occupied sector. GLA estimates that the level of overcrowding has increased approximately a third on the number 10 years ago. Recent Merton figures (2010-11) showed a total of 498 overcrowded households on Merton’s Transfers Register. Of these, 66 were severely overcrowded i.e. lack 2 or more bedrooms.

The Mayor’s Overcrowding Action Plan showed under-occupation of 25% across all tenures in London, far higher than the 6.8% overcrowding. This is also the case in Merton, where 35% of social tenants were under-occupiers compared to 8% who were overcrowded at the time of the Census 2001, and the 2005 Housing Needs Survey showed under-occupation at 30% and overcrowding at 15%. This means that at least 3,500 households living in the social rented sector are under-occupying their homes, many of these are older people households. Between 2008-2011, the council has achieved 53 under-occupation moves, exceeding our target of 30.

Bed Size Requirements

In relation to size of homes, although Merton’s Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2010 indicates a high need for larger homes across all tenures, the most pressing need for affordable housing is for 1-bed and 2-bed homes. Overall, 3,360 households or 50% of the

6,679 Housing Register applicants (June 2011) require 1-bed homes, while 1,804 or 27% require 2-beds, and 1,514 or 23% needed 3-bed plus homes.

With regards to need for intermediate housing, the HNS 2005 found that only ‘entry-level’ intermediate housing would be affordable to households in housing needs. The SHMA 2010 shows the likely requirement for intermediate housing as between 33% to 57% of the affordable housing programme. The assessment was based on predicted house price trends under a number a scenarios, and estimated that house prices in 2007 were 16.5% above long-term trend, with house prices relative to household incomes likely to fall by 15%-20% to 2021. The assessed need for intermediate housing therefore falls within the target of 40% intermediate housing set out in Merton’s Core Strategy.

Housing Market Affordability

For people on low and middle income wanting to purchase their own homes, house prices remain unaffordable in Merton despite the housing market downturn. The average house price in Merton is £412,000 and the average lower quartile price is £231,000, above the London average of £393,100 and £218,200 respectively (Hometrack, June 2011). The table below show average house prices by bedsize.

	Average House price
1-bed flat	£201,800
2-bed flat	£266,900
2-bed house	£340,600
3-bed house	£341,300
4-bed house	£675,100

Source: Hometrack June 2011

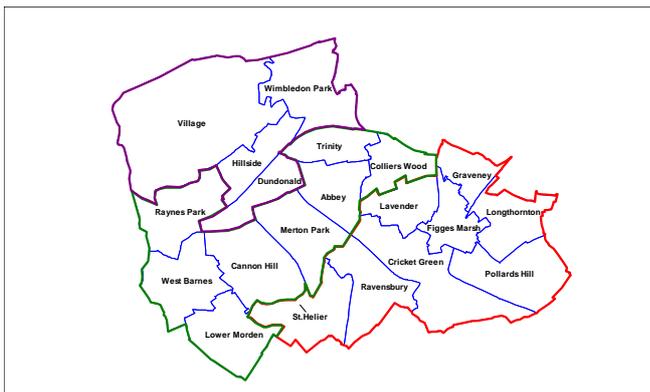
The average annual gross income for Merton resident in 2011 is £43,931 (CACI) or c. £30,915 net of tax and NI. This is equivalent to a weekly net income of £595. This means that a household on average income could obtain a mortgage of around

HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2015 PART B – KEY OBJECTIVES

£154,000 based on 3.5 times annual salary, or £175,000 based on 4 times annual salary. On this basis, the households will need a 25% deposit or 15% deposit respectively, to be able to purchase a one-bed flat in Merton, although average house prices vary according to locations and cheaper homes could be found in East Merton.

However, affordability analysis based on average income does not show the true extent of difficulties faced by local people, as 61% of households in Merton have an income of below £45,000, 55% have an income of £40,000 or under and 40% have an income of £30,000 or under.

Renting in Merton is also unaffordable to many. Market rents data show that there are broadly 3 rental markets in Merton, as shown in the map below. The market characteristics of these 3 rental markets reflect those shown by socio-economic data, with clear distinctions between the more affluent West and the more deprived East, and with the top end of the market concentrated in the Wimbledon area.



The table below shows average weekly market rents in Merton by bed sizes.

	Wimble-don	West Merton	East Merton	Borough Average
1-Bed	£250.75	£204.13	£167.86	£207.54
2-Bed	£333.75	£260.38	£215.13	£269.75
3-Bed	£449.50	£331.25	£268.88	£349.88

Source: Hometrack Feb 2010 - Jan 2011

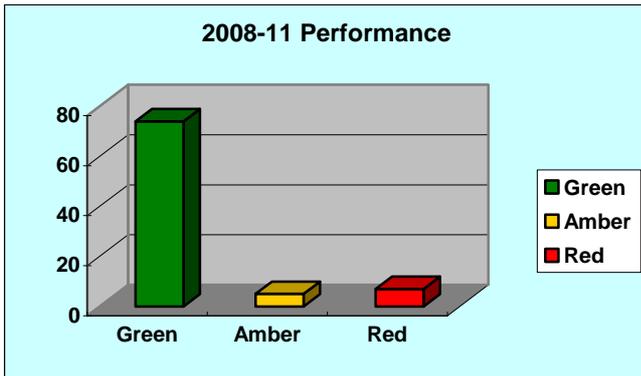
According to the GLA, housing cost is regarded as affordable if it does not exceed 30% of a household's net income. Based on this definition, households with an average income in Merton needing to rent would only have £178.50 to spend on housing cost, therefore could only afford a 1-bed home in East Merton.

Review of Housing Strategy 2008-2011

We have reviewed the outcomes of our Housing Strategy 2008-2011 to help inform the development of our new Strategy. The Housing Strategy 2008-2011 set out 2 key objectives focusing on 'People and Places' and identified 11 priorities. The review looked at outcomes for each of these priorities, as well as progress against the 3-year Action Plan.

Action Plan Progress

The Housing Strategy for 2008-2011 had set out a total of 86 actions. The review showed that the majority of the actions and targets have been achieved. Of the 86 actions in the Plan, 74 (86%) had been completed and are shown as 'Green', 5 actions were not yet completed and shown as 'Amber' (6%) and the remaining 7 were not met or 'Red' (8%). Amber and Red actions that are considered still relevant and deliverable have been included in the new 3-year Action Plan.



Key Achievements

This section gives an overview of key achievements against the objectives and priorities set out in our last Housing Strategy, which focused on “People and Places”

PEOPLE

Low and Middle Income Households

- Delivered 36% of the affordable housing programme as intermediate housing in 2008-09; 36% in 2009-10; and 60% in 2010-11, exceeding the target of 30%

Homeless Households

- Secure government funding to deliver homelessness prevention initiatives which included: Homelessness Prevention Fund; £20k for Mediation; £48k BME video project; £15k for a non-priority group Rent Deposit Scheme (mainly rough sleepers); £20k for General Needs RDS in 2009-10; £25k for Under Occupation and over crowding; an additional £20k for Vision Rent Deposit; £10k for A10 Rough Sleeper project; Repossession Mitigation fund and £500k Homelessness Grant in 2010-11.
- Other initiatives include Sanctuary Scheme, Mortgage Rescue Scheme and Tenancy Rescue Scheme.
- The Temporary Accommodation target of 87 was exceeded, as was the Homelessness Prevention Target.

Older People

- 33 units of Extra Care housing were completed in 2009 for rent and shared equity.
- Merton Priory Home’s re-development programme for sheltered housing and other development opportunities.
- New Handypersons and Gardening Service for older people in operation
- Training events held for advisors through the Advice Network
- 156 DFGs and 93 SRGs were approved.
- A new committee system established for the Older People’s Housing Forum

Ethnic Minorities

- Successful completion of peer research on young people and produced an award-winning video
- Peer Education Programme delivered 18 sessions in schools across the borough, providing information and advice and sought to dispel the myths around homelessness.
- Ran a Youth Forum 2008-2009 and facilitated discussions on housing issues
- Reduced proportion of BME households amongst homeless applicants

Children & Young People

- No 16-17 year olds in B&B at end of year. The Housing Needs team worked closely with Supported Housing providers through the Young Person Nomination Panel and MYSHF to support this target.
- Over the three-year period 2008-11 61 young people were helped to secure permanent tenancies from temporary supported housing, which exceeded the annual target of 15.

Other Vulnerable People

- Completed 18 new-build affordable homes for vulnerable people, including 15 homes for people with learning disabilities (Cliveden, Durham & Meopham Road), and 3-units of move-

on accommodation for people with mental health issues at Pavilions.

- Acquired an additional 6 units of move-on accommodation for mental health clients and 4 homes for people with HIV/AIDS.

PLACES

Balancing Housing Markets

- Make best use of private sector housing by assisting 451 homeless households to access private rented homes through the rent deposit scheme during 2008-2011
- Over the three-year period 53 under-occupation moves had been achieved, exceeding the target of 30 set for this period

Affordable Housing

- 438 affordable homes were built during 2008-2011, including 208 social rent homes and 230 shared ownership homes. 51 of the 438 homes built are supported housing for vulnerable people

Decent Homes & Quality Service

- Secured additional financial resources through housing stock transferred to Merton Priory Homes to bring housing stock to beyond Decent Homes standard
- 64 HMO Licenses issued during 2008-11

Affordable Warmth, Energy Efficiency & Climate Change

- Supported the Coldbusters scheme and between 2006-11 Merton received over £1.5million funding from government; completing over 425 grant applications
- For the period 2009-11, £604,000 were received from the government and 178 grants approved.

Healthier, Safer & Cohesive Communities

- Developed Sustainability Index to monitor sustainability of local areas

such as Phipps Bridge, Pollards Hill and Plough Lane over time.

Delivery Mechanism of Housing Strategy 2012-2015

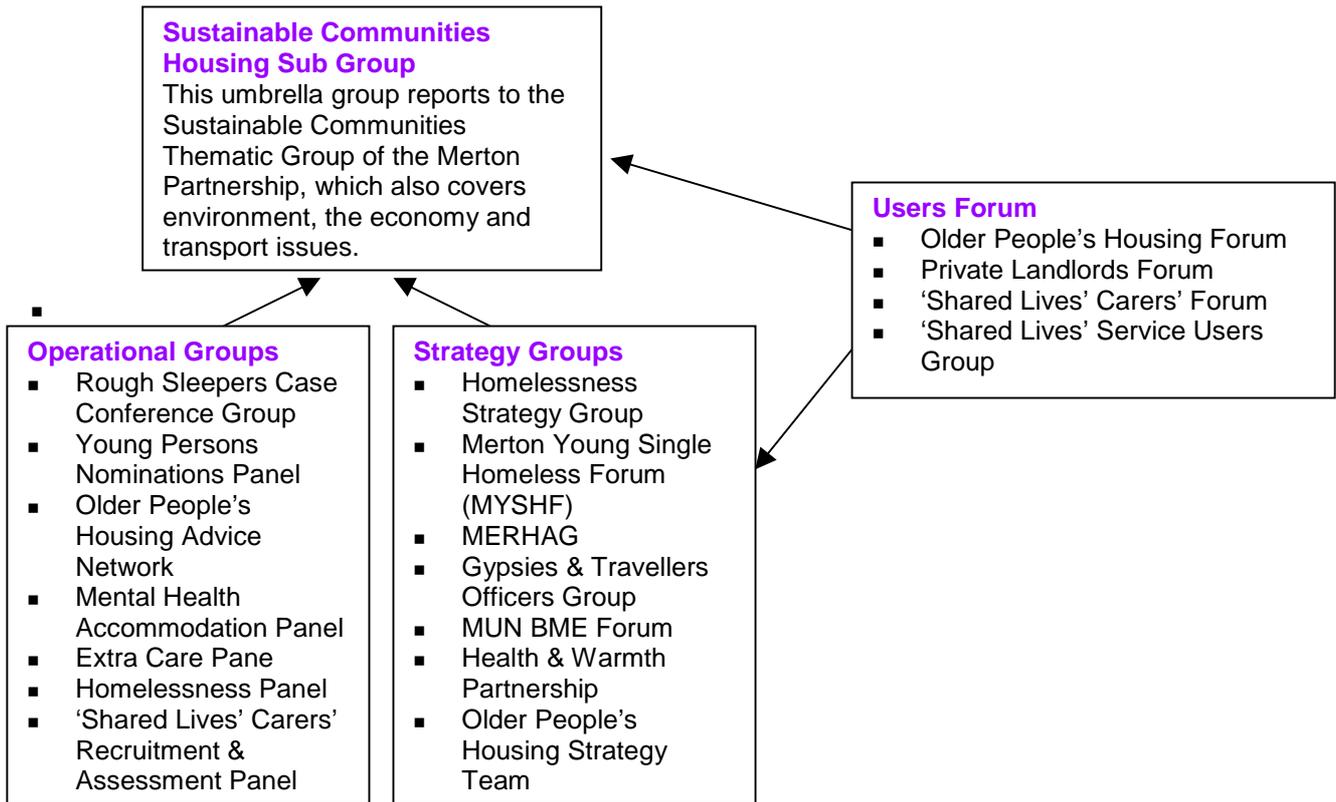
The priorities set out under the 4 key objectives in Part B of this Strategy will be delivered through corresponding actions and targets set out in a 3-year Action Plan in Part C.

The Action Plan will be monitored every six months and reports will be submitted to the Community and Housing Department's Management Team and to Merton Partnership's Sustainable Communities Thematic 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 jointly with partners to ensure its relevance and deliverability.

The council places a strong emphasis on effective internal and external partnership working when developing, implementing and reviewing our Housing Strategy, and will be relying on our key partners to help deliver the actions and targets in the Action Plan.

A number of multi-agencies housing partnership groups have been operating for years and supported the delivering of the objectives in the last Housing Strategy. Housing partnership groups that are currently operating include the umbrella Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, and a number of strategy and operational groups as well as user groups, as follows:



The council also contributes to the work of the South West London Sub Regional Housing Partnership and its sub groups, which include working group of homelessness & rough sleeping, allocations, strategy and development.

Objective 1 - Responding to Social Housing Reform to Meet Needs

BACKGROUND

Over the next few years, local housing authorities will need to respond to the radical changes to housing policy being brought in by the government through the Localism Act 2011, which received Royal Assent in November 2011. The key housing proposals contained in the Act as well as other housing policy changes are set out below.

Tenure Reform

As from April 2012, all Registered Providers (RPs) have the option to offer fixed-term tenancies on social rent homes to new tenants, although RPs that have signed funding contracts with the HCA already have the option to offer fixed-term on 'Affordable Rent' tenancies since April 2011, provided that they have published a tenancy policy.

The minimum length of tenancy will be 5 years except in exceptional circumstances where a minimum 2-year tenancy could be offered, but there is no upper limit on the length of tenancy.

Through this reform, the government aims to provide RPs with greater flexibility that will enable them to make better use of their housing stock, while still having the option to offer lifetime security.

Local authorities are required to publish a Tenancy Strategy by 15 January 2013 under Section 150 of the Localism Act, which RPs operating in the area must have regard to when formulating their own policies. This Strategy must be kept under review "from time to time". Before adopting a Tenancy Strategy, local authorities must:

- Send draft strategy or proposed modifications to all RPs who grant tenancies in the area
- Give RPs reasonable opportunity to comment
- Consult the Mayor of London
- Have regard to the authority's Allocations Policy, Homelessness Strategy and the London Housing Strategy

Merton Council has published an Interim Strategic Tenancy Policy Statement in September 2011, to provide RPs with early indication of the council's policy intentions, with the aim of helping RPs shape the development of their own organisational policies and procedures, and to help stimulate discussions and debate to help shape the council's Tenancy Strategy.

Whilst it is important that social housing acts as a transitional tenure or a "springboard" for households who aspire to homeownership until their circumstances improve, the council believes that most vulnerable people in society need a safety net for their housing that can only be provided through a secure and long-term tenancy.

The lack of a stable base for vulnerable households could lead to increased costs in other areas of public expenditure (e.g. social care and healthcare). Requiring the poorest families to move homes constantly will also interrupt the lives of children and young people and affect their life chances.

However, in cases where tenants' circumstances have improved and are in a position to access other housing solutions, then fixed-term tenancies can help release much needed affordable homes.

Affordable Rent' Tenancies

Alongside housing policy changes being brought in through the Localism Act, the new 'Affordable Rent' investment regime has also been introduced by the Homes

and Communities Agency (HCA) for their 2012-2015 Affordable Housing Programme. With the new 'Affordable Rent' funding model, RPs are expected to offer all new build homes to tenants at up to 80% market rent, and to borrow against the increased income stream to help fund their development programme and reduce the level of HCA grants required.

RPs wanting access to HCA's affordable housing grant are also expected to convert a proportion of their vacant social rent homes or relets into 'Affordable Rent' tenancies in order to raise more cash for their development programme, although the Government has made clear that existing tenancies and rents of secure and assured tenants of social landlords are protected.

Allocations Reform

Merton's Allocations Policy seeks to ensure that those in the greatest need are re-housed first. This is in line with the "reasonable preference" categories as set out by legislation. 64% of all lettings are made available to homeless households. This policy, along with successful Rent Deposit scheme that places homeless households into the private rented sector, has helped Merton meet the target of halving the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation well before the 2010 government deadline, and helped ensure that the number of households in temporary accommodation continue to remain low.

With large number of households waiting for social housing on local authorities' Housing Register, the majority of which have no realistic chance of being allocated a social rent home, the government has introduced changes through the Localism Act 2011 to allow councils to decide who can go on their Housing Register.

Although the government has preserved 'reasonable preference' categories as prescribed in Part VI of the Housing Act

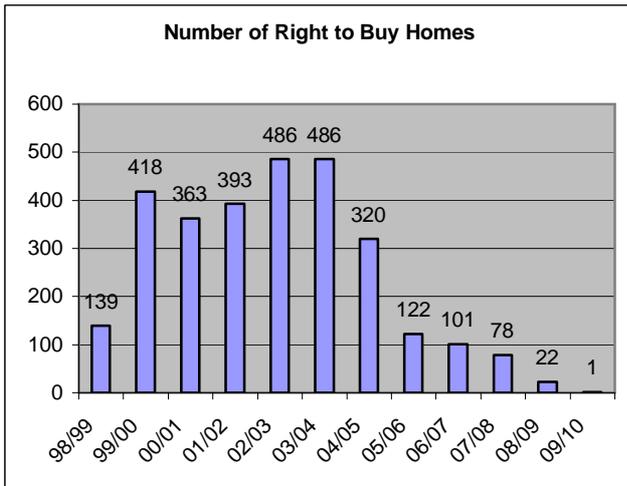
1996, the government has also brought in changes that will allow local authorities to give priority to particular groups that fall outside the "reasonable preference" categories, such as low income working families, through their allocations schemes, in order to balance the need of those greatest need, and to respond to demand from working households on low income.

The government has also made clear that members of the armed forces who are returning to civilian life should be given priority access to social housing, and has consulted on new regulations that will place clearer responsibilities on local authorities to give appropriate priorities to service families in need of social housing..

Right-to-Buy

The statutory Right to Buy was introduced on 3 October 1980 in the UK, allowing qualifying council tenants to purchase their homes with discounts on the market value ranging from 33% after 3 years' tenancy to 50% after 20 years. Various changes were subsequently made to the scheme to make it more generous, but limits to cash discounts were introduced in 1999 and again in 2003, when the maximum discounts for most areas of London, including Merton, was capped at £16,000 (c.21% of sales price), following concerns about exploitation of the Right to Buy scheme by private companies in a rising housing market.

Due to the introduction of the discount caps, which had particular impact in London, sales have fallen markedly from 2004-05 in Merton. There were 4,292 sales from 1979-80 to 1997-98, and another 2,929 between 1998-99 and 2009-10. The chart below shows the significant fall in sales from 2004-05, corresponding with the introduction of discount caps in 2003.



In April 2012, the government has introduced a new Right-to-Buy scheme with the aim of “reinvigorating” right-to-buy sales and enable more council tenants to become homeowners, by offering discount up to £75,000 for them to purchase their own home. Although Merton Council no longer owns any housing stock and the scheme is for council tenants only, households who were Merton council tenants at the time of the stock transfer to Merton Priory Homes and still remain a MPH tenant could exercise the Preserved Right-to-Buy, as long as they meet the criteria of the scheme.

Under the new scheme, local authorities are expected to use right-to-buy sales receipts to fund a replacement new ‘Affordable Rent’ home, for every additional home sold due to the increased demand, on a one-to-one basis. In Merton’s case, the council will need to work closely with MPH to deliver the required replacement homes.

Ombudsman for Housing Complaints

The Localism Act 2011 brings changes to the complaints system regarding RPs. Changes will come into effect from April 2013, and involve a new Ombudsman for the area who in turn will take referrals of complaints from designated persons. A designated person is either a member of a tenant panel recognised by the landlord, a member of parliament, or a member of the local housing authority. The role of

designated persons will increase the democratic role in the area of complaints.

New build Affordable Housing

The government has brought in tenure reform with the aim of freeing up some existing supply, however, increasing the number of new build affordable housing remains key to meeting housing needs in Merton. As such, the council and its partners will also need to respond to the challenges posed by and a new ‘Affordable Rent’ investment regime for funding the development of new affordable housing and the current economic climate, in order to maximise supply.

Between 2008 and 2011, a total of 438 affordable homes were completed in Merton, far exceeding the target of 315 set in our previous Housing Strategy. The council has worked closely with Registered Providers (RPs) and developers to develop a proportion of these through section 106 agreements to help increase the supply of affordable housing in Merton, with the remaining provided through RP owned sites. In addition, 104 households were assisted into home ownership through the ‘My Choice HomeBuy’ and ‘HomeBuy Direct’ programme, where household purchased street properties or homes direct from private developers through these intermediate housing initiatives.

The table below shows a breakdown of new build affordable housing completions by tenure type and by bedsize. The table shows that 47% of completions were for social rent and 53% for shared ownership. The majority of home completed were smaller 1-bed or 2-bed homes, making up 90% of all completions.

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed +	Total
Social Rent	66	128	36	230
	27%	56%	16%	100%
Shared Ownership	103	96	9	208
	50%	46%	4%	100%
All completions	169	224	45	438

KEY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The government's tenure reform presents challenges as well as opportunities. Whilst there are opportunities to make more efficient use of their housing stock therefore able to assist more households in the greatest needs, the challenge for both local authorities and RPs is to ensure that vulnerable tenants are not disadvantaged.

The council is now formulating its Tenancy Strategy, to include a number of key policy objectives for RPs to take into consideration and have due regard to when developing their own policies. We will be consulting RPs on these key objectives, to include the following.

Granting of fixed-term tenancies

- Those living in sheltered / extra care housing should be given lifetime tenancies
- People with a lifelong need for support should be offered lifetime tenancies in both supported & general needs housing e.g. physical disabilities.

Review

- Review bed-size requirement and support need at least 6 months before the end of fixed-term
- Review household's financial capacity (earned income & entitlement to benefits) to secure alternative market accommodation
- Assist households with Income Maximisation to help reduce Family Poverty

Renewals or Terminations

- The needs of individual households & the sustainability of the community should come before the efficient use of their housing stock'
- Seek to achieve positive housing outcomes for households at the end of fixed term tenancies

- Decisions not to renew fixed term should not result in tenants becoming homeless as defined under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996
- Provide households with relevant advice and assistance – e.g. LCHO options, renting in PRS, signposting to appropriate advice agencies
- Where under-occupation or overcrowding is identified, seek to grant a further fixed term tenancy for alternative home that is more suitable (size & affordability)
- Work with partners to identify suitable alternative housing options where tenants support need has increased and a move becomes necessary
- Where rent level is found to be no longer affordable to tenants (GLA definition), seek to grant a further fixed term tenancy for an alternative home that is more affordable

Affordability of the new 'Affordable Rent' tenancy

There are concerns amongst many housing organisations that the new 'Affordable Rent' tenure at up to 80% market rent will be unaffordable to households in housing need. A research report called "Mirror, signal, manoeuvre" published recently by Family Mosaic, highlights that even rents at 60% market value would significantly increase the level of housing benefits required by tenants, thus compounding the impact of the 'benefit trap', and would result in more households needing to rely on housing benefit.

Using the average weekly market rent figure of £275.74 (2010) for Merton, 'Affordable Rent' at 80%, or £220.59, would represent a 61% increase from the average weekly 'target' rent of £86.75 charged by RPs for social rent homes in 2010.

While under present housing benefit rules for social housing tenants (this is different from Local Housing Allowance which

covers private sector tenancies only), the increased rent level of the Affordable Rent tenure would be fully covered for households wholly reliant on benefits in most cases, from 2013, the government's proposed Welfare Reform will limit total benefits (such as Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance and Housing Benefit) that a household can receive to £350 per week (£18,200 p.a.) for a single person households, and £500 per week (£26,000p.a.) for a family.

Using the GLA's definition of housing affordability that housing cost should not exceed 30% of net income, this means that rents above £105 a week will not be affordable to single households, and rents above £250 a week will not be affordable to a family,

A recent affordable analysis undertaken by the council using local market rent data shows that 'Affordable Rent' homes of all sizes across Merton at 80% market rent will not be affordable to households reliant on benefits when the proposed welfare cap is implemented. If reduced to 65% market rent, 1-bed and 2-bed homes in East Merton would become affordable to single households and small families reliant on HB respectively. However, larger homes with 3 or more bedrooms are not affordable anywhere in the borough even at 65% market rent, so families will have particular difficulties accessing affordable housing options.

Impact of Relet Conversions

The conversion of social rent relets by RPs into 'Affordable Rent' tenancies will also have more of an impact on Merton than on stock-owning authorities that have a large supply of social rent homes. Due to Right-to-Buy and Right-to-Acquire sales, social housing stock in Merton has been decreasing gradually over the years despite the completions of 1,095 affordable homes (2002-2008).

Relet conversions to 'Affordable Rent' tenancies will further reduce the supply of social rent homes available at 'social' rent, and unlike stock-owning boroughs that are not converting social rent homes to 'Affordable Rent' (those that are not developing new homes), Merton will not be able to meet needs through its own social rent homes to meet needs. The conversion of larger social rent homes is likely to have particular negative impact on families needing to access affordable homes due to the proposed welfare cap.

Affordable Housing Deliverability

Merton lacks the large development sites that are available to some other boroughs therefore has limited build capacity for new housing. The borough has a land capacity to build 320 new homes annually between 2011-2021. A 2009 Merton Affordable Housing Viability Study shows it would be feasible to build 40% of these homes as affordable housing. This translates into 128 affordable homes per annum.

The study was carried out prior to the introduction of the 'Affordable Rent' funding model, so it is unclear as to how this new funding model would affect affordable housing development viability in Merton. It should be noted that the Mayor of London no longer sets affordable housing targets at borough level.

Deliverability is another issue that needs to be taken into account, due to changes in development economics brought about by the new funding model, with no grant available for Section 106 sites, and the council has for many years relied on S106 agreements with developers to deliver a sizeable proportion of new affordable housing in Merton, with the remaining

As such, when planning for the right mix of new housing supply for Merton, it is necessary to consider housing need alongside build capacity, housing affordability, as well as financial viability and deliverability.

The council recognises that HCA/GLA funding now targets ‘Affordable Rent’ homes and no longer funds the development of social rent homes except in exceptional circumstances. The council will work with developers and RPs to maximise development viability and deliverability. Many RPs are now considering funding their schemes through cross-subsidies from sales to meet funding gap. Some also have the option to use surplus resources generated from high rental value areas to subsidise developments in Merton. Where necessary the council will consider making financial contribution, such as cash-in-lieu receipts from housing sites of below 10 units.

Bed Size Mix Policy

With regards to size mix, Merton’s affordable housing build programme for 2012-2015 will focus mainly on smaller-sized homes, a sizeable proportion of which should be supported accommodation for vulnerable client groups, in order to make best use of available resources to meet the greatest needs, and taking into account the following factors:

- The need to maximise the number of affordable homes completions as indicated by Viability Study
- The most pressing need of households with the highest priority on the council’s Housing Register is for 1-bed and 2-bed homes.
- Much of the estimated household growth in Merton between 2011 is expected to be single person households.
- Older people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 22% between 2011 and 2025, of which 38% are predicted to live alone
- There is a need to increase the supply of smaller homes that are attractive in designs and are energy efficient, to encourage under-occupiers, particularly older people,

to downsize, thus helping to release family-sized homes.

- Larger ‘Affordable Rent’ homes with 3 or more bedrooms are not affordable anywhere in the borough even at 65% market rent.

Affordable homes for rent

1-Bed	40%	2-Bed	40%	3-Bed	20%
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The council’s housing policy gives priority to households in the greatest housing needs, such as homeless households, when allocating affordable homes for rent. The above bed-size mix closely reflects the profile of need of homeless households that the council gives priority through our Allocations Policy. Of the 230 homeless households on the Housing Register (June 2011), 49 or 21% households require 3-bed or larger homes, 93 or 48% require 2-bed homes and 88 or 38% needed 1-bed.

	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed +
Housing Register	50%	27%	23%
Homeless Households	38%	41%	21%

This bed-size mix also takes into account the following:

- Current difficulties in procuring 2-bed homes in the private rented sector
- Preference of many under-occupiers’ aspiration to downsize to a 2-bed rather than a 1-bed home

There is a need to develop more family-sized social rent homes. As mentioned above, where possible, family-sized 3-bed plus homes should be developed as social rent homes.

LCHO

1-Bed	50%	2-Bed	34%	3-Bed	16%
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The above bed-size mix will be adopted for Low Cost Homeownership units such as shared ownership homes. The 16% target for 3-bed plus homes is in line with the target set out in the London Housing Strategy for intermediate housing.

Private market housing

1-Bed	25%	2-Bed	28%	3-Bed	47%
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In relation to private sector housing, Merton’s SHMA 2010 identified the above bed-size mix requirement:

The overall housing bed-size mix for all tenures is therefore as follows:

All tenures

1-Bed	33%	2-Bed	32%	3-Bed	35%
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With regards to where in the borough should affordable housing be built, with the introduction of HCA’s new funding regime, along with the current uncertain housing market conditions, the council will consider affordable housing schemes in all parts of the borough to help increase supply, and will discuss affordability with developers and RPs on a scheme by scheme basis to ensure viability and affordability, and to facilitate sustainable communities.

KEY PRIORITIES

1.1 Develop policy responses to legislative changes that are appropriate for Merton

Develop Merton’s Tenancy Strategy

The council will consult RPs on the key objectives to be included in the borough statutory Tenancy Strategy through a series of workshops. Wider consultation with organisations working with tenants and with vulnerable client groups will also

take place. The Mayor of London will also be consulted. The council aims to publish the Strategy by the end of 2012, to include the following topic areas:

- Kinds of tenancies
- Circumstances in which particular tenancies are granted
- Length of tenancies
- Granting of further tenancy at end of fixed term
- Advice & assistance
- Affordability analysis

Affordable Rent Policy

While the council will seek opportunities to increase new build ‘Affordable Rent’ homes in Merton, we will negotiate with RPs to ensure that rent levels are affordable to local people.

The council will work with RPs to ensure a range of rents is set for new affordable housing developments, and has agreed an Interim Affordable Rent Policy Statement in November 2011. Under this policy, the council will only support new housing schemes in Merton where average rent level across all bed sizes does not exceed 65% of market rent, unless RPs can demonstrate exceptional circumstances. Affordable rent level for any bed size must not exceed 80% market rent and must not exceed 65% for larger homes with 3 or more bedrooms. Affordable rent level for all relet conversions should not exceed 65% of market rent.

Minimise impact of relet conversions

The Council also recognises the need for RPs to increase their rental stream further to help fund new affordable housing development through conversions of ‘social rent’ relets into ‘Affordable Rent’ homes.

As it is likely that larger ‘Affordable Rent’ homes with 3 or more bedrooms will not be affordable to families in housing need from 2013 with the implementation of the Welfare Reform, larger social rent homes

with 3 or more bedrooms should not be included in relet conversions to 'Affordable Rent' homes, unless RPs can show that these conversions will be affordable to low-income families, having regard to the proposed welfare cap, and where RPs also have a commitment to include some family-sized social rent homes in their new development programme in Merton.

Implementation of Refreshed Allocations Policy

The council has reviewed its Allocations Policy, titled the "Housing Register and Nominations Policy". The review took into account the need to continue to give priorities to households that fall within the "reasonable preference" categories as specified in Part VI of the Housing Act 1996; as this statutory requirement has remained unchanged. The council's annual strategy therefore gives priorities to homeless households, and households who are overcrowded or are under-occupiers amongst others.

The review also considered the new flexibilities brought in by the Localism Act, which permits local authorities to give households that fall outside of the "reasonable preference" categories additional priorities, and our Allocations Policy now set aside 10% of lets in certain waiting list 'bands' for working households.

The review also took into account the new requirement for local authorities to prioritise members of the armed forces returning to civilian life, and the Policy now awards ex-armed forces personnel additional priorities.

Responding to changes to Right-to-Buy

Local authorities are expected to use right-to-buy sales receipts to fund a replacement new 'Affordable Rent' home, for every additional home sold due to the increased demand, on a one-to-one basis. Council tenants transferred to MPH in March 2010 could exercise their "Preserved Right-to-Buy" if they met the

scheme criteria, therefore the council will be working closely with MPH to closely monitor sales completions and to explore how the required replacement homes could be delivered.

Ombudsman for Housing Complaints

The council will work with local RPs to map tenant panels in the borough, and to provide councillors and MPs with information on the requirements to handle complaints sent to them in their capacity as a "designated person" under the Localism Act.

Impact Analysis of Universal Credit & Welfare Reform

In order to gain a better understanding of what impact the Welfare Reform is likely to have on low-income households ability to access affordable housing solutions, and to help inform plans to assist these households, an impact analysis on the proposed Welfare Reform will be undertaken.

1.2 Increase supply of new homes that are affordable to Merton residents

Merton's affordable Housing Policy

The council aims to maximise the development of affordable housing in the borough, and will seek to achieve 40% of affordable housing across all new housing development schemes in the borough. Merton's Housing Viability Study has demonstrated the financial viability of seeking 40% affordable housing on new housing schemes, and the 40% affordable housing figure is also set out in Merton's Core Strategy.

Negotiation on a site-by-site basis for affordable housing will take into account affordability, financial viability and deliverability, when seeking to maximise affordable housing, and in determining bed-size mix and the provision of Lifetime Homes and wheelchair accessible units.

Key principles of Merton's Affordable Rent Policy can be found under Priority 2.1 above.

Seeking a mix of tenures on new housing schemes

Within the affordable housing programme, the council seeks a borough-wide 60/40 split i.e. not scheme-specific, of rented homes versus Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO), which includes shared ownership and the First Steps shared-equity initiative in London. A more flexible approach will be considered for developer-led Section 106 schemes without grant. Targets are to be adjusted if proved to be financially unviable.

Seek to develop larger homes at 'social rent'

The council will work with RPs to seek to increase larger new build homes that are affordable to low-income households, and will explore with RPs any opportunities to develop new affordable housing in the borough, including the development of new homes to be let at social rent level where financially viable.

Where RPs are converting relets into 'Affordable Rent' homes to help fund new affordable housing schemes, the council will seek new family-sized (3-bed plus) homes to be let at social rent level.

Ensure affordability of Intermediate Housing

The council aims to increase the number purchases of new shared-ownership homes built in the borough by Merton residents, therefore will negotiate a sizeable proportion of new intermediate housing to be at prices that are affordable to local people on average or lower quartile income. The latest available household income figures, currently £39,900 per annum on average and £19,970 at lower quartile (CACI 2012), will be used as an indicator of affordability. Priorities for access to intermediate housing will be based on household income levels across all tenures.

Ensure 'Affordable Rent' levels are affordable to local people

The council will negotiate 'Affordable Rent' levels of new build homes with developers and RPs, based on most up-to-date local market rents data. The findings of the Impact Analysis on Universal Credit and will also be used to inform negotiations. Local Housing Allowance rates are not considered appropriate indicators of affordability for social housing as it can be as high as 90% market rent levels when applied at ward level. The council will regularly produce most up-to-date housing market data, supplied to ward level to ensure affordability.

Appropriate infrastructure for new housing developments

The council has policy in place to ensure all large-scale housing developments are supported by adequate infrastructure. Policy CS11 (a) of Merton's Core Strategy adopted by the council in July 2011 requires "new development to provide any necessary infrastructure", and identified strategic priorities as "health provision, education, transport infrastructure, water and sewerage provision and supporting future needs of the police and fire services". The policy also stipulates that "where there is a capacity problem we will require the developer to fund appropriate improvements and where necessary ensure improvements are completed prior to occupation".

Implement to Bed –Size Mix Policy for new build housing

The council will seek bed-size mix as set out in the Bed –Size Mix Policy in this chapter of the Strategy, to reflect the specific requirements set out for the different tenures.

Use of 'Cash-in-Lieu' to support new development

The council collects 'cash-in-lieu' payments from private developers in exceptional circumstances for schemes where affordable housing cannot be

developed on site, under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990). Merton's Core Strategy Policy CS8 (e) on Housing Choice also sets out the requirement for housing sites of below 10 units to make a financial contribution to the council equivalent to 20% of affordable housing provided on site.

The cash-in-lieu receipts, as part of Commuted Sum contributions, are earmarked for the provision of additional affordable housing, but cannot be used to subsidise or substitute for the 40% on site affordable housing requirement, where this is demonstrated to be viable.

However, it can be used to facilitate the element of provision above the 40% requirement if the council deem it appropriate taking account of each case on its individual merits, and could be used to target the provision of additional 3-bed homes to be let at social rent level and additional affordable supported housing in Merton.

Objective 2 - Preventing & Addressing Homelessness

BACKGROUND

Merton has the lowest number of accepted homeless households amongst all London boroughs, with 101 acceptances in 2011-12, due to our success in homelessness prevention through housing advice, helping over 500 households at risk of homelessness to find housing solutions every year, and many of these households are given additional priorities for social housing and re-housed through Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

Homelessness has been on the increase across the UK and homelessness acceptances in Merton had also gone up from 89 in 2010-11 to 101 in 2011-12. Merton has also seen an increase in the number of households making homelessness applications to the council. In 2011-12, there were a total of 279 applications, up from 188 in 2010-11, a 48% increase, and from 148 in 2009-10.

Of the 89 accepted households in 2011-12, 50% have dependent children, 6 (5%) were young people aged 16-17, and 39 (34%) were households vulnerable as a result of old age, physical disability, mental health or learning disability etc.

Ethnic minority households are over-represented amongst accepted homeless households when compared to their share in the population. Although this over-representation had decreased from 60% of accepted homeless households in 2006-07 to 50% in 2010-11, there is evidence that this is on the increase again, as 57% of accepted homeless households in 2011-12 were from ethnic minority communities.

Prevention measures undertaken by the council include legal advocacy, nominations to supported accommodation, crisis intervention, mediation & conciliation, Sanctuary scheme and mortgage and rent rescue etc. Nominations to permanent social housing under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 accounted for just under a quarter (24%) of prevention cases, but the most common measure was the use of rent deposit to help households at risk of homelessness to access housing solutions in the private rented sector, which accounted for over a third (34%) of prevention cases.

Merton council has been making best use of the private rented sector through the Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) since 2003. Between 2008-2011, 451 households at risk of homelessness found private rented accommodation through the scheme, and just over 1,000 households secured a home in the private rented sector since the scheme's inception. There is evidence to show that the majority of these tenancies were still in place after the initial fixed-term has ended.

The Localism Act is bringing in changes to homelessness legislation, which will give local authorities the option to end the main homelessness duty by placing accepted homeless households into the private rented sector without having to seek their consent. Government consultation on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order has ended in July 2012, and it is expected that the Order will come into force by the end of 2012, alongside the commencement of the provision for local authorities to end homelessness duty in the private rented sector.

Recognising that the needs of young homeless persons are distinct from homelessness families and older homeless persons, tackling youth homelessness is one of the key objectives of Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

Following the Southwark Judgement in May 2009 about accommodation for homeless 16-17 year olds, a Protocol was put in place between the council's Housing Division and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, to ensure homeless children who meet the criteria for section 20 of the 1989 Children Act are assisted as 'looked after children' supported by Pathway Plans. Those who have received support for more than 13 weeks after their 16th birthday will become entitled to leaving care services until the age of 21, or until age 24 if they are in higher education.

Merton also has a providers' forum - Merton Young Single Homeless Forum (MYSHF), which meets regularly to identify the support and move-on needs of young single homeless people. There is also a monthly Young Persons Nominations Panel that seeks to place young single homeless people into available supported housing units according to their needs.

Over the last three years, Merton Council also worked with key partners to provide support and assistance to rough sleepers in the borough. In 2009, Merton Council undertook an official Rough Sleepers Count on the night of 12th/13th November and found 2 rough sleepers that fitted the definition set out in Government guidance. Following the publication of new government guidance in September 2010 – Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping: A new approach, an estimate in November 2010 identified 6 rough sleepers in Merton using the new wider definition, and a subsequent estimate in November 2011 identified 2 rough sleepers.

In preparing for the 2009 count, a Case Conference Group was established, which consists of the key agencies such as Street Rescue/Thames Reach, Faith in Action, MET Police, and the South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust. The group works closely with council officers from Housing and Adult Social Care and Safer Merton to discuss housing

and support options for each identified rough sleeper. The group meets every 6 weeks and has received 130 referrals between April 2009 and March 2012, including 5 rough sleepers who are 'returners'.

The council has developed a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) with partners, in place since November 2010, to ensure rough sleepers are not at risk of dying on the streets during cold weather. Working with the Case Conference Group and other agencies, all known rough sleepers are placed into temporary accommodation when the temperature is predicted to be zero degree Celsius for the next 3 consecutive nights. The SWEP was reviewed and updated in November 2011, to improve responses to the needs of rough sleepers during extreme weather conditions that do not fit the SWEP's standard criteria.

With evidence showing that the number of rough sleepers from A10 Accession countries¹ were on the increase across London, the council provided Faith in Action, a local faith organisation, with a small grant to start a project that assists people from Eastern European countries to access jobs, with the help of a bi-lingual project worker. The A10 Project compliments Faith in Action's weekly drop-in sessions for rough sleepers.

KEY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Changes to homelessness legislation being brought in through the Localism Act is likely to increase the reliance of the private rented sector to meet housing needs, particularly as the impact of the

¹ A8 nationals from Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, can come to work in the UK but have limited or no access to social provisions and benefits. A2 nationals (Romania and Bulgaria) are subject to further restrictions and require a work permit in order to start work in the UK.

new 'Affordable Rent' funding regime and the challenging economic climate are likely to lead to a reduction on the volume of new affordable housing completions.

At present, placements of homeless households by local authorities into the private rented sector are made with the agreement of the households concerned, as required by Section 193 (7D) of the Housing Act 1996. To discharge homelessness duty into the private rented sector, local authorities must also ensure that households are placed into a home that is suitable and meet their composite needs relating to size and affordability (Section 210, Housing Act 1996), and should help them find accommodation in the local area where reasonably practicable under Section 208 of the 1996 Housing Act.

With the changes to homelessness legislation under the Localism Act, local authorities will be given the option to place homeless households eligible for permanent social housing into the private rented sector without having to seek their consent. Given this new flexibility, it is likely that all local authorities will look to increase placements into the private rented sector, although the increasing gap between rising rents and housing benefit caps (through recent changes in Local Housing Allowance and the Welfare Reform in 2013) would result in local authorities of high rental value areas seeking more affordable placements out-of-borough for clients in receipt of housing benefit.

There have already been reports in the media that several London boroughs are planning to place households in other parts of the UK with lower rental values. It is likely that inner London boroughs with higher rent levels would also look for more affordable supply in outer London boroughs, including Merton. This is likely to further increase demand and

competition for private rented accommodation in the borough.

There are already clear signs that the supply of private rented homes that landlords are willing to make available to households relying on Housing Benefit is reducing. 128 Merton homeless households were placed into the private rented sector in 2011-12, compared to 146 in 2010-11 and 221 in 2009-10. The drop in supply may be due to the fact that rents in the private sector have risen rapidly over the last 18 months across London (Hometrack) because of increased demand from working households unable to obtain a mortgage under the current economic climate to purchase their own homes.

The implementation of the 'single room' LHA rate for those aged under 35 from January 2012 (brought forward from January 2012), may have implications for Merton as single people aged under 35 eligible will now only receive a housing benefit amount equivalent to the rent for a shared room in a house, rather than that for a self-contained studio or 1-bed flat. This will limit the options for people of this age group who are in housing need or at risk of homelessness to find housing solutions in the private rented sector.

There is also likely to be pressure on the level of supported housing for single homeless people due to the spending cuts brought in by the Government. The current provisions of supported housing in Merton are therefore subject to continual review.

For young single homeless people already living in supported accommodation, MYSHF has identified a need to increase move-on accommodation for those who are ready for independence. The government recognises the need to support this client group to live independently, and have applied an exemption to the LHA 'Shared Room Rate' for those aged between 25 and 35 who

have lived in supported accommodation for a minimum of 12 weeks, to enable them to access one-bed flats in the private rented sector.

Providing support and assistance to rough sleepers will continue to be a challenge for Merton. The Mayor of London has set a target in the London Housing Strategy to end rough sleeping in the capital by the end of 2012, and has set up the London Delivery Board (LDB) to deliver the target. A 6-month 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) pilot was launched in April 2011 in 10 London boroughs (Camden, Islington, City of London, Tower Hamlets, Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Brent & Southwark). This has now been rolled out to all London boroughs.

The project works to ensure that no new rough sleepers arriving in London will sleep out for a second night through rapid response, and to prevent someone new to rough sleeping from spiralling downwards into a long-term life on the streets and at high risk of crime, drug and alcohol addiction and serious illness. Assistance is provided through an Assessment Hub that is opened round the clock, helping rough sleepers to reconnect with their local area, and with family and support networks.

The South-West London Sub Regional Housing Partnership has also received c. £800k to fund rough sleepers initiatives in the 7 boroughs including Merton. These will present opportunities for Merton council and its partners to further develop support services for rough sleepers.

KEY PRIORITIES

2.1 Prevention of homelessness

Tenancy Rescue

13.5% of homeless acceptances were due to termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) in 2010-11. The council

therefore aims to maintain current supply in the private rented sector through a Tenancy Rescue Scheme, and by improving our understanding of reasons why landlords wish to terminate tenancies. The Tenancy Rescue scheme provides landlords with financial incentives at the point of tenancy renewals, to ensure they continue to rent their homes to households referred by the council at the reduced LHA rates.

Homelessness prevention measures

Merton Council's Housing Options Team will aim to maintain the current level of homelessness prevention against number of homelessness acceptances over the next 3 years, by continuing to apply existing prevention measures, and by working with partners to develop other innovative measures.

Maintain Low Number living in TA

Merton Council aims to maintain the current low number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation, by adopting prevention measures, and by increasing placements into the private rented sector provided that the council were able to find homes that meet their composite needs.

Review of Homelessness Strategy

In light of changes to homelessness legislation being brought in through the Localism Act giving local authorities the option to end the main homelessness duty through private rented sector, and with Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 approaching its end. a review of the Strategy will be undertaken as required under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002.

2.2 Housing solutions through the private rented sector

Increase access to private rented homes

The council aims to increase access to private rented accommodation in Merton

for homelessness households through the well-established Rent Deposit Scheme. However, the supply of private rented homes available for households on benefits depends on housing market factors such as the level of demand from working/professional households.

Procurement of private rented homes through RPs

The council will also discuss with RPs any opportunities for them to procure in the private rented properties to be let to homeless households referred by the council, for example, through the HALS Direct Scheme being run by Genesis Housing Association.

Private Landlord Forum

The council will continue to engage private landlords through our Private Landlord Forum, held twice a year to provide private landlords with information and advice and to listen to their concerns. Through this Forum, usually attended by over 40 private landlords, the council aims to secure further supply of private rented homes and also to increase the number of accredited landlords through the provision of Landlord Accreditation training. The Forum has helped 114 Merton landlords gain accreditation to date.

Social Lettings Agency

The council will explore the option of setting up a social lettings agency. There are already a large number of successful social lettings agencies set up by local authorities, RPs or homelessness charities. One example is the social lettings agency set up by Exeter Council. By offering a professional lettings service at below market rate, and utilising their in-house maintenance team, the council was able to grow their private rented supply.

2.3 Increase move-on opportunities for the single homeless

Move-on quota for social housing

The council provides long-term housing solutions for vulnerable people needing move-on accommodation from their stay in supported housing, through a quota system set out in its annual Allocations Strategy. In 2008-2011, 61 young people living in supported accommodation were provided with permanent tenancies. In recognition of the need for more move-on accommodation for young people, the quota for this client group will be increased from 12 in 2011-12 to 20 in 2012-13.

YMCA Redevelopment

Plans are being put in place to redevelop the YMCA hostel on Wimbledon Broadway, with the aim of providing some second-stage supported accommodation alongside first-stage within the scheme. The YMCA is currently negotiating the Development Agreement with the developer Willmott Dixon, following a financial appraisal to ensure scheme viability. It is envisaged that a phased development programme would take place following the planning application stage in the autumn.

Y:Cube Housing

The YMCA is in discussion with the council to identify opportunities in Merton for the development of short-term affordable modular “Y:Cube” housing on public or private land that are temporarily vacant, which can be used as move-on accommodation for single people in housing need. There is significant interest from local, regional and national agencies as well as housing providers on adopting this innovative model. The YMCA has already secured a funding partner and the plan is to deliver the initial 3 schemes in the next 18 to 24 months.

MASH (Merton Action for Single Homeless) Hostel

Following a merger between MASH & SPEAR in June 2011, the council's emergency direct-access homeless hostel is now managed by SPEAR, an organisation that has extensive experience in providing employment and skills advice as well as training for homeless people. SPEAR has a dedicated Skills Development Officer and will in the coming months be reconfiguring their service to develop a more strategic focus on supporting young people. Through SPEAR, MASH residents will be equipped with the life skills necessary to enable them to make a successful move to semi-supportive or independent accommodation. The government has also awarded £200k capital funding for the council to improve this hostel.

Better access to the private rented sector for the single homeless

The council will work with Vision Housing to source bedsits for single homeless people, and has arrangements in place with SPEAR to utilize their Oaks Foundation Resettlement Fund to pay rent guarantee insurance for landlords as an extra incentive for taking on homeless households, in addition to guaranteeing a rent deposit.

The YMCA is also in discussion with the South West London Sub Regional Housing Partnership with regards to delivering part of the sub-regional programme with the aim of increasing the number of properties for single homeless people.

Young Persons Nominations Panel (YPNP)

The council will continue to work with providers of supported housing to assess the need of young single homeless people for either first-stage or second-stage supported housing, or permanent social rented homes, through the Young Persons Nominations Panel. The Panel will

continue to work together to identify suitable supported housing placements for this client group.

Merton Young Single Homeless Forum (MYSHF)

The work of the YPNP will help inform the strategic work being undertaken by the Merton Young Single Homeless Forum (MYSHF). MYSHF is represented by providers and agencies working with young single homeless people, which include the YMCA; Grenfell; SPEAR and a number of RPs.

MYSHF will work towards increasing move-on opportunities for young single homeless people living in supported housing, and will focus on increasing employment and training opportunities for this client group as this is key to preparing them for independent living.

Training & Employment Initiatives for Young Single Homeless

A review of training and employment initiatives will also be undertaken by MYSHF to help maximise take-up. Existing initiatives include Notting Hill Housing Trust's Construction Training Initiative; Grenfell's 'Open Talent' project that encourages the development of skills; its employability training called "Together You Can"; and the 'Your Career Your Choice' project provides 10 young people with work experience and engages them to help a further 50 young people.

Reduce repeat or sustained homelessness

To help reduce "repeat" or "sustained" homelessness amongst young people, it is necessary to provide them with tenancy support, and to help them develop a pathway to independence that involves access to training and employment. Working with MYSHF, the council will develop a Pathway Project for homeless young people affected by repeat or sustained homelessness.

Maximising external funding opportunities

The council and its partners will continue to work together to identify funding opportunities for local projects. For example, Grenfell Housing and SPEAR had developed complementary proposals to help non-priority homeless people (aged 18-34 year-olds and aged 35 and over respectively) secure a private tenancy and provide pre-tenancy training and support with benefits claims. Funding opportunities being explored include the government's Homelessness Transition Fund, and Homelessness Prevention funding available through the South West Sub Regional Housing Partnership.

2.4 Support rough sleepers to find long-term housing solutions

Rough Sleepers Case Conference Group (RSCCG)

The council will further develop our work with partner organisations through the Rough Sleepers Case Conference Group, to respond to government-led initiatives, such as the possible roll-out of the 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) pilot across London. The group will also continue to build networks with support organisations in order to help meet rough sleepers' housing and support needs, and to help them stay off the streets. Where appropriate, the group will also help rough sleepers reconnect to their local area.

SWEP

During the cold weather periods in early 2012 when Merton's multi-agency Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) was triggered, a total of 24 homeless people were referred to the council for placements. Learning from this experience, the council will work with the RSCCG to review the SWEP, taking into consideration the new guidance published by Homeless Link, and to increase awareness of movements of rough sleepers in and out of Merton, to help ensure that appropriate responses are

developed to meet changing demands in future.

Winter Night Shelter

12 rough sleepers benefited from the Winter Night Shelter opened in Merton for over 4 weeks in January and February 2012. The Shelter was developed by the YMCA and involved 7 faith-organisations in the borough, each providing food and shelter for the rough sleepers for one night of each week. Following the successful pilot, the YMCA is now leading the Winter Night Shelter Consortium, and is planning to run a Shelter again for up to 3 months next winter. The consortium is also seeking participation from additional faith organisations so that more rough sleepers could be catered for.

Homelessness Change Programme - Hostel Improvement

Working with SPEAR, an organisation with years of experience supporting homeless persons that in June 2011 had merged with our local organisation Merton Action for Single Homeless (MASH), the council has successfully obtained £200k capital funding through the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) Homelessness Change Programme, to improve the council-owned direct-access hostel for homeless young people in Colliers Wood managed by SPEAR.

The Homelessness Change Programme is one of the key deliverables in the Mayor's London Housing Strategy. The funding will enable the council to turn the existing 9 bed-spaces in shared rooms into self-contained bedrooms, and to provide additional communal facilities such as an IT Suite. A Project Group has been set up to oversee the delivery this programme, and to maximise potential opportunities such as the building of an Annexe to the main building that could offer an independent service to older rough sleepers.

As part of this programme, SPEAR will also put in place training and personal development sessions for young people to help them move towards independence. The council will also work closely with Homeless Link and the Greater London Authority, which has taken over the HCA's functions in London from April 2012, on this project.

A10 Project

The council will provide continuation funding for Faith in Action in 2012-13 to deliver the A10 Project through a bilingual project worker, with funding increased from £10k to £20k. The project worker will assist rough sleepers from A10 Ascension countries to obtain documents required for work, identify their housing and support needs and make appropriate referrals. The Project will also assist A10 rough sleepers to reconnect with their home countries where appropriate.

Faith-Based Group Co-ordination Project

The council aims to broaden its network across London through the CLG's Faith-Based Group Co-ordination Project delivered by The Passage, a Catholic church organisation. Through this project, the council and our partners such as Faith in Action and Morden Baptist Church will build our capacity in responding to the need of rough sleepers, helping them get off the streets and find longer-term solutions, including reconnections to their local areas, and to provide them with the necessary support.

SPEAR's Outreach & Resettlement Project

The council supported SPEAR's successful bid for sub-regional funding to run an Outreach and Resettlement Project for rough sleepers, which covers the boroughs of Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. This project aims to support rough sleepers into appropriate accommodation in the private rented sector, and will add capacity to the existing

outreach resources in the borough provided by London Street Rescue. The project will also link rough sleepers to SPEAR's existing training and development programme for single homeless people.

Assessment Beds

The South West London Sub Regional Housing Partnership has made available £35k of funding for each of the 7 boroughs in the sub region to purchase assessment beds for rough sleepers. This will enable Merton to place rough sleepers in a place for safety, allowing sufficient time for comprehensive assessments of the clients' housing, support and training needs to be undertaken.

Objective 3 - Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People & Minority Groups

BACKGROUND

One of the key roles of local authorities is to provide assistance to the most vulnerable people in society, such as older people, people with physical disability, dementia, learning disability or mental health problem.

In 2001, 16.8% (31,515) of Merton’s total population were people aged 60 and over, and 13% were aged 65 and over (24,288 persons), of these 15% were ethnic minorities. 14,990 (19%) Merton households were pensioner households, and of these, almost 7 in 10 (68%) were lone pensioner households (10,119 households). Merton’s Housing Needs Survey published in 2005 showed that single pensioner households in Merton had increased to 10,442 by 2004, a 3% increase in 3 years.

67% of all older person households in Merton were owner-occupiers and 21% live in social rented housing. Another 10% were tenants in the private rented sector. More than 600 Merton residents aged 65 and over lived in residential care or nursing homes in 2001.

In Merton, it is estimated that in 2010 there were 9,873 adults (aged 18-64) with a moderate physical disability; 2,714 with a severe physical disability; 4,402 with a sensory impairment; 3,473 with learning disabilities; and 22,817 with mental health problems (POPPI & PANSI).

As of March 2010, the council funds approximately 1,200 units of supported accommodation for vulnerable client groups.

90% of Merton’s 1,333 designated older people’s homes are sheltered homes, with only 128 extra care homes which cater for older people with higher support and care needs. In addition, 385 vulnerable people receive floating support and 59 vulnerable clients are placed into ‘Shared Lives’ accommodation in the private sector, where support are provided by their landlords acting as their carers.

Older people make up the biggest client group living in supported housing (55%), followed by homeless people with support needs (14%) and people with mental health problems (9%). Other client groups living in supported accommodation include ex-offenders; people with physical disabilities and sensory impairment; people with learning disabilities; people with alcohol problems or HIV/AIDs, and people experiencing domestic violence.

Between 2008-2011, an additional 51 supported housing units were completed in Merton, including a 33-unit extra care housing scheme for older people; 15 units for people with learning disability at Cliveden Road, Durham Road and Meopham Road; and 4 new units for people with HIV/Aids. In addition, 9 move-on units were also secured for people with mental health problems who are ready for more independent living.

The council also provide permanent housing solutions for a number of vulnerable people needing move-on accommodation, through a annual quota system set out in our Allocations Policy, as shown in the table below.

Mental health	11
Learning disabilities	8
Substance Misuse	2
Young people / move-on	12
Ex offenders	2
Children leaving care	11
Children special	5
Total	51

The council's Adult Social Care teams provided support to 1,674 people aged 65 and over between 2008-2011, to enable them to live independently at home. The council also works closely with other statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations to provide low-level support that promote independence living. Over a three-year period, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 95% of OT equipment delivered within 7 days
- 181 clients assisted in home improvement
- 1,772 handypersons jobs completed
- 34 loft clearance completed
- 170 home safety checks completed
- Funded a pilot garden clearance project
- Home Visiting Schemes - funded an additional 100+ households to access grants, energy schemes and have benefits checks
- Set up Housing Advice Network & provide talks and training for advice workers
- Annual Energy Advice Days

The council also administers grants and support other initiatives that help improve the condition and energy efficiency of housing, targeting vulnerable client groups.

- Approved 156 disabled facilities grants (DFG) worth £1m & 93 small repairs grant (c. £500k) between 2008-2011
- 178 Coldbusters grant totalling £604k approved in 2009-11, and 247 (£1m) approved in 2006-09
- Provided advice to nearly 3,000 older people on repairs & grants
- c. 2,000 households benefited from grant work

In relation to the needs of minority client groups, the council is reviewing the needs of the BME community in Merton. Following the successful completion of Merton's Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy in 2006, the council continues to work with

partners to implement an annual Action Plan. Outcomes achieved through this work included the development of a sheltered housing scheme for African/Caribbean elders; a homelessness prevention BME video project involving young people undertaking peer research; a Peer Education programme targeting Merton schools in deprived areas; and a subsequent drop in the proportion of BME representation amongst homeless applicants. However, with a rise in homelessness, there is evidence that the proportion of BME homeless applicants is increasing again.

Following the completion of a Pan London Gypsies & Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA) in 2008, the Mayor of London is now seeking additional local evidence from boroughs to inform pitch targets. This approach is set out in the recently published government document on Planning for Travellers Site.

The council works closely with Planning colleagues and partners such as the Sutton Traveller's Education Service; Merton Priority Homes; the Health Service and the Police through a Gypsies & Travellers Group with users representation. The group has developed a draft Gypsies & Travellers Strategy covering not just housing issues, but also health, education, community safety etc. A Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments for partners has also been signed off by the Merton Partnership in 2010, and it was reviewed in 2011.

The council also worked closely with Merton Priority Homes, the managing agent of the council-owned Brickfield Road Caravan Site, to implement Section 318 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 by the statutory deadline of 28 May 2011, by providing residents of the site with a Written Statement to ensure that they are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the MHA 1983. Section 318 extends the definition of a protected site in the

Mobile Homes Act 1983 to include local authority owned Gypsy & Traveller site, bringing the rights and responsibilities of residents living on LA sites into line with those in other park home sites. A statutory Written Statement was issued to residents of the Brickfield Road Caravan Site in April 2011 to inform them of their new rights and responsibilities.

KEY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The council faces the challenge of meeting the needs of an ageing population in Merton. Population projection shows that older people aged 65 and over in Merton will see a 22% (5,200 households) increase between 2011 to 2025, with the over 85 age group increasing by 34%. The projected 30% increase in the 65-69 age-group is above the London average increase of 27%. The number of older people with illnesses and disabilities is also projected to increase over the next 5 years (Source: POPPI):

- People aged 65 and over with a limiting long-term illness to increase by 23% from 10,841 to 13,294, and will make up 46.5% of this age-group
- For people aged 85 and over, as high as 70% will have a limiting long-term illness
- People aged 65 and over with dementia increase by 25% from 1,812 to 2,259
- People aged 65 and over with learning disability to increase by 24% from 488 to 603

There are over 600 older person households currently on Merton's Housing Register, of which over 400 are Merton residents who are not already living in social housing, so there is a clear need to increase the provision of affordable designated older people's housing for renting.

It is also necessary to increase housing choice for older people who are owner-occupiers, as 67% of all older people households in Merton are owner-occupiers, but at present, 79% of designated older people homes are for social rent, with only 21% catering for older owner-occupiers. We also know that in Merton, there are fewer extra care homes and leasehold sheltered homes per 1,000 pensioner households compared to the London average (EAC Database 2010). The 'Pantiles' extra care scheme completed in 2009 included 10 shared ownership homes (33%) that cater for owner-occupiers.

Increasing the availability of attractive and well-designed older people's homes will also encourage under-occupiers to downsize. At the time of the Census 2001, 65% of Merton households were under-occupying their homes. In the social housing sector, encouraging under-occupiers to downsize helps release much-needed larger accommodation for families in housing need.

An estimated 30%-35% of social housing tenants in Merton are under-occupiers. This means that at least 3,500 households living in the social rented sector under-occupying their homes in Merton, many of these are older people households. In 2008-11, there were a total of 53 under-occupation moves for social tenants in Merton. This shows that a lot more will need to be done to encourage more under-occupiers to move to smaller homes. It is therefore important that smaller-sized homes should be maximised within the affordable housing new build programme.

The number of adults with disabilities is also projected to increase between 2010 and 2015:

- People with a physical disability to increase by 560 or 5%
- Young adults aged 25-34 predicted to have a learning disability set to

- rise by 1,076 or 8% from 2010 to 1,163 in 2015
- Adults (aged 18-64) with a learning disability to increase by 213 or 6% to 3,686
- People with a mental health problem to rise by 1,352 or 6% from 2010 to 24,169 in 2015.

There is also a need to provide more supported living options for people with physical and / or learning disabilities. Historically, a higher proportion of Merton expenditure goes towards residential care for adults with physical disabilities and learning disabilities. More than half (51%) of the 600 adults with a learning disability aged 18 and over registered with the council had to rely on residential accommodation in 2007 ('Fit for the Future in Merton' 2007), with only 8% living independently and 41% lived with their families.

With more and more people with a learning disability living longer, families and carers are less likely to be willing or able to take on a lifetime of commitment of care. There are also more single parent families who cannot care for their child due to work commitments. Although more provisions for these client groups have since been developed,

There is also a need to focus on prevention. Merton's Joint Local Adult Services Commissioning Strategy 2010-2013 sets out the case for a shift in resources to prevention and help improve health and well-being of older people and other clients with disabilities. Supported housing plays an important role in delaying or preventing the needs for residential or nursing care. A range of support services is also required to help vulnerable people to continue to live independently in their own home, and to help delay or prevent the needs for higher-level support.

Given the limited build capacity, we will need to prioritise the type of housing for

older and vulnerable people that is most needed when planning for new provisions. Merton already has an above London average proportion of social rented sheltered housing per 1,000 pensioner households, while the provision of leasehold sheltered schemes as well as extra care housing scheme are below the London average.

With the projected increase in older people with limiting long-term illness, dementia and learning disability, as well as an increase in lone pensioner households, we need more housing that will meet the changing needs of the population. On the one hand, housing needs to play a part in promoting the independence and well-being of older people and people with learning disability, helping to prevent or delay the need for more intensive support and care, while on the other hand also offering non-institutionalised home for life for many older and other vulnerable people who may otherwise require residential or nursing care.

The extra care housing model fulfils both these functions and caters for a much wider range of needs than the traditional sheltered housing model, through its design, layout, facilities, and the support and care services provided. It is recognised by the Department of Health as a model of housing that "promotes well-being, choice, dignity and quality of life for older and other vulnerable people with disabilities and long-term conditions".

However, the same issues of viability and affordability relating to general needs housing also apply to supported housing schemes though, therefore cross-subsidies and contributions from developers, RPs and the council are likely to be necessary.

As well as the issues concerning capital funding, the viability and affordability of these schemes are also dependent on revenue funding sources. The public funding for the care and support is

undergoing significant changes, with the implementation of Personal Budget and Direct Payment, the introduction GP Commissioning, and plans to reform how care and support should be paid for in future.

The Commission on Funding of Care and Support set up by the government in late 2010 has examined the funding streams via adult social care; the NHS and the benefits system, and has published its report in July 2011 on how to achieve an affordable and sustainable funding system for care and support, both in the homes and other settings. The report recommends that lifetime contribution to adult social care costs should be capped at £35k, with means tested support for those with assets of below £100k. However, the government has yet to announce their responses to these recommendations.

The Department for Work and Pensions has also consulted on proposed changes in the way housing benefit assists those living in supported housing in the social and voluntary sector, through their consultation paper "Housing Benefit Reform – Supported Housing". Details of the changes are only just emerging and these need to be fully understood to help inform our Housing Strategy.

Vulnerable people are also particularly at risk of fuel poverty. Building Research Establishment carried out a research which showed 5% of households in Merton (c.4,000) spent more than 10% of their income on heating, therefore within the government's definition of fuel poverty. Wards most affected are Wimbledon Park (7%), Graveney (7%), Trinity (6%), Dundonald (6%) and Hillside (5%). With reduction to grant funding such as the Small Repairs Grant (SRG) and the closing of the Coldbusters scheme, local authorities will need to identify new funding sources that can provide assistance to households who are 'fuel poor'.

There is also evidence that vulnerable people in Merton are more likely to be affected by excess winter deaths. Between 2006-09, there was on average 101 excess winter deaths in Merton per annum. Further breakdown shows an average of 90 deaths per month in the summer, but 115 deaths per month in the winter, which is higher than the number of deaths in Sutton in the corresponding periods. As such, the council's Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has tasked the Health and Warmth Partnership to develop measures to address this.

KEY PRIORITIES

3.1 More supported housing provision for vulnerable people

Redevelopment of MPH sheltered schemes

The council is working with MPH on its project to redevelop 3 existing sheltered homes to eradicate shared facilities and provide fully self-contained homes for rent. The redevelopment of Gresham House, The Oaks and Doliffe Close will result in better-designed homes with modern facilities that have incorporated the key design principles as recommended in the HCA's "HAPPI" report. However, it will not result in many additional homes, although many existing residents will be taking up re-housing options offered by MPH and will not return to the new schemes, hence there will be re-housing opportunities for many older and vulnerable households.

Provisions for adults with learning disability

The MPH sheltered housing redevelopment programme will also deliver a separate wing for young adults with learning disabilities at Doliffe Close. In addition, the council will work with providers to develop another 8 1-bed units for people with learning disability, and to

identify further development opportunities for new schemes.

Additional supply of supported housing

The council will seek further opportunities to increase the supply of supported housing, such as extra care housing, that will meet the needs of older people as well as other client groups such as people with dementia or learning disabilities, to include rented homes, shared ownership/shared equity and private leasehold sales, where necessary with contributions from the council to ensure viability and affordability. This will help meet the needs of older and vulnerable people, and help address under-occupation.

Shared Lives

The council is further developing its Shared Lives service through an Optimisation Programme to provide supported living for more vulnerable people and to help them gain more independent living skills, as the 'Shared Lives' service has proved to be a cost effective way in supporting people towards independent living. The council will seek to move residential care homes residents who will benefit from more independent living to the 'Shared Lives' scheme.

Explore other revenue funding options

The council will work with partners to identify any revenue funding opportunities for supported housing that may be offered through government policy changes such as the changes in housing benefit for people living in supported housing, GP commissioning, personal budget & direct payment, and any changes that the government may bring in with regards to funding care and support.

The council will also examine other market options such as 'Immediate Care Plans' that can be arranged through private insurance companies. For a fixed sum paid upfront, depending on the person's level of needs, the plan would cover a person's care costs for life. This option is available

to older people with sizeable amount of savings, or those who are willing to sell their homes to release funds for the plan.

3.2 Increase housing options for older owner-occupiers

Rental Model for Owner-Occupiers

Older owner-occupiers with care and support needs have in the past been accepted onto extra care housing schemes in the past on a case-by-case basis. The council aims to make sheltered or extra care accommodation owned by RPs available to more owner-occupiers who need them but have difficulties accessing private sector options. We will develop a rental model for older owner-occupiers with care and support needs, where these clients would be let a home in an extra care housing scheme.

In return, the clients would allow the council to let their homes to homeless households through the Rent Deposit Scheme, for the duration for their stay in the extra care homes, The owner would enter into an Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreement with the households nominated by the council, and could use the rents collected to pay for their housing and care costs.

Address under-occupation and improve health through rental model

The Rental Model for Owner-Occupiers should help release much needed larger homes for those in housing need as many older people are under-occupiers, and would provide housing solutions for those who are too frail to deal with repairs and maintenance of their large homes, and/or lack sufficient income to keep their homes warm. This option should also help improve the health of older people by moving them into a modern and well-designed scheme, as we know that 52% of vulnerable households in the private sector are living in 'non-decent' homes, often due to a lack of thermal comfort.

Responding to the HB Size Criteria

A new size criteria for housing benefit claims by working age social housing tenants will apply from April 2013. This will cut the amount of benefit that tenants can get if they are deemed to have a spare bedroom in their council or housing association home. Although this will not affect under-occupiers who are older people or are disabled and need a non-resident overnight carer, vulnerable tenants not needing an overnight carer will be affected.

Some RPs such as MPH are already considering measures to assist those who will be affected, including assistance to trade down to a smaller home, or provide information about taking in a lodger. The council will work with RPs to further develop these initiatives.

3.3 Support vulnerable households to live independently in their own homes

Move-on quota for social housing

The council provides long-term housing solutions for vulnerable people needing move-on accommodation from their stay in supported housing, through a quota system set out in its annual Allocations Strategy. The council will increase the quota for vulnerable client groups including people with mental health, learning disabilities and substance misuse issues in 2012-2013, and will review the quota annually.

Lifetime Homes & Wheelchair Standard

The council seeks to increase the supply of new homes that can cater for the needs of people as they age and those with physical disabilities. In line with the London Housing Strategy and Merton's Core Strategy, the council seeks all new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes Standard, and 10% should be wheelchair accessible subject to suitability of sites.

Services to support people to live at home

The council's Adult Social Care teams will continue to provide care and support for vulnerable people, including support by the Occupational Therapy Service (OT); the MASCOT Telecare community alarm service; and community-based services such as home care, professional support, day care and direct payment etc.

Grant resources to adaptations

The council will continue to maximise spend of grant funding such as Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), and will assist RPs with the Landlord Application Procedures, where RPs could make collective applications on behalf of their tenants for funding without the need for individual means testing. Work that has been initiated included application by Haig Homes to access 70k of CLG funding for adaptation for ex-service personnel, and Wandle Housing Association's plan to apply for landlord funding to adapt homes for rehabilitation, thus helping to reduce hospital bed blocking.

Adaptations for MPH Tenants with Disabilities

MPH will work with the council's Occupational Therapy Team to undertake adaptations for tenants with physical disabilities to make their homes more suitable to their needs, with a £500k budget set aside for this purpose as part of the Stock Transfer Agreement. Where appropriate, tenants will be offered alternative accommodation that is more suitable.

Promote early interventions

There has been many cases of vulnerable people referred to the council for support and care services where the clients would have benefited from early intervention. The council will work with RPs and other support agencies to improve the rate of identification of these clients, so that a package of early interventions could be put

in place to help delay or prevent the need for higher-level support.

Address Excess Winter Deaths

Health and Warmth Partnership is working with stakeholders to review activities in the winter period with the aim of reducing excess winter deaths through the production of a Winter Plan, and reporting to the council's Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Gardening Service

The council has provided Age UK Merton with seed funding to provide a Gardening Service for older and vulnerable people in Merton, assisting at least 100 households per annum. The council will work with Age UK Merton to fully develop this project with the aim of moving it on to a self-financing model by 2015.

3.4 Identify housing and support needs of minority groups

Ensure synergy with other local BME Strategic Plans

The council will review the housing and support needs of minority client groups, such as the needs of the BME community, working with other agencies and organisation, to ensure synergy with their BME strategies. For example, the council will work closely with the Merton Unity Network (MUN), to seek added value from their recently launched BME Strategic Plan, and will establish link with MUN's BME Forum.

Target homelessness initiatives to BME communities

As households from BME communities are over-represented in homelessness applications and acceptances (57% applicants compared to 32% in the population in 2012), the council will target BME communities when delivering all homelessness initiatives set out under Objective 2.

Ensure Fair Access to Services

The council undertakes annual equality monitoring of all housing services and projects, to include homeless cases, housing advice, nominations to general needs housing, nominations to supported housing through panels (young persons, mental health & older people), and projects such as the A10 Project and Gardening Project. The monitoring includes analysis of take-up and outcomes by ethnicity, age and disability, as well as by gender where appropriate, in order to identify any gaps in take-up or access to services by different client groups, and to make adjustment where necessary to ensure fair access for all.

Publish Gypsies & Travellers Strategy

Having held a successful research event involving over 150 people from the Gypsy & Traveller community, the council will work with representatives of the community to finalise the draft Gypsies & Travellers Strategy, the publication of which had been deferred pending the findings of this research. The Strategy will take into account the Government's recent consultation on "A Better Deal for Mobile Home Owners" (April 2012), and the findings of the Ministerial Working Group's report on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers.

Review of Protocol of Unauthorised Encampment

Although there may not be an immediate need to review the 2010 Protocol on Unauthorised Encampment, given that a light-touch reviewed was completed in 2011, it is likely that the Protocol will need to be reviewed again within the period covered by this Strategy, i.e. before March 2015.

New Agreement for Caravan Site Residents

Having issued a Written Statement to residents of the Brickfield Road caravan Site, to inform them of their rights and responsibilities following a change in the

law, Merton council will work with MPH, to consult residents of the Brickfield Road Caravan Site on the development of a new ‘Tenancy’ agreement that will reflect their additional rights and responsibilities brought about by the extension of the Mobile Homes Act 1983 to council-owned caravan sites.

**Objective 4 – Regenerating
Housing & Shaping
Neighbourhoods**

BACKGROUND

Physical Regeneration

In March 2010, Merton Council transferred its housing stock of over 6,000 homes to Merton Priory Homes (MPH), a newly created subsidiary of Circle (then known as Circle Anglia), following a 'yes' vote by tenants. The transfer helped bring about a programme of investment to improve the condition of stock previously owned by the council, which makes up about 58% of all social housing stock in Merton. Properties will be improved to the Merton Standard, which is over and above the Decent Homes standard, developed with the help of the Residents.

MPH also planned to improve the attractiveness and facilities on the 22 key estates through a £1.25m two-year investment programme, and through an ongoing £325,000 neighbourhood improvement annual budget. MPH has consulted tenants and residents on the improvements they want for their estates through a Consultative Group. The priorities identified by tenants are included in the major works program to be carried out over a 2-year period.

The delivery of new build housing schemes also contributes to the regeneration of an area. A total of 438 affordable homes were built in Merton between 2008-2011, and an additional 348 affordable homes were completed in 2011-12 due to the development of 2 large sites, Windmill and Brenley, both located in the eastern part of Merton. This means a total of 786 affordable homes were built over the last 4 years.

Private Sector House Condition

Local authority strategic housing role plays a key part in maintaining standards in the private sector. The 2004 Housing Act reflects this and brought in a range of measures for local authorities to enforce standard and protect the most vulnerable residents. The main elements of the Act include a new Health & Housing Rating System (HHSRS), which replaces the housing fitness standard, powers to require landlords to take action to rectify hazards in their property; mandatory licensing for larger higher-risk HMOs and discretionary powers to licence smaller HMOs. It is estimated that there are about 5,000 HMOs in Merton, although the number of verifiable HMOs is around 123. During 2008-2011, the council had issued a total of 64 HMO Licenses.

A BRE Survey on private sector condition completed in 2008 showed that around 38% (24,100) 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 66% of properties. Of the non-decent private sector homes in Merton, private rented dwellings are most likely to be non-decent homes, especially ones that do not have modern facilities.

Vulnerable Households and Non Decent Homes

The survey also showed that vulnerable households are more likely to be living in homes that do not meet the decent homes standard. There are nearly 7,000 vulnerable households occupying private sector homes, of which 3,360 (48%) live in homes that met the decent homes standard, and 3,640 (52%) live in non-decent homes. 486 private sector homes occupied by vulnerable people were made 'decent' through direct action by the council over a 3-year period. We achieved this through targeting grants, such as Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Small Repairs Grant, to vulnerable people and

focused on making homes more energy efficient.

Empty Homes

According to Council Tax records, there are 1,550 empty homes in the private sector in Merton (April 2011). The records show that of these 1,003 have been vacant for more than 6 months. The council has started an audit programme of all empty homes, and more than 600 have already been audited. The majority of these were found to be occupied, and only a third (about 200 homes) were found to have been vacant for more than 6 months.

The council was awarded Empty Homes Grant funding through the sub-regional Targeted Funding Stream, and to date around £300k have been given to owners of long-term empty homes to bring their properties up to decent-homes standard, in return for letting the homes to households in need nominated by the council for 3 years.

The South West London Sub Region has just been awarded £2.7m by the HCA to bring more empty homes back into use for the period 2012-2015. Merton will use the borough's share of £255k to help bring more empty homes back into use.

The YMCA has secured funding from the HCA's Empty Homes initiative to bring empty homes back into use, and has partnered with Habitat for Humanity to deliver the improvement work as well as a programme that offers training and construction work opportunities for residents.

Energy efficiency

Private sector housing stock in Merton has an average SAP rating of 52 (rating of 1-100 used to measure energy efficiency, with the rating of 1 being the poorest), close to the London average rating of 53. However, 16% private sector homes in Merton have a SAP rating below 35, the third poorest figure amongst London

boroughs. Social housing stock in Merton has a better average of 66, although the average rating for ex-council stock now transferred to Merton Priory Homes is slightly lower at 60.

One initiative that has result in improved energy efficiency in social housing stock is the creation of a Low Carbon Zone area around Phipps Bridge, covering a small number of social housing (around 1,000 homes) on the Cherry Tree Estate and in New Close, one of 10 Low Carbon Zones across London. The initiative, which has just been successfully completed, aimed to reduce the area's CO₂ emissions by over 20% as well as reducing energy bills, by inspiring residents to lead a greener life and installing energy saving devices in homes, businesses and schools through advice, support and training.

The London-wide "NEW" scheme which aims to support households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, was also operating in the Cricket Green and Pollards Hill wards of Merton, although not including the Low Carbon Zone at Phipps Bridge in the Cricket Green ward. The Gravney ward, which has a high proportion of private housing, was also covered by the scheme. Energy experts working on the scheme planned to visit 1,600 homes in these 3 Merton wards to advise on behavioral changes and to provide easy installations, such as free energy meters and shower heads, as well as loft insulations which are provided free to those aged 70 and over.

Merton, along with other boroughs in SW London, was awarded funding from the London Housing Board for energy efficiency grants. A total of 425 vulnerable households benefited from loft and cavity wall insulation through the Coldbusters scheme between 2006-11 amounting to £1.5m resources harnessed from the government. Other energy efficiency schemes supported by the council included Warm Front, Heat Streets

(replaced by Warm Zones). The council also commissioned the Creative Environment Network (CEN) to run Home Visiting services to provide energy advice and assistance to people in their own home. 340 households have been visited by CEN in 2008-2011, and received help to access free and discounted energy efficiency grants.

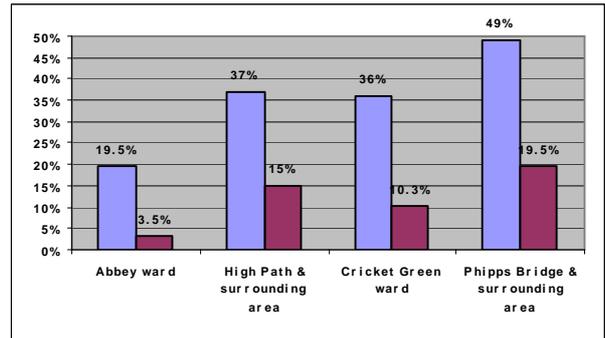
Socio-economic regeneration

Small area analysis undertaken by the council on areas such as Phipps Bridge and High Path, where a high proportion of social housing are located, show particularly high level of socio-economic deprivation. These areas are found in the most deprived wards in Merton, but the level of deprivation within these neighbourhoods is well above the average of those wards.

There is a high level of family poverty in these areas, with a high proportion of households with dependent children and lone-parent households with no adult in employment:

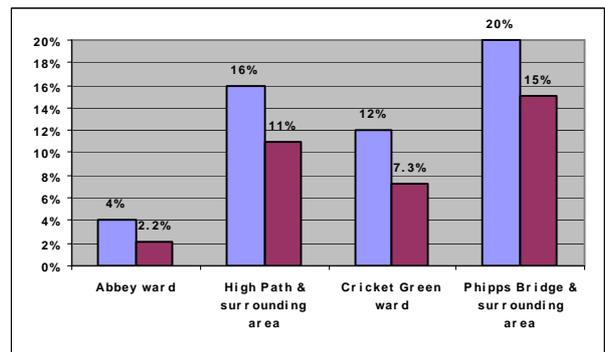
- Nearly half (49%) of the households in the Phipps Bridge area and 37% of households in the High Path area have dependent children³, much higher than the averages for the 2 wards and the borough average of 29%
- 4 in 10 of households with dependent in the Phipps Bridge and High Path areas have no adult in employment, compared to averages for the 2 wards and the borough average of 16%

³ A dependent child is a person aged 0-15 in a household (whether or not in a family) or aged 16-18 in full-time education and living in a family with his or her parent(s). This is a change from the 1991 definition which was a person aged 0-15 in a household or a person aged 16-18, never married, in full-time education and economically inactive.



Legend:
 % Households with dependent children
 % Households with dependent children with no adult in employment

19.6% of households in Phipps Bridge and its surrounding area and 16.3% in the High Path area were lone parent households (93% were females), compared to the borough average of 6%. Of these, 73% and 69% in the Phipps Bridge and High Path areas respectively were not in employment, compared to the borough average of 51%.



Legend:
 % Lone Parent Households
 % Lone Parent Households not working

In order to help social housing residents overcome worklessness in these deprived areas, the council organized a Jobs Fair in 2009, bringing employers and training institutions, as well as advice agencies, to the Phipps Bridge estate, one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Merton. Over 200 residents from the estate attended the Fair with a number securing employment and training opportunities. In 2010, the council hosted its first annual Housing Fayre, targeting residents from across the borough, providing them with a range of housing related advice and assistance. Employment and training opportunities

Many registered providers (RPs) operating in Merton have strong track records in developing community development initiatives, particularly larger RPs such as L&Q, Moat Housing Group, Wandle Housing Association and Thames Valley Housing Association.

Merton Priory Homes is delivering a £1m community fund between 2010 and 2015 to build the capacity of local community groups for the benefit of its residents and the wider community. The Neighbourhood Regeneration Strategy was refreshed in April 2012.

Merton Partnership's Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, reporting to Merton Partnership's Sustainable Communities & Transport Thematic Group, has developed a Sustainability Index to monitor outcomes of community development initiatives, focusing on deprived neighbourhoods, which include Phipps Bridge, Pollards Hill and Plough Lane.

Diversifying tenures in deprived areas such as increasing the number of low-cost homes for sale, resulting more working households moving in these areas, often contributes to their socio-economic regeneration. Developing LCHO such as shared ownership in these areas also results in more affordable housing options for households on middle and low income. The Windmill and Brenley Road housing developments that include shared-ownership options in the Mitcham area are good examples of this.

KEY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for physical regeneration through new build housing is limited in Merton because of the lack of large sites for market and affordable housing development, and a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

identified a capacity for only 320 additional homes per annum over the next 10 years, to include both market and affordable housing.

The present uncertain economic climate, along with the limited build capacity, has also had an impact of housing completions in Merton, with affordable housing completions dropping to only 50 homes in 2009-10 from 327 homes in 2008-09, before increasing to 121 in 2010-11. There was a large number of affordable housing completions in 2011-12, with a total of 348 homes built, of which 235 were social rented homes and 113 were for shared-ownership sales. It should be noted that this large number of completions was the result of 2 large sites - Windmill and Brenley in Mitcham, becoming available for development last year. We are not currently aware of any other large site that will be available for housing development in the near future, although the 'Call for Sites' work of the Planning Division may present new opportunities.

CO2 emissions from domestic housing account for c.27% of the UK's total CO2 emissions (Energy Saving Trust). With limited opportunity to re-develop existing housing in Merton, housing providers will need to look at retrofitting options to help improve the energy efficiency of their stock, thus helping to reduce CO2 emissions.

The government's spending cut also has a big impact on energy efficiency measure, with the Coldbusters scheme now closed after 6 years, and the council has seen huge reduction to our Small Repairs grant funding. It is therefore essential that the council develops innovative approaches.

Identifying long-term empty homes (vacant for more than 6 months) and to identify the best course of actions for bringing these empty homes back into use, have been a key priority for the council for many years and continues to be the case. Measures

available include the award of Empty Homes Grant to homeowners to bring their empty properties back into use, and the option to utilise these homes for households in housing needs through the Rent Deposit Scheme.

The Welfare Reform and Universal Credit to be introduced by the Government in 2013 is likely to reduce the amount of housing benefit available to low-income households, particularly larger households, due to the benefits cap of £350 for single households and £500 for families. This will affect many social housing tenants. It is therefore of paramount importance that physical regeneration is linked to socio-economic regeneration to ensure that new developments will result in sustainable communities. The challenge for the council and our RP partners and other stakeholder organisations is to improve joint working and pool resources to help reduce the high level of deprivation and family poverty in areas with high proportion of social housing.

KEY PRIORITIES

4.1 Contribute to regeneration through the improvement of housing stock condition

Decent Homes programme for housing stock transferred to MPH

MPH will deliver its promise to bring 100% of housing stock transferred to their ownership from the council in March 2010, to 'Merton Standard', which is over and over the 'Decent Homes' standard set by government.

Identifying opportunities for improving social housing stock

The Housing division will work with the 'Future Merton' Team and with RPs to identify opportunities for improving social housing stock condition in Merton, either through refurbishment or re-development. Aligning with Merton's emerging

Regeneration Delivery Plan, this will include opportunities identified through Masterplans for the Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon areas, those identified in the London Plan as Area for Intensification, and any opportunities that arise may through Morden town centre and other priority areas.

Identifying additional housing development opportunities

Increase supply of new build affordable housing is key to meeting the high level of housing needs in Merton. However, the new HCA 'Affordable Rent' funding (2012-2015) for RPs was allocated on a Pan London basis, therefore it is not possible to accurately predict the level of affordable housing development opportunities in Merton over the next 3 years. The council will however actively negotiate with RPs that have signed development contracts with the HCA (now managed by the GLA) to develop homes in Merton, ensuring that the proposed 'Affordable Rent' reflects local housing market rents while taking into consideration the viability of schemes. The council will also actively identify housing development opportunities through the Planning Division's 'Call for Sites' work.

Protect supply of larger homes and maintain standard

Policy 14 of Merton's Core Strategy on Design states that the council is "seeking to retain the existing stock of family-sized units in Merton", therefore de-conversions involving "conversion of existing family-sized single dwellings into two or more smaller units must include the re-provision of at least one family-sized unit", and that "all new dwelling conversions must comply with the most appropriate minimum space standard".

For de-conversions into Houses in Multiple Occupations (HMOs), the council will work with landlords to ensure licensable HMOs are issued with licences to help maintain standard, and to take necessary actions

against landlords who failed to obtain licences.

Improve private sector house condition

In relation to the private sector, the council will continue to use statutory powers to improve the condition of private sector housing in Merton, through the removal of hazards, enforcement actions and the licensing of HMOs.

Bringing empty homes into use

The council will continue with the active identification of empty homes that have been vacant for more than 6 months, and will utilise Merton's £255k share of the £2.7m sub-regional funding provided by the HCA to bring some of these empty homes back into use. In addition, the council will also seek opportunities to work with RPs and other organisations e.g. YMCA, that have been granted HCA Empty Homes funding to turn more empty homes into accommodation for people in housing need.

4.2 Innovative solutions to improve energy efficiency of housing stock

Improve sustainability of new homes

The council's Planning Policy stipulates that all new homes in Merton should be developed to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3. Since Merton's Core Strategy was adopted in 2011, the council's planning policy (CS15) states that all new homes in Merton must be developed to Code 4. There are many schemes that have been given permission since this date that have been or are being built to Code 4, including a Wandle Housing Association affordable housing scheme of 9 houses, and the Rowan High School scheme with a mix of market and affordable housing, to come on stream in 2013-14.

Energy Efficiency Initiatives

Other initiatives being developed include the use of the reduced Small Repairs Grant to help maintain the London Warm

Zones initiatives, to be supplemented by household contributions. Merton has also been given £178k to run a new 2-year scheme where every home can have an energy and a water system assessment, as part of a Pan London scheme.

The council will also raise awareness of housing providers on new funding opportunities such as ECO and the "Green Deal".

Revolving Loan for Home Improvement & Energy Efficiency

The council is also introducing a "Revolving Loan", a pool of money totaling £100k available which is available as a loan at below market interest rate, for households who are not eligible for the Small Repairs Grant, but need small domestic repairs such as rewiring, damp proofing, solid wall insulation, provision of energy efficiency etc.

Low Carbon Initiatives

Following the successful completion of the Low Carbon Zone initiative, which focused on reducing CO2 emissions from social housing stock in and around the Phipps Bridge area, the council and its partners on the Health & Warmth Partnership will contribute to the development of future schemes in Merton.

'Green' Private Landlords

The council will also explore the development of a 'Green Landlord' initiative through our Private Landlord Forum, with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of private rented accommodation. The idea is to develop incentives to encourage landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, either by using their own resources or through government initiatives such as the Green Deal.

4.3 Socio-economic regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods

Reduce Family Poverty

The council will seek to ensure that RPs assist their tenants to manage their budgets and rent payments through income maximisation, in particular following the introduction of the Universal Credit. This objective will be set out in Merton's Tenancy Strategy.

Neighbourhood Renewal

The council will seek to ensure that new housing development will be sustainable, by linking physical regeneration with the improvement of socio-economic conditions. Merton Priory Homes has taken on the role of delivering Neighbourhood Renewal for the council, and is supporting local projects through its annual round of Community Fund. Funding for community initiatives are also offered by other RPs. The council and its partners will learn from these funding programme by examining key outcomes and how they benefit local communities.

Review of community development initiatives

The council will work with partners through the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group, to develop a strategic overview of the effectiveness of community development and funding initiatives put in place by the council and RPs, and to assess progress against initiatives put in place to help reduce socio-economic deprivation such as unemployment and family poverty.

Build capacity of residents in housing need

It is recognised that training and employment provides the pathway for people to gain independence, and place them in a position to resolve their own housing problems. However, many residents often lack the confidence to embark on more formal training courses. The council will seek funding opportunities

to help develop courses that help build people's confidence and capacity, to help them move on to more formal training and ultimately, employment.

Maximise resources through joint working

The council will also look to add value by dovetailing the partnership's work with community development initiatives undertaken by RPs. This will include the following:

- MPH's Community & Economic Development Plan (2010-2015), which sets out actions to improve the life chances of its residents and the wider community
- Moat Housing Group's Residents Involvement Strategy and a Socio-Economic Strategy for the Pollards Hill estate.

This is one of the priority areas identified by the Sub Group, and a case study will be conducted for the area using the Sustainability Index, and the mapping work on community projects to be undertaken by Moat.

Widening engagement with partners

Over the next few years, the Housing Sub Group will look to widen engagement with other Merton Thematic Partnerships, including the Children's Trust, Safer Merton, and the Healthier Citizens partnerships, to broaden our understanding of linkages between housing, education, health and crime, in order to inform the development of joint initiatives to bring about socio-economic regeneration on deprived social housing estates.

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
Priority 1.1				
Develop policy responses to legislative changes that are appropriate for Merton				
1.11	Undertake consultation with RPs and other relevant organisations on the key objectives of Merton's Tenancy Strategy	By June 2012	Housing Strategy	Gain good understanding of RPs' perspective on the council's Tenancy Strategy objectives, to help ensure that they are deliverable
1.12	Publish Merton's Tenancy Strategy	By January 2013	Housing Strategy	Tenancy Strategy published and sent to all RPs operating in the borough
1.13	Monitor implementation of RPs Tenancy Policies against objectives in Merton's Tenancy Strategy	Annually	Housing Strategy	Ensure RPs who opt to introduce fixed-term tenancies adhere to the principles set out in Merton's Tenancy Strategy
1.14	Take into consideration of the council's Affordable Rent Policy when negotiating new affordable homes	6 monthly	Housing Development	Ensure new 'Affordable Rent' homes are affordable to local people
1.15	Negotiate 'Affordable Rent' levels of new build homes with developers and RPs, based on most up-to-date local market rents data.	6-monthly	Housing Development	Ensure new 'Affordable Rent' homes are affordable to local people
1.16	Implement changes to the council's refreshed Allocations Policy and monitor outcomes	By July 2012	Housing Needs & Enabling / Housing Strategy	Provide working households and ex armed forces personnel with additional priorities
1.17	Work with MPH to closely monitor RTB sales completions and to explore how the required replacement homes could be delivered	Annually	MPH / MPH Relationship Manager	Build replacement homes for 'additional' right-to-sales to maintain social housing supply
1.18	Undertake a survey of RPs plans to set up tenants' panels and their planned response to legislative changes to complaints	6-monthly	Housing Strategy / RPs	Gain understanding of the impact of changes in the Localism Act RE complaints on the local authority
1.19	Provide councillors & MPs with information on the requirements to handle complaints from social housing tenants to facilitate consistency	By March 2013	Housing Strategy	Ensure a councillors adopt a consistent approach in dealing with complaints from social housing tenants in their capacity as a "designated" person
1.20	Undertake Impact Analysis of Universal Credit & Welfare Reform	By March 2013	Housing Strategy	Gain better understanding of the impact of Welfare Reform on low-income households' ability to access affordable housing solutions
Priority 1.2				
Increase supply of new homes that are affordable to Merton residents				
1.21	Seek to achieve 40% of affordable housing across all new housing development	Annually	Housing Development	Maximise the development of affordable housing in the borough

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
	schemes in the borough.			
1.22	Seek a mix of tenure on new housing schemes	Annually	Housing Development	Help develop balanced and diverse communities through mixed tenures
1.23	Seek to develop some larger homes at 'social rent'	Annually	Housing Development	Increase supply of affordable homes for low-income families
1.24	Ensure a proportion of intermediate housing are affordable to middle income Merton residents, using the Median & lower quartile household income figure for assessments	Annually	Housing Development	Increase the number of purchases of new shared-ownership homes built in the borough by Merton residents
1.25	Produce regular briefings of up-to-date house prices, rents and income down to local area level where available.	Quarterly	Housing Strategy	Inform negotiations with developers and RPs to ensure new 'Affordable Rent' homes and intermediate housing are affordable to local people
1.26	Enforce Planning policies on infrastructure	Annually	Spatial Planning	Ensure large-scale developments are supported by adequate infrastructure
1.27	Implement Bed-Size Mix Policy	Annually	Housing Development / Planning	Deliver new housing that meet the needs of local people
1.29	Use of "Cash-in-Lieu" to support much needed new development	Annually	Housing Development / Planning	Enable the delivery of much needed homes such as larger social rent homes or supported housing that would otherwise not be financially viable
Priority 2.1				
Prevention of homelessness				
2.11	Run a Tenancy Rescue Scheme to increase tenancy renewals for Rent Deposit Scheme placements	6-monthly	Housing Options	Maintain current private sector rented supply and to reduce the percentage of homelessness acceptance due to termination of AST
2.12	Achieve 500 homelessness prevention cases per annum	Annually	Housing Options	Continue to assist households at risk of homelessness through prevention measures
2.13	Review the number of households in temporary accommodation in light of homelessness trends	6-monthly	Housing Needs & Enabling	Minimise the number of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation
2.14	Review Homelessness Strategy as required by Homelessness Act 2002 and in light of legislative changes	By December 2013	Housing Strategy / Homelessness Strategy Group	Review homelessness in Merton and update actions needed to by the council and its partners to respond to changing needs

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
Priority 2.2				
Increase access to the private rented sector				
2.21	Continue to run the successful Rent Deposit Scheme and to identify and negotiate further supply of affordable private rented homes	Annually	Housing Supply	Increase the number of private rented homes that are available to Merton homeless households
2.22	Work with RPs to identify opportunities for them to procure private sector properties to be let to homeless households	Annually	Housing Supply	Increase the number of RPs managed private rented homes to meet housing needs in Merton
2.23	Engage private landlords and to organise Accreditation training through the Private Landlord Forum, to be held twice a year	6-monthly	Housing Strategy	Maintain level of participation from existing members of the Forum and to engage new landlords, and to increase the number of accredited landlords
2.24	Explore the feasibility of setting up a social lettings agency for the Merton area	By March 2015	Housing Strategy	Learn from best practice and initiatives in other parts of the UK in growing the supply of private rented homes for households in housing need
Priority 2.3				
Increase move-on opportunities for the single homeless				
2.31	Increase move-on quota for young people in Allocations Strategy for 2012-13, and to review this for subsequent years with the aim of maintain the increased quota or further increase it	Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling / Housing Strategy	Increase long-term move-on provisions for young homeless persons
2.32	Finalise plans to redevelop the YMCA hostel in Wimbledon Broadway, and to complete redevelopment once planning permission has been granted	By March 2015	YMCA / Planning	Provide quality supported accommodation for young single homeless people and to increase the number of second-stage supported housing
2.33	Explore the feasibility of delivering short-term modular Y:Cube housing for single people in housing need in Merton	By March 2014	YMCA / Planning / Housing Needs & Enabling	Increase the number of move-on accommodation for young single homeless people living in supported housing who are ready for more independent living
2.34	Develop a more strategic focus in supporting residents of the Wilton Road homeless hostels	Annually	MASH / SPEAR	Ensure MASH residents are equipped with the life skills necessary to enable them to successfully move on to semi-supportive or independent living
2.35	Work with Vision Housing and SPEAR to source bedsits in the private sector for single homeless people,	6-monthly	Housing Needs & Enabling / Vision Housing / SPEAR	Increase the supply of private rented homes for single non-priority homeless people

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
	supported by a rent deposit and where available, rent guarantee insurance			
2.36	Continue to run the Young Persons Nominations Panel in assessing the housing and support need of young single homeless people and make appropriate referrals through monthly meetings	6-monthly	Housing Needs & Enabling /Housing Strategy / YPNP	Ensure appropriate referrals are made to either first-stage or second-stage accommodation, or to permanent social rented homes
2.37	Develop initiatives to increase move-on as well as employment & training opportunities for young single homeless people	6-monthly	MYSHF / Housing Strategy	More opportunities for young single homeless people to move on from supported accommodation to independently living
2.38	Undertake a review of employment and training initiatives being run by housing providers and training organisations and to refer young single homeless people to appropriate schemes	By March 2013	MYSHF / Grenfell / YMCA	Increase the number of young single homeless people signing up to employment and training initiatives
2.39	Work with MYSHF to develop a Pathway Project by assisting young homeless people affected by "repeat" or "sustained" homelessness on a pathway to independence through training and work placement	By March 2014	Housing Strategy / MYSHF	Reduce "repeat" or "sustained" homelessness amongst young people, particularly ethnic minority young people
2.3	Work with partners to identify funding opportunities and to submit bids to run homelessness projects	Annually	Housing Strategy	Increase resources available for homelessness initiatives in Merton
Priority 2.4				
Support rough sleepers to find long-term housing solutions				
2.41	Work with partners through the Rough Sleepers Case Conference Group through 6-weekly meetings to assist rough sleepers to stay off the streets, and to respond to Government initiatives	6-monthly	Housing Strategy / Housing Needs & Enabling RSCCG	Assist more rough sleepers to stay off the streets and find longer-term solutions
2.42	Review the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) annually with the RSCCG	Annually	Housing Strategy / RSCCG	Put in place appropriate responses from various agencies to meet changing demand
2.43	Engage more faith organisations and volunteers in providing a Winter Night Shelter for rough sleepers	By March 2013	YMCA / Winter Night Shelter Consortium	Increase emergency provisions for rough sleepers during cold weather periods
2.44	Improve MASH hostel for young single homeless people as part of the GLA's	By March 2014	Housing Strategy / SPEAR	Improve quality of hostel accommodation and increase communal facilities

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
	Homelessness Change Programme			
2.45	Provide training and personal development sessions for young people as part of the GLA's Homelessness Change Programme	Annually	SPEAR	Assist more young single homeless people to move towards independence
2.46	Provide advice and assistance to homeless persons from A10 countries through the "A10 Project"	6-monthly	Faith in Action	More homeless persons from A10 countries are able to access work, as well as housing and support service
2.47	Broaden existing network of organisations that assist rough sleepers by developing links through the CLG's Faith-Based Group Co-ordination Project run by The Passage	Annually	Housing Strategy / The Passage / Morden Baptist Church / Faith in Action	Increase the capacity of the council and the RSCCG in finding longer-term solutions for rough sleepers
2.48	Implement and monitor outcomes of an outreach & resettlement project funded by the South West Sub Regional Housing Partnership	6-monthly	SPEAR / Housing Strategy	More rough sleepers will be linked up with statutory and voluntary services and receive appropriate assistance
2.49	Provide assessment beds for rough sleepers using sub-regional funding	6-monthly	Housing Needs & Enabling	More comprehensive assessments of rough sleepers need are undertaken
Priority 3.1				
More supported housing provision for vulnerable people				
3.11	Deliver 3 new housing schemes as part of the sheltered housing development programme	By March 2014	MPH	Increase the quality of accommodation for older people with additional support and facilities available
3.12	Deliver an independent wing at Doliffe Close for adults with learning disabilities	By March 2014	MPH	Increase housing provisions for adults with learning disabilities
3.13	Seek further opportunities for new build supported housing, including extra care housing for rent, shared ownership or leasehold sales, where necessary with contributions from the council e.g. Cash-in-Lieu funding	By March 2015	Housing Supply & Development / Housing Strategy / Planning	Increase housing options and choice for older people, people with dementia, learning disabilities or mental health issues across all tenures
3.14	Increase the number of clients placed with 'Shared Lives' carers through the Optimisation programme	Annually	Shared Lives / Adult Social Care	Provide supported living for more vulnerable adults and to help them gain independent living skills
3.15	Identify revenue funding opportunities for supported	By March 2013	Adults Social Care	Improve understanding of revenue funding options to

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
	housing by analysing details of government policy changes and other market options		Commissioning Team / Housing Strategy	help inform and plan future provisions
Priority 3.2				
Increase housing options for older owner occupiers				
3.21	Introduce a Rental Scheme that enables owner-occupiers with support needs who are under-occupying their own homes to move into sheltered or extra care accommodation, and in return their homes will be let to families in housing need	Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling / Housing Strategy	Improve housing options for older owner-occupiers with support needs
3.22	Address under-occupation and help improve health of older people through the Owner-Occupier Rental Scheme	Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling / Housing Strategy	Reduce under-occupation and increase supply of family-sized homes for households in housing need, and improve health of older people living in non-decent homes in the private sector
3.23	Work with RPs to further initiatives to respond to the introduction of HB size criteria which will cut the amount of benefit for under-occupiers	Annually	MPH / RPs / Housing Needs & Enabling	Ensure vulnerable social tenants of working age affected by the HB size criteria are provided with advice and assistance
Priority 3.3				
Support vulnerable households to live independently in their own homes				
3.31	The council will increase the move-on quota for vulnerable clients in supported housing from 51 to 75 in 2012-13, and to review the quota in subsequent years	Annually	Housing Needs & Enabling	Increase move-on opportunities for vulnerable people living in supported housing, and free up supported housing for others in need
3.32	Negotiate with developers for 100% of new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standard and 10% to be wheelchair accessible subject to the suitability of sites	Annually	Planning / Housing Supply & Development	Increase the supply of housing suitable for people with physical disabilities and can meet people's changing needs over time
3.33	Provide support services such as OT, MASCOT Telecare & community alarm, home care, day care, direct payment etc.	Annually	Adult Social Care Direct Provisions	Enable more vulnerable people to remain living independently in their own homes
3.34	Maximise take-up of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), to include the implementation of Landlord Application Procedures	Annually	Environmental Health	Enable more vulnerable people to remain living independently in their own homes

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
3.35	Undertake adaptation to homes of tenants with physical disabilities or to explore alternative housing options to meet their needs	Annually	MPH / Occupational Therapy	Provide tenants with physical disabilities with a home that is suitable for their needs
3.36	Work with RPs and other support agencies to improve rate of identification of clients needing early interventions	6-monthly	Adult Social Care Access & Assessment	Provide residents in need of support with a package of early interventions to help delay or prevent the need for higher level support
3.37	Develop winter activities and a Winter Plan to address excess winter deaths	Annually	Health & Warmth Partnership / Housing Strategy	Improve health of older and vulnerable people and help reduce excess deaths in winter
3.36	Work with Age UK Merton to further develop the Gardening Project into a self-financing project, and to assist at least 100 vulnerable households per annum until March 2015	By March 2015	Age UK Merton / Housing Strategy	Provide a support service to enable vulnerable households to remain in their own homes, and to ensure the long-term viability of the project
Priority 3.4				
Identify and meet housing and support needs of minority groups				
3.41	Ensure synergy between the Housing Strategy and other local BME plans such as the Merton Unity Network BME Strategic Plan and establish link with BME Forum	Annually	Housing Strategy	Improve joint working with local BME organisations and improve effectiveness of actions
3.42	Target all homelessness initiatives to BME communities	Annually	Housing Strategy	Address over-representation of BME communities in homelessness applications & acceptances
3.43	Undertakes annual equality monitoring of all housing services, to include homeless cases, housing advice, nominations to general needs housing, nominations to supported housing through panels, as well as projects such as the A10 Project and the Gardening Project,	Annually	Housing Strategy	Ensure fair access to services by all client groups, through the identification of any gaps in take-up or access to services by different client groups, and by making adjustments to services where necessary
3.44	Finalise and publish Gypsies & Travellers Strategy taking into account local research and latest government reports	By March 2013	Housing Strategy / Gypsies & Travellers Officers Group	Clearly set out the commitment of the council and its partners in addressing the needs of the Gypsies & Travellers community
3.45	Review Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments	Annually	Environment & Regeneration / Housing Strategy	Update protocol to ensure that it is up-to-date with latest legislative requirements, and that it

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
				reflects the latest best practice and lessons learnt from its implementation
3.46	Develop new agreement for Brickfield Road Caravan Site residents following changes in the law	By March 2013	Housing Strategy / MPH	Produce a new agreement that clearly reflects the new rights and responsibilities of residents following a change in the law
Priority 4.1				
Contribute to regeneration through the improvement of housing stock condition				
4.11	Improve housing stock owned by the council prior to the 2010 stock transfer to Merton Standard	By March 2015	MPH	Improve over 6,000 social rented homes and improve the quality of lives of MPH tenants
4.12	Identify opportunities through the 'Future Merton' for improving social housing stock through either refurbishment or redevelopment	By March 2015	Housing Supply & Development / Planning Division	Improve social housing stock condition in Merton
4.13	Work with RPs contracted to the HCA/GLA to develop 'Affordable Rent' homes to identify opportunities for developing new homes in Merton	Annually	Housing Supply & Development	Increase affordable housing
4.14	Identify additional housing development opportunities through the 'Call for Sites' work	By March 2013	Planning Division / Housing Development	Increase housing building capacity in Merton
4.15	Implement Planning policy on de-conversions	Annually	Spatial Planning	Protect the supply of much-needed larger homes in Merton
4.16	Issue 15 licences for licensable HMOs per annum	Annually	Environmental Health	Help ensure de-conversions of family-sized homes does not result in sub-standard housing
4.17	Use statutory powers to remove hazards in private housing, licence HMOs, and to undertake enforcement actions where necessary	Annually	Environmental Health	Improve condition of private sector housing stock
4.18	Make use of new HCA and sub-regional Empty Homes funding to increase the number of empty homes brought back into use	6-monthly	Environmental Health	Increase supply of housing to include additional homes for households in housing need
Priority 4.2				
Innovative solutions to improve energy efficiency of housing stock				
4.21	Negotiate new housing developments to achieve the Code for Sustainable Homes required in Planning policy	Annually	Planning Division / Housing Supply & Development	Improve sustainability of new homes, help reduce carbon emissions and help reduce energy & utility bills for the occupiers

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
4.22	Raise awareness of housing providers on new funding opportunities such as ECO and the "Green Deal"	Annually	Climate Change / Housing Strategy	Increase funding resources available to improve energy efficiency of housing stock
4.23	Maintain the London Warm Zone initiatives by utilising Small Repairs Grant	Annually	Environmental Heath	Enable more households to benefit from energy efficiency measures such as loft insulation
4.24	Undertake energy and water system assessments	By March 2014	Environmental Heath	Assist more households in reducing energy and water usage and reduce fuel and utility bills
4.25	Provide loan for households to undertake home improvement and energy efficiency measures through a £100k 'Revolving' pot	Annually	Environmental Heath	Enable more households to benefit from energy efficiency measures such as loft insulation
4.26	Develop future Low Carbon schemes in Merton learning from the scheme successfully completed at Phipps Bridge	By March 2015	Planning Division	Reduce CO2 emissions from social housing stock
4.27	Explore the development of a 'Green Landlord' initiative with incentive to encourage landlords to take up government initiative such as the 'Green Deal', linking this to the Landlords Accreditation Scheme	By March 2015	Housing Strategy / Private Landlord Forum	Improve energy efficiency of private rented homes and reduce fuel bills for tenants
Priority 4.3				
Socio-economic regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods				
4.31	Include an objective in the Tenancy Strategy for RPs to assist households to budget, particularly following the introduction of Universal Credit in 2013.	Annually	Housing Strategy / RPs	Help reduce Family Poverty amongst social tenants
4.32	Provide 'Community Fund' for local organisations to run projects that help improve the quality of lives of people in the most deprived areas	Annually	MPH / RPs	Contribute to Neighbourhood Renewal through the reduction of deprivation in local areas
4.33	Review local community development initiatives undertaken by RPs and voluntary sector organisations through the Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group	Annually	Housing Strategy / Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group	Improve understanding of outcomes of local community development initiatives, to help inform development of future initiatives
4.34	Seek funding opportunities to develop and run courses that help build people's confidence and capacity, so that they can take up more	By March 2014	Merton Adult Education	Help people to gain independence, and place them in a position to resolve their own housing problems, through the take-up of

No	Action	Monitoring Timescale	Lead	Desired outcome
	formal training courses			training and employment.
4.35	Establish links with local plans put in place by RPs and voluntary sector organisations to facilitate joint work	Annually	Housing Strategy / Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group	Maximise resources to help reduce socio-economic deprivation such as unemployment and family poverty
4.36	Widen engagement with a range of partners to broaden linkages between housing with education, employment, health and crime etc. and to develop more joined up solutions	Annually	Housing Strategy / Sustainable Communities Housing Sub Group	Improve collaboration between housing and other agencies to maximise resources for and effectiveness of measures to reduce socio-economic deprivations

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Albanian

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Arabic

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باللغة التي تتكلمها،الرجاء اختيار مربع اللغة المناسب،كتابة عنوانك ورقم التلفون في الجانب الايسر من اسفل الصفحة وارسال هذه الاستمارة الينا على العنوان الموجود في الاسفل .

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের

কোন অংশ আপনার নিজের ভাষায় ব্যাখ্যা করতে চান, তাহলে ভাষার বাক্সে টিক দিন। আপনার ঠিকানা ও ফোন নম্বর নীচে বাম দিকের কোনায় লিখুন। নিম্নে প্রদত্ত আমাদের ঠিকানায় এই ফর্মটি ফিরে পাঠিয়ে দিন।

Farsi

اگر خواهان توضیح هر بخشی از این نوشته

به زبان خودتان هستید، لطفاً جدول مقابل زبان را علامت بزنید. ادرس و شماره تلفن خود را در گوشه سمت چپ پایین بنویسید. این فرم را به ادرس ما که در پایین آمده است، پست کنید.

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Tamil

இந்தப் பத்திரத்தின்

எந்தப் பகுதியும் உங்களின் மொழியில் விளக்கப்படுவதை நீங்கள் வேண்டினால், மொழிக்குரிய பெட்டியில் தயவுசெய்து அடையாளமிடவும். அடிப் பகுதி இடது பக்க மூலையில் உங்களின் முகவரியையும் தொலைபேசி இலக்கத்தையும் எழுதவும். கீழுள்ள எங்களின் முகவரியைப் பயன்படுத்தி, இந்தப் படிவத்தை எங்களுக்குத் திருப்பியனுப்பவும்.

Urdu

اگر آپ اس دستاویز کے کسی بھی حصے کی اپنی زبان میں توضیح چاہتے ہیں

تو براہ مہربانی زبان کے خانے میں صحیح کا نشان لگائیے پھر نیچے بائیں جانب دئیے گئے خانے میں اپنا پتہ اور ٹیلیفون نمبر درج کیجئے اور یہ فارم ہمیں نیچے دئیے گئے پتے پر بھیج دیجئے۔

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