

**Consultation Draft of The Private Sector  
Housing Strategy for Oxford 2007-2010**

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## **Introduction**

More than 77% of housing in the city of Oxford is privately owned. The majority of homes are safe to live in, well heated and well maintained. Unfortunately this is not true in all cases and a recent survey<sup>1</sup> commissioned by the Council showed the extent of disrepair and poor standards and the estimated cost of rectifying them.

Until recently, the focus was on the condition of local authority housing stock but, in common with most council landlords, we now have plans in place to ensure that council homes meet the Decent Home Standard (DHS). We can now move forward to plan how the majority of housing in Oxford can meet residents' needs for the future.

This strategy looks at how the condition of our homes has altered, where our policies have been effective and why and how they need to change. We also consider what action the Council and our partners are taking in response to new legislation and government priorities for private sector housing. Through examining these factors we have drawn conclusions about the objectives, priorities and actions necessary to guide the delivery of private sector housing services.

It is important to see this in the context of the overall provision of housing in Oxford. The City Council's Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 sets out policies for land use in Oxford and allocates various sites within Oxford for residential development. These are sites that are likely to be developed by 2016. It is estimated in Oxford's Urban Potential Study 2005 that these sites, plus windfall sites (sites that the City Council were unable to predict being available for development including conversions of larger houses into smaller dwellings) will deliver 6,791 dwellings by 2016. This exceeds the target set by the Oxfordshire Structure Plan of 433 dwellings per annum. The South East Plan sets a target, which extends from 2006-2026 but Oxford's target is set at a lower rate than the present Structure Plan of 350 dwellings per annum.

The Local Plan contains policies to ensure that residential development takes into account any impact upon neighbouring properties, traffic generation, urban design, resource efficiency, the quality and amount of public and private open space whilst also maintaining high densities in order to deliver housing. Policies seek to deliver mixed communities in terms of tenure, house size and type and land use.

Local Plan policies require that 50% of all new residential development of 10 or more dwellings (or 0.25ha) to be affordable housing. Commercial developments are also required to make a contribution towards affordable housing. Key worker housing can be provided by major employers on their

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<sup>1</sup> 2004 Private Sector Stock Condition Survey carried out by Fordham Research Ltd on behalf of the Council

own land or in addition to the general affordable housing requirement on other sites.

For the first time, this consultation draft brings together our proposals for the private sector in a single integrated strategy that states clearly how we can help improve living conditions and the health and well being of residents.

The following chapters show how we have used the survey and other evidence to look at key facts and trends to propose how to prioritise investment and concentrate assistance where it is most badly needed.

## **Chapter 1 The Condition of Private Sector Housing and Understanding the needs of Vulnerable Households**

### **What is private sector housing like in Oxford?**

The stock condition survey gave us a lot of information about the state of our housing. The key facts are as follows.

- **A higher than average amount of privately rented housing.** Oxford has 54,140 homes. 55.7% are owner occupied, 22% are privately rented and 22.3% are rented from the council or a housing association. The amount of privately rented housing is higher than the regional average for the southeast of 10.9% and the national average of 10.4%. The amount of owner occupation is relatively low with the regional average at 75.6 % and the national average at 69.9%.
- **Ageing properties.** 53% of our homes were built before 1944 including 25.8% built before 1919. Inevitably they are deteriorating as time passes. Our policy of giving advice and assistance has successfully halted the decline in many cases, but some aspects of the housing stock have deteriorated over the last decade.
- **Large concentrations of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).** There are over 5000 houses in multiple occupation in the city with an estimated 6.1% being unfit and 70% that do not have adequate provisions for escape from fire. These properties are found throughout the city but are concentrated particularly in East Oxford, which is also one of the most deprived wards in England for living environment. Oxford has the highest number of properties without a bath, shower or toilet in the South East.
- **Properties in poor condition with low energy efficiency.** 2244 dwellings are estimated to be unfit for human habitation. The cost of undertaking all repairs required in the next five years to private rented dwellings is assessed at £19.1m. It is estimated that 3285 dwellings would be assessed as having a category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) – 2771 of these would be due to “excessive cold”. 30.7% fail the Decent Home Standard (DHS), the main reason for failure being thermal comfort. The average SAP rating is 53 – close to the national average. However dwellings built before 1919 have an average SAP rating of 45. Ratings are lowest for private rented housing and for pensioner households.

- **Empty Homes.** 138 out of 1608 empty homes were vacant for more than 6 months: 18.5% of all vacant dwellings are estimated to be unfit. This is below the national average but the pressure of housing need in Oxford makes it even more important to bring as many properties as possible back into use.

The full survey report is available on the council's website:  
<http://srvbocc/services/private-housing.cfm>

## Where is the poorer quality housing in Oxford?

The Council commissioned BRE consultants to undertake a preliminary study in 2004 to map the occurrence of non-decent homes, vulnerable households, unfit housing and poor energy efficiency across the city. Although the results were not sufficiently conclusive for the council to dispense with a more detailed survey, the results are broadly in line with the survey that was carried out subsequently. The BRE modelling indicated that pockets of poor condition tend to be concentrated in the centre and southern half of the city and away from larger council-built estates. The exception was that dwellings with a SAP of less than 30 were also to be found in more than 26% of dwellings in northern wards such as Wolvercote, Summertown and Marston, which tend to have larger numbers of older owner-occupiers in their populations. This indicates that although an area-based approach to identifying concentrations of poor condition dwellings is likely to be successful, it should not be the only approach and general promotion of energy efficiency, especially to older people is required.

## How many people living in unfit housing are vulnerable?

Older people represent the largest group in Oxford falling within the government's definition for vulnerability for the Decent Homes Standards. Vulnerability is defined as being in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability benefits.

The tables below show how poor housing conditions affect older people and a wider group of vulnerable people.

**Table 1. Vulnerable households and unfit housing in Oxford**

Type of household	Total number of households	Number of vulnerable households in the group	Number living in unfit housing
Single pensioners	5361	2559	363
Two or more pensioners	3140	962	83
All vulnerable households	-	-	472

**Table 2. Vulnerable households and poor energy efficiency**

Type of household	Average SAP	Average annual heating costs (based on early 2006 rates)
All households living in private sector housing	51	£449
Single pensioners	50	£469
Two or more pensioners	48	£559
All vulnerable households	52	£433

### **What trends can we see in the condition of housing across sectors?**

Stock condition was also assessed in 1988 and 1995. The total housing stock has grown from 38,022 in 1988 to 53,786 in 2004.

**Table 3. Unfitness trends 1988 to 2004**

Survey year	Owner occupied	Private rented	RSL
1988	660	618	0
1995	1294	806	0
2004	1404	775	65

Taking unfitness as an indicator of the property in worst condition, it is clear that unfitness levels have increased mainly in the owner-occupied sector. The trend between the 1988 survey and 1995 survey shows that an estimated 91 owner/occupied properties each year became unfit-i.e. almost 2 properties each week.

Between 1995 and 2004 this figure slowed considerably to an average of just over 1 property per month becoming unfit. Grant activity in this period had a considerable part to play until 2003 when policy changed. Between 1995 and 2003 an estimated 650 properties were made fit through the grant process (530 Renovation Grants and 120 minor works grants for repairs).

In the Private Rented Sector between 1988 and 1995 an estimated 2.5 properties became unfit each month with this trend appearing to reverse slightly in the 1995 to 2004 period.

2004 brings the first indication that unfitness is a problem within housing association stock that generally is of fairly recent construction. Balanced against this, energy efficiency in this sector is higher than all others.

**Table 4. Long term vacant properties**

Survey year	Long term Vacant
1988	95
1995	46
2004	138

The definition of an empty property has developed over the timeframe of the surveys and comparisons should therefore be made with caution. Long-term vacant properties remain a small number when compared to national figures but still have a role to play in the overall supply of housing.



## **Chapter 2. What private sector services have been provided?**

### **Main areas of provision**

Staff and monetary resources have been used in the following ways to help address private sector conditions:

#### **Reactive Service Requests**

We respond to customers in relation to all private sector housing issues through our reactive service based in Environmental Health. This is often the first point of contact clients have with the City Council and often leads to customers being signposted to other parts of the service for longer term improvements to be made to their homes. The reactive service will deal with issues not only in relation to poor conditions but also public health issues, drainage and safety issues. The reactive service includes part of a Tenancy Relations Service, which deals with harassment and illegal eviction issues.

#### **Financial assistance policies based on the fitness standard**

In an area of traditionally high and rising property values like Oxford, it is reasonable that the owners who benefit from increases in value should meet the cost of maintaining and improving their homes. The Council therefore took advantage of changes in the law by introducing a policy in 2003 based on advice and information for all and access to loans for those unable to meet the immediate costs of improvement works. Eligibility for Essential Repair Grants made by the Council, has been restricted to people who are vulnerable (due to age or disability) and on low incomes. These provide emergency assistance such as emergency heating breakdowns. Public funding for this work is extremely limited and is increasingly required to meet the cost of installing facilities for people with disabilities.

This policy is under review and will form Part Two of this strategy. However, the principle of limiting investment of public funds in privately owned housing remains valid and the focus will be on making the most effective use of funds while moving towards a fully functioning loan-based policy.

- **Disabled facilities grants**

Demands on the capital programme allocation for assistance are increasingly taken by mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's). The trend is for a small but progressive annual increase in the number of applications as follows:

O3/04 102 applications

04/05 108 applications

05/06 110 applications

- **Target hardening**

For a number of years, the Council in partnership with Thames Valley Police has operated a target hardening project to improve the security of vulnerable homes and victims of burglary. In 2005, the Area Commander

of Thames Valley Police awarded a commendation to Council officers for operating the scheme, which, to date, has a 100% record for preventing repeat burglaries.

- **Energy efficiency**

The Council has an excellent record in promoting home sustainable energy from early promotion of the Big Green Boiler Scheme and energy efficiency discount schemes to the Oxford Solar Initiative and award-winning Oxford Solar Guide published in 2005.

As well as providing an advice service on energy efficiency, maintaining up to date information and advice and responding to public enquiries, the Council participates in a range of schemes and initiatives to make continued progress towards the HECA target. These include:

- Offers of low energy light bulbs
- Supporting Rose Hill eco homes, Big Green Insulation Scheme.
- The Generation Homes project: an externally funded study that shows how 60% carbon reductions can be achieved from common house types found in the existing UK housing stock through comprehensive sustainable energy refurbishment.
- Projects and partnerships such as Oxford Solar Initiative.

Energy companies have a legal obligation to promote home energy efficiency schemes and we work with them and other partners to obtain maximum benefit for residents of Oxford

We concentrate on trying to make contact with people on low incomes who are not well placed to invest in energy efficiency measures, for example by targeted mailings to people on housing and council tax benefit. The cost of promotion is kept to a minimum by enclosing promotional material with other correspondence. Targeted mail shots like this are effective in enabling us to make contact with people whose needs go beyond energy efficiency. For example, in November 2005 an offer mailed to 4000 council tenants and 6000 non-council households on benefit resulted in a 15% take-up (with 3000 low energy bulbs being claimed by 1500 households).

Having made contact with new clients we can advise them on how to get help with other problems with the condition of their homes.

**Progress made against objectives in the Housing Strategy.**

The table below shows progress made on the priority actions for private sector housing identified in the Council's current Housing Strategy. In many cases considerable progress has been made. Where action has not yet begun or further work is needed, actions are restated in this private sector strategy, adding greater detail drawn from survey analysis.

**Table 5. Updated extract from Housing Strategy Action Plan**

WHAT WILL WE DO?	WHEN WILL WE DO IT?	HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE'VE SUCCEEDED?	PROGRESS AT APRIL 2006
<b>Objective 4 Improve the condition of Housing in Oxford</b>			
Work towards the HECA target and report annually on progress	By 2010	30% improvement in home energy efficiency between 1995 and 2010	22.7% improvement to March 2005
Implement new powers in the Housing Act 2004 for HMOs and private sector housing;	To the timetable to be set by govt	Staff trained and procedures in place	Progress on schedule
Assess the resources needed to operate additional licensing of HMOs	By March 2006	Assessment completed; decision made re future approach	Target date revised to July 2006 to enable impact monitoring of mandatory scheme.
Draw on private sector strategy to develop private sector renewal policies to increase the proportion of vulnerable households living in decent homes	By October 2006	Policies included in private sector strategy to meet PSA 7 targets	Proposals included in this document
Assess the range and quality of our work on sustainable energy and fuel poverty and use this to develop an affordable warmth strategy	2005/6	Strategy adopted	Under development
Where the need arises, using enforcement powers against landlords who do not take up opportunities to improve their properties.	2005/6 onwards	Minimum standards achieved as a result of enforcement action	Responsive work continues; HMO polices under development

WHAT WILL WE DO?	WHEN WILL WE DO IT?	HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE'VE SUCCEEDED?	PROGRESS AT APRIL 2006
Investigate the potential for a landlord's accreditation scheme and developing a pilot scheme for student lettings	2006/7	Potential assessed	Action retained in new action plan
Develop support and advice mechanisms for landlords through regular meetings of Landlords Forum	April 2005	Programme of meetings and advice topics agreed	Under development
Develop private sector strategy	By December 2006	Strategy adopted	Development process on schedule

## **Chapter 3 Do our services need to change?**

We have understood from the stock condition survey and other data that there are serious needs within the private sector as a whole. However the survey was a sample and although this gives a good overall statistical picture means there is still work to do to locate individual properties in poor condition before we can offer advice and help to improve them.

Similarly, the council will never be in a position to invest in improving all these properties itself so many of our policies are about advising how to go about making improvements and what loans or grants may be available from the Council or other sources to help owners and landlords meet the cost. The people who cannot meet the cost themselves do not always come forward voluntarily so work is needed to make sure they can get help and advice.

The scarcity of affordable housing in Oxford, as evidenced by the Housing Requirement Study and high levels of homelessness, is an overwhelming argument in favour of ensuring that every individual dwelling is maintained to maximise the length of its useful life.

From the stock condition survey it is clear that there are a number of issues highlighted, which should be addressed through this strategy, these include

- The levels of unfitness in the private sector stock
- The poor conditions found within the HMO stock
- The large number of cold homes occupied by elderly people

The next section shows how government legislation and targets reflect this. These changes have already affected the staffing resources within the Environmental Health team.

### **Legislation and Government policy**

#### **Housing Act 2004**

The Housing Act 2004 has introduced a number of fundamental changes to the way in which the Council deals with private sector housing

- The Housing and Health Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

This new standard assessment looks at a range of risks (or “hazards”) that may be present in a home and the impact they are likely to have on the occupants. It replaces the long-standing standard of fitness for human habitation. HHSRS thereby becomes one of the four components of the Decent Home Standard. The Council must consider action where there is a category 1 hazard. “Excessive cold” is one of the most commonly occurring hazards in the HHSRS. and likely to lead to a mandatory response as are falls

on stairs. As the legislation requires councils to consider taking action when a category 1 hazard is identified it would not be appropriate to set targets for remedying these hazards. However we can see that work to improve energy efficiency will have an impact on the need for mandatory action.

- **Licensing of HMOs**

The Act has changed the definition of a house in multiple occupation (HMO) and has also introduced a national HMO licensing scheme. The scheme covers certain larger dwellings used as HMOs. The granting of a licence is subject to conditions, whereby the HMO will have to meet minimum standards for amenities, management and fire precautions. The Council has introduced the mandatory HMO licensing scheme; this will only cover an estimated 20% of the total HMO stock in the city, approximately 100 HMOs. The Council are therefore exploring an additional scheme which will cover more HMOs. The scope of this will be decided once mandatory HMO licensing has had a chance to operate. The scope of any additional scheme will be dependant on the available resources and is subject to consultation

- **New powers regarding empty homes**

These enable councils to make management orders or compulsory purchase orders to bring empty homes back into use. These new powers will enable the Council to tackle unfitness in long-term empty properties more effectively.

### **Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA)**

Since 1995 councils have been expected to comply with the Home Energy Conservation Act 1994 (HECA) by reporting annually on progress towards a 30% target improvement in domestic energy efficiency between 1995 and 2010.

Although we are working towards the HECA target, there are a number of reasons why achieving it cannot be guaranteed unless concentrated effort can be sustained:

Popular energy efficiency measures in earlier years tend to have been those that were easiest and cheapest to apply, such as loft and cavity wall insulation and installation of gas central heating systems. As time passes, the target becomes more difficult to achieve because the unimproved homes tend to be those that are difficult to insulate (e.g. because they are older properties with solid walls) or people who cannot afford to invest in energy efficiency occupy them. However, we know that relatively simple and inexpensive measures are still lacking in many properties and will treat it as a priority to identify these.

Continued progress with the HECA target will be affected by external factors such as energy price rises and cold winters which make people more aware of the need for more affordable means to heat and power homes. However these are unpredictable and we cannot rely on these factors to ensure progress.

## **Decent Home Standard**

Although the private sector stock already meets the government's target of no more than 30% of non-decent private sector homes being occupied by vulnerable households by 2010, the government is also seeking a continuous annual reduction in that figure. Levels of vulnerability may be affected by factors the council cannot influence like the national economy and unemployment. However, within that constraint this strategy sets targets designed to achieve that annual improvement by tackling the worst conditions in the city. An adequate heating system (thermal comfort) is one of the four key components of the Decent Home Standard. The 2005 survey estimates that:

- There is a total of 14,055 non-decent private sector dwellings in Oxford
- 3,214 are occupied by households which are vulnerable within the DHS definition.
- 4,529 of non decent homes fail on more than one ground
- 9,915 fail on thermal comfort
- 4,363 fail on disrepair
- 2,244 fail on unfitnes (now replaced by the HHSRS)
- 2,214 single pensioners are estimated to have a category one hazard
- 873 of households with two pensioners are estimated to have a category one hazard

It should be remembered that dwellings are continually subject to wear and tear and the effects of weather and therefore if no action is taken, the stock will decline. The 2005 survey report states that it is not yet possible to estimate the rate at which dwellings become non-decent because the standard has been introduced so recently. It is therefore important to make an allowance for properties that are decent now but could become non-decent through the passage of time.

## **Performance Monitoring**

Currently there is only one national Best Value Performance Indicator ( BVPI) concerning private sector housing, this refers to bringing long term empties back into use (BV64). However local performance indicators are monitored for all aspects of the work area and with the Housing Act 2004 the government have introduced a comprehensive monitoring system around HMO licensing

The Council have to report on an annual basis regarding its' progress on the HECA target.

The Council is also an active member of a benchmarking group which identifies best practice.

## **Regional and local policies**

Priorities for the South East Regional Housing Strategy 2006 are: to build more affordable homes; bring decent housing within reach of people on lower incomes and to improve the quality of new housing and of the existing stock.

The Regional Housing Board decided that it should contribute to improving the existing stock by allocating grant from the Regional Housing Pot (RHP) to local authorities in the region with over 2000 unfit homes. Confirmation was received in March 2006 that Oxford would receive capital grant of £248,227 for 2006/7 for investment in this way.

Local strategies and plans produced by the City and County Councils, the Supporting People Commissioning Body and the Primary Care Trust recognise the linkages between health and housing conditions and the benefits to older people of being able to live independently in their own homes. Joint working already takes place to fund the Small Repair Service, which provides essential maintenance enabling older people in hospital to return home sooner. Approaches putting the client at the centre of community services are likely to develop further following the publication in 2006 of the government's white paper "Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services".

It can therefore be seen that there is broad agreement between different agencies locally and at different levels of government that housing conditions must improve to deliver better health outcomes and increase energy efficiency and to secure a supply of decent housing for the long term. Our survey work has shown us where effort must be concentrated to achieve these.

### **Can we do more?**

Legislation is already imposing additional responsibilities on local authorities and using existing staffing resources to their full limit.

We have been awarded additional money for 2006/2007 through the Regional Housing Pot. This is a capital grant of £248,227 and has been awarded in recognition of the needs in the City. The grant has to be spent within a number of conditions and must be spent within the financial year of 06/07.

The proposal is to spend this on identifying and improving some of the poorer dwellings that will achieve fitness (i.e. deal with the category 1 hazard of excessive cold) through energy improvement measures. Excessive cold accounts for the highest amount of category 1 hazards in Oxford.

We will do this through a partnership with British Gas as a way of extending their existing scheme to provide insulation and other energy measures.

We have also budgeted over the next three years for additional loft and other basic insulation as follows

2006/7 £50,000  
2007/8 £85 000  
2008/9 £100 000

We know that 5% of all loft spaces are not insulated (around 6,868 properties) but a further 58.9% of private sector stock has insulation of 100mm or less. The recommended standard is 270mm.



There are also further plans for the longer term:

### **Additional HMO licensing**

This will be introduced following consultation with landlords and interested parties. This will allow the Council to continue to tackle poor and often unsafe conditions within the HMO stock throughout the city.

### **Accreditation schemes**

Accreditation schemes for landlords and private rented accommodation are labour intensive but there can be benefits for landlords in giving them a competitive edge; whilst tenants can be more confident about standards. The Council is investigating a pilot Accreditation scheme to cover some student accommodation in partnership with the University Accommodation office

### **Energy Efficiency**

There are a number of ways already identified to increase advice and support for improving energy efficiency. These include

- Home Information Packs – which home sellers will have to produce from June 2007 – have to include an energy report. This is an opportunity to advise purchasers and sellers of possible energy efficiency upgrades to a property. 2113 homes in Oxford were sold during 2005 – this is therefore a significant way of reaching people at a time when they are thinking about financial matters including selecting new energy suppliers.
- New licensing obligations for landlords of Homes in Multiple Occupation could allow us to develop not only management advice packs for landlords but also energy information for residents.
- Finding volunteer owners (e.g. of a pair of adjoining properties) interested in having their homes used as Generation Homes demonstration houses.
- Promotion to employers – advice surgeries/ presentations to staff and employers on business energy savings can be used to promote home energy efficiency too.
- Energy ‘champions’ (staff with special expertise and willing to promote awareness) trained within the council and our partners
- Partnership promotion of annual Warm Homes Campaign

However government policy in the area of climate change and energy efficiency is changing rapidly. The council has already taken a lead by creating the Oxford Climate Change Action Plan. This sets objectives for the next four years including reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the council's own buildings, raising awareness of climate change and encouraging energy conservation. The long term goal is to transform Oxford into a sustainable city by managing its resources in a sustainable way and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the city overall by 15% by 2010. We need to try and align climate change targets with energy efficiency targets and this would mean achieving an average SAP rating of 65 across the stock by 2010. This target however is aspirational and a target of 58 is more realistic.

## **Chapter 4 Options for change**

We have identified the need to target resources to particular client groups (vulnerable elderly) and in particular areas.

Given the level of need amongst owner occupiers it makes sense to move towards loans and this will form the basis of the financial assistance policy that will form part two of this strategy.

We also need to monitor our actions more closely so we can establish how effective they have been. This monitoring should include GIS mapping to plot where improvements have taken place as well as monitoring all HECA activity to prioritise actions that prove most effective.

We have summarised the options for delivering the service in two ways. Firstly the looking at current service within the requirements of legislation. This is summarised in the table 6 below. We then have options that take us beyond the minimum and therefore may help us make greater progress towards addressing the issues but which also have a resource implication. These are summarised in table 6 below.

**Table 6 Current level of service**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Target /Outcome</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Risk</b>
1.Continue the largely responsive approach adopted in 2003 making grants to applicants under the financial assistance policy maintaining the current expenditure of £800k	2 FTE	To maintain current levels of spend (154 properties improved in 05/06)	Can be funded from existing budgets	Stock survey shows it has not reached all those in greatest need; condition will continue to decline
2.Implement provisions in the Housing Act 2004 relating to private sector housing to operate mandatory HMO licensing and HHSRS.	5.5 FTE	Licence all relevant HMOs ( current estimate 1000 HMOs over 5 year period).	Meets the Council's legal obligations and provides greater powers to control unsatisfactory conditions	New ways of working may take time to become well established
3.Continue to initiate referrals to external funding sources (e.g. Warm Front, HouseProud) to produce improvements in energy efficiency and stock condition.	Part of work of energy team		Stock survey shows that a core of residents lack and are eligible for energy efficiency measures but have not been reached by current initiatives	HouseProud service has not yet produced any equity loans

<b>Option</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Target /Outcome</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Risk</b>
4. Continue to provide a reactive service to customers concerning all aspects of private sector issues including harassment, illegal eviction, standards and public health issues	4.0FTE	To maintain responses times to service requests. In 05/06 there were approximately 13,000 requests for service made to the EH service with a over 90% of emergency complaints being dealt with within the target time.	This provides a good service to he public	Actions in response to requests are usually mandatory but may not be reaching those in greatest need
5.Increase the overall supply of housing by introducing advice and incentives to bring empty homes back into use. Establish policies that will enable the private sector to provide good quality permanent solutions for households at risk of or experiencing homelessness.	0.5FTE	Reduce number of unfit empty homes and the number of homes vacant for over 6 months by 5 per year.	Reduction in number of long term empty homes	Can be a slow process and may not be value for money and therefore the role will be regularly reviewed
6.Provide free loft insulation to 250 homes per year in addition to providing a publicity campaign to pensioners who are able to access government grants for such work.	Part of energy work area	250 homes provided with insulation .	Reducing the number of cold homes and contributing to the HECA target	Difficulties in identifying eligible properties
7. Provide an advice service on energy efficiency	2.5FTE	Working to HECA target of 30% improvement by 2010	Reducing the number of cold homes and contributing to the HECA target	

**Table 7. Further Options for the service**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Resource required</b>
1. Increase access to external funding beyond the level of Item 3 (above) especially for older people and those on low incomes through targeted joint working with partner agencies, sharing information and working to a common protocol to proactively identify eligible residents and refer them for assistance.	Reduce the proportion of vulnerable households living in non-decent private sector housing on an annual basis by 200 households pa	More contact with vulnerable residents; increased take-up of assistance at no extra cost to the resident or the Council	Requires closer cooperation with partner agencies	Staff time to set up meeting with partners agencies and protocols and method of sharing information. Further work required to identify costs
2. Tackle poor conditions in the private rented sector through a) Incentives to encourage private landlords to improve their properties b) Evaluating an accreditation scheme for landlords	a. Investigate with Landlords Forum and local representative bodies.  b. Complete evaluation of benefits for landlords and tenants by end of 2009.	Helps private sector tenants who live in worst conditions	Lack of cooperation from landlords leading to enforcement being a slow process	The investigation and evaluation is within current staff work loads – further resources may be required to implement
3. Explore an effective long-term approach to loan-based investment in private sector housing conditions through using a provider to undertake a publicity campaign and promotional events	Develop a good understanding of active level of interest by March 2008 in order to develop future policy.	A long term solution to investment in the stock that does not place an unrealistic burden on tax payers	As above	Further work required to identify costs
4. Set a more ambitious target for energy efficiency and align policy and resources with Oxford Climate Change Action Plan	Work towards SAP 58 across the housing stock by 2010.	Exceed HECA target. Pre-empt government action; benefits local residents	Will have cost implications	The resources needed for this need to be established

<b>Action</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Resource required</b>
5.Improve advice and information available to older people. In conjunction with primary care trust, voluntary sector and county council, develop an advice guide for older people giving multi-agency information on housing, health and support options.	Publish guide by March 2008	Reduced health risks	Can be a sensitive area where people are reluctant to make decisions	Would be joint funded by County and districts and other agencies
6 Assess requirement for an additional HMO licensing scheme	Complete assessment based on first 3 months' operation of mandatory scheme	More HMOs will be covered by HMO licensing – ensuring an improvement in standards	The Secretary of State may not approve the additional scheme.	Already in current budget

In consulting on this strategy we will gauge how much of this additional work we could be doing and how we may find the resources to carry this out.

## **Chapter 5 Making the strategy work**

### **Consultation and adoption**

Proposed timetable:

June 2006	Complete draft strategy
17 <sup>th</sup> July	Report to Executive Board; commence formal consultation period
18 <sup>th</sup> October	Consultation period ends
19 <sup>th</sup> October	Analyse consultation responses and amend strategy
November - January 2007	Subject to dates for Council Committees yet to be arranged, report post-consultation version of strategy with recommendation for adoption as part of the council's policy framework.

Consultation has already begun through stakeholder presentation in 2005 to councillors and agencies represented at SHOP.

During the formal consultation period, direct consultation is proposed with:

- The Landlords' Forum
- Age Concern
- SHOP
- OCC staff and other staff from partner organisations
- Student representatives
- Residents Associations
- Publicity via Your Oxford magazine.

It is proposed to design a leaflet to summarise the key issues and the available options and to ask a range of specific questions of the public, landlords and other professionals.

### **Monitoring**

As indicated in Chapter 1, formal monitoring in this area has been confined to the annual HECA return and BV64 reporting on empty homes.

Increased local performance monitoring is essential to identify whether the actions planned for the next 5 years are the correct ones to meet local and national objectives and whether those actions are being implemented effectively.

(it should be noted that annual monitoring is the most appropriate timescale for monitoring in this area).

It is proposed that:

- The objectives in this strategy be incorporated into the performance management framework by reporting regularly to Housing Scrutiny Committee on key indicators
- In liaison with Housing Scrutiny Committee, SHOP takes forward actions relating to joint and partnership working such as the

development of a housing and support options guide for older people, criteria for the future commissioning of services and the development of equity loan/release products.

- The key indicators should be
  - Annual progress towards the target for 30% improvement in domestic energy efficiency by 2010 from the 2005 level of 22.7% (HECA)
  - 5 empty homes per year brought back into use (BV64)
  - Increase in average SAP rating from 53 to 60 to meet HECA target
  - Reduction of proportion of vulnerable households occupying non-decent homes – 20 households p.a.
  - From 2008 onwards: number and value of loans facilitated to improve stock condition.

### **Preparation for the next strategy**

The monitoring recommended by this strategy will mean we will be able to better assess our effectiveness with dealing with poor standards in the private sector. In 2009 we will undertake a further stock condition survey to measure our progress and to enable us to formulate a new strategy to continue the improvement work.



## ***Appendix 1***

# **Glossary of Terms**

### **DHS (Decent Homes Standard)**

A decent home is defined in legislation as one that is warm, weatherproof and has reasonably modern facilities.

The Government has set a target for all housing in the social rented sector to reach decent homes standards by 2010. There are also targets to deal with non-decent homes in the private sector by 2020.

### **DFG (Disabled Facilities Grant)**

This is a local government grant to help towards adaptation of a home to enable a person with a disability to remain living there. The council must be satisfied that the changes are necessary to meet the occupants needs and the work is reasonable and practical before it will award a grant. Grants are means tested.

### **Financial Assistance Policy**

The Council published its Financial Assistance policy in 2003 and this is due to be updated in 2006. It is a requirement for the Council to have such a policy in order for it to exercise its powers under legislation to improve living conditions in the private sector. The policy covers the whole range of services that are proposed to be developed across the City in accordance with the Housing Strategy.

### **HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act)**

This act came into force in 1995 and requires Local Authorities to publish an energy conservation report identifying measures to improve the energy efficiency of all residential accommodation in the area. It looks for an integrated approach between energy efficiency and climate change.

### **HHSRS ( Housing Health and Safety Rating System)**

This was introduced in 2006 as a standard assessment of the health and safety risks found in any type of dwelling. It essentially replaced the 1985 (amended in 1989) Act's housing fitness regime. It introduces an evidence

based risk assessment process to enable Local Authorities to be more effective in addressing the hazards to health and safety present in the home.

### **HMO (House in Multiple Occupation)**

HMOs are defined by the Housing Act 2004 and essentially are houses that are occupied on a shared basis by unrelated persons; it also includes houses that have been converted into flats without current Building Regulation approval. In 2006 mandatory HMO licensing was introduced. Landlords of certain HMOs will need to hold a licence, which will only be granted if the property is able to reach defined standards.

### **PCT**

Primary Care Trust. PCTs are statutory bodies responsible for delivering health services to their local area. This includes funding for GPs and commissioning hospital and mental health services.

### **PSA 7**

This was a revised target within the Decent Homes standards and highlighted the need to target improvement measures to families with children in the private rented sector as a means of reducing child poverty.

### **Regional Housing Board**

Regional Housing Boards are partnerships established in 2003 to provide strategic direction for housing policy and co-ordination of housing investment in the region. In 2006 responsibility for the board transferred to the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) to integrate housing with planning.

### **Regional Housing Pot**

The Single Regional Housing Pot (SRHP) is funding the Regional Housing Board uses to address the regional investment priorities as set out in the regional housing strategy. In 2005 Local Authorities were asked to bid for funding for innovative schemes to address poor quality housing in the private sector.

### **SAP (standard assessment procedure) rating**

This is the government's procedure for assessing the energy rating of dwellings based on the predicted costs of heating and hot water. It forms part

of the 1995 building regulations. SAP ratings are expressed on a scale of 1-100, the higher the score the better the rating.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Working in Partnership**

Delivering effective service requires the Council to work in partnership. Relevant partners to deliver this strategy include the following:

***The Landlords Forum*** This is primarily operating as an information sharing forum where the Council can keep landlords informed about legislative changes and other initiatives. Recently the Council have linked with the National Association of Estate Agents and the Southern Private Landlords Association to participate in events for local landlords and letting agents.

***Home Improvement Agency*** This is a partnership between Social and Community Services, Anchor Housing and the City Council and provides advice, referral and direct maintenance services primarily to owner occupiers and people living in the private rented sector. It is hoped that the contract for this service will be renewed by Supporting People on a countywide basis.

***The Credit Union*** A new credit union has opened in Oxford with the support of the City Council and a number of other partners. This may be an opportunity to give information to people about loans for dealing with issues such as thermal warmth.

***Housing Associations*** The Council works in partnership with a number Housing Associations in the City not just to develop its affordable housing programme but also to deliver other projects and strategies. The Lord Mayors Deposit Guarantee Scheme which provides bonds and support for people trying to access homes in the private rented sector would be an example of this.

***SHOP*** SHOP is an Oxford City partnership which works in conjunction with the Councils Housing Scrutiny committee to oversee the development of housing strategy in Oxford. It is attended by senior staff from Housing Services , Environmental Health and Planning in the City Council and by representatives of the RSLs, Social and Community Services, the PCTs and the voluntary sector

***Sub-regional partnerships (Oxon-wide and CISE)***

There is a clear Countywide structure for strategic partnerships.. The Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Group comprising of Officers and Members is supported by the Strategic Housing Implementation Group which helps deliver particular strategies and projects.

**Cities in the South East Partnership (CISE)** is a coalition of City Councils including Oxford, Southampton, Brighton and Hove, Portsmouth and Reading along with representatives from regional government agencies. They discuss common issues to share good practice and respond to government initiatives.

***PCT and Health Care*** The council has a health visitor seconded form the PCT to help with all health aspects of its Housing service. It is hoped that the Council can use this resource more effectively within the private rented sector.

