



COMMUNITY STRATEGY

2007 - 2012

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The overall goal of this strategy is to achieve sustainable communities where people want to live now and in the future.
- 1.2 The Government defines sustainable communities as those which offer people:
- Decent affordable homes
 - A community in which they want to live and work
 - The opportunity to develop their skills and interests
 - Access to jobs and excellent services
 - The chance to get involved and make a difference
- 1.3 The Trust is the largest landlord in Bath and North East Somerset owning 86% of all social housing. In addition we manage a growing number of homes in other Local Authority areas. We therefore are ideally placed to make a significant contribution to community sustainability in these areas and have an important role to play in meeting the aspirations of existing and future communities.
- 1.4 Over the past 5 years there has been an increasing focus nationally on neighbourhood renewal, regeneration, social exclusion and developing sustainable communities, led by Government strategy and supported strongly within the housing sector through the National Housing Federation, Chartered Institute of Housing and Housing Corporation policy.
- 1.5 Key Government Strategy:
- National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (2001)
 - Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) plus five year plans Homes for All, People Places and Prosperity
 - National Community Safety Plan (2006 – 09)
 - The Respect Action Plan (2006)
- 1.6 In its' recently published 'Neighbourhoods and Communities' Strategy (Oct 06), the Housing Corporation states that *'the distilled message (for housing organisations) from these initiatives is clear. Achieving sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities must be the core component of successful businesses'*.
- 1.7 In this Strategy the Housing Corporation sets out its vision for how social housing providers can support the development and delivery of neighbourhood strategies, contribute to sustainability of communities and empower people to engage actively in the decisions that affect them.

- 1.8 The Trust is also actively supporting the National Housing Federation In Business for Neighbourhoods agenda launched in 2003, which has been adopted by 80% of housing associations nationally. The key objectives of the initiative are to:
- Encourage housing organisations to exercise a wider neighbourhood regeneration role
 - Tackle 'liveability' issues irrespective of tenure
 - Work in partnership with residents and other organisations while continuing to deliver effective housing and management services
- 1.9 There is a clear business case for the Trust taking a community focused approach that emphasises long term planning and sustainability. Key drivers include:
- protecting the Trust's current and future investments
 - continuous improvement, through flexible and responsive services that further the interests of our residents and meet the needs of local communities
 - maximising the opportunities across the business for joint working and collaboration with partners and stakeholder to ensure the coherent and co-ordinated use of resources
 - empowering communities by putting them at the heart of decision-making, supporting communities to help themselves, be inclusive and get involved in issues that affect them
 - maximising the reputation of the Trust as a community focused organisation
- 1.10 This Strategy clearly states the organisation's vision for creating successful and sustainable communities and is a mechanism for ensuring a holistic approach to delivery across the business. All areas of Trust business make a contribution to community sustainability and the success of this Strategy will be based on harnessing the full potential inherent in this.
- 1.11 Essential to success is the acknowledgement that social, economic and environmental factors all contribute towards the long term sustainability of an area. The Trust will need to ensure social and environmental factors are considered in business planning processes and decision making, alongside economic considerations.

2 Context

- 2.1 There are nine key factors contributing to community sustainability which have been documented widely (Long 2001) and are listed in appendix A. Community sustainability is a complex and dynamic concept and it is accepted that no one organisation can achieve this aim in isolation. However, the Trust has a significant asset base and community presence in Bath & North East Somerset and is well placed to take a community leadership role in the area, and transfer this experience and approach to managing new communities.

2.2 There are key areas of priority for the Trust and its residents which have been highlighted through the Best Value Review undertaken in 2006.

- Maintaining the quality of the physical environment, ensuring shared and public places are well designed and managed
- Ensuring the sustainability of new developments outside of Bath and North East Somerset
- Addressing community safety issues and residents' fear of crime and anti social behaviour
- Encouraging resident engagement in the management and care of their area
- Working in partnership to ensure access to facilities for young people on estates
- Maximising opportunities for creating training and employment opportunities for local people
- Addressing poverty and social inclusion, in particular supporting vulnerable and new tenants

2.3 These priorities have been incorporated into the Strategic objectives outlined within this Strategy.

3 Prioritising activity – Neighbourhoods and communities

3.1 The Trust's main area of operation, Bath and North East Somerset, is relatively affluent in relation to other parts of the country and in public health terms, the health of the population is good. However there are marked inequalities in our population. People living in the most deprived wards as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2004) have lower life expectancy than those living in the most affluent wards. In B&NES the most deprived wards are (in order of greatest deprivation): Twerton, Southdown, Abbey, Radstock, Kingsmead, Combe Down, Keynsham South.

3.2 A significant proportion of Trust housing stock is located in these wards, where residents are suffering from the effects of multiple disadvantage. The IMD 2004 uses a number of indicators which cover a range of economic, social and housing issues. Low income is a central component of the indices which also includes employment, education, health, housing, crime and living environment indicators.

3.3 The Trust has developed a neighbourhood monitoring tool that identifies a wide range of important business factors ranging from levels of tenancy turnover to the impacts of rent restructuring on demand for specific areas. A system based on GIS collates and assesses such information, as well as the opportunities arising from planned development schemes or major works programmes, and has the potential to effectively and efficiently co-ordinate the allocation of a wide range of resources. A SCAN 'Toolkit', that provides a flexible and sustainable range of responses to both challenges and opportunities is also in development.

3.4 The Trust is developing the Neighbourhood Excellence model as a basis for more effective partnership working at a neighbourhood level. This approach will strengthen basic service delivery and thereby provide an effective starting point for engaging with residents on wider community issues

- 3.5 Non-area based community investment activity will be focused predominantly on communities of interest, particularly on improving the ability of these groups to participate more effectively in their community and providing access to activities and opportunities which build confidence and skills.

They are:

- Older people - in terms of social isolation, poverty and health
- Children and Young people –antisocial behaviour and social exclusion
- Black and Minority Ethnic Groups – social inclusion, needs identification
- New & younger tenants - social exclusion, tenancy support needs

4 Principles for promoting community sustainability

- 4.1 The success of this Strategy depends on all Trust operational strategies and relevant Group strategies adopting the following overarching principles in their approach to planning and service delivery.

- Taking an holistic approach to everything we do, which assesses the impact of decisions on community sustainability and a commitment to long term investment in solutions
- Commitment to shared prioritisation and decision making across all Trust departments and members of Somer Housing Group
- Co-ordinated and joined-up service delivery across the organisation, which has a neighbourhood focus
- Commitment to understanding the needs of all our residents
- Equality of access to our services.
- Enabling the empowerment and involvement of under-represented and vulnerable groups
- Community and resident involvement in prioritisation, decision making and development of services and projects
- Commitment to a community development approach, dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, through capacity building and empowerment
- Devolving power and resources to resident and community groups where possible
- Maximising the contribution of partner organisations for the benefit of the communities in which we work
- Communicating with residents in clear, simple jargon-free language
- Where appropriate working with communities across tenure including shared ownership, owner occupiers and rented (private and social)

5 Links to other Trust Operational Strategies

- 5.1 Objectives identified within this Strategy will be linked to relevant Trust operational strategies and Group wide strategies, specifically:

- Housing Management
- Leasehold Services
- Asset Management
- Repairs and Servicing

- Resident Involvement
- Housing with Support
- New Homes

5.2 **Group wide strategies:**

5.3 **Equality & Diversity**

5.3.1 The Group Wide Equalities and Diversity Strategy has a strategic goal to support residents and the wider community to ensure that they have maximum opportunities to be consulted on and participate in the delivery and development of the Group's services.

5.3.2 Objectives to achieve this goal include playing a more active partnership role on equality and diversity issues in the communities where we work and building on the work already done in neighbourhoods and communities to establish links to all sections of the community, so that we increase our confidence in our understanding and knowledge of peoples' background culture and needs.

5.3.3 The Equality and Diversity Strategy will be undergoing a Best Value Review during 2007 and included in the scope of this review is the need to focus on meeting the needs of current and future under represented/minority groups. Community development principles and processes are key in supporting the delivery of the equality and diversity strategy in terms of helping to better understand the needs of residents and communities and building their capacity to become more actively involved in influencing and shaping service delivery.

5.4 **Environmental Strategy**

5.4.1 The Group wide Environmental Strategy has strategic objectives relating to valuing the natural environment, managing it in a way that benefits existing and future communities, increasing opportunities for residents and communities to engage with the environmental agenda and supporting residents to take action locally on environmental issues.

5.4.2 Residents continue to prioritise improving the quality of the local environment in terms of how the organisation can support communities. Increasingly environmental issues such as recycling and energy efficiency are at the top of the agenda in terms of residents' concerns and can often form the trigger for engagement with the organisation on improvements to service delivery.

5.5 **Procurement Strategy**

5.5.1 The Group's procurement approach can have a significant impact in terms of maximising our influence with suppliers to ensure a positive return to the communities in which we operate. Opportunities exist to raise awareness of our commitment to sustainability amongst suppliers through protocols and tendering arrangements, partnering, reinvestment of savings into the local community and promoting new business opportunities to small/local businesses.

5.6 Fundraising Strategy

- 5.61 The Group-wide Fundraising Strategy has the strategic goal to maximise all existing sources of voluntary income and to develop additional income streams, to help fund member organisations' community development projects.
- 5.62 Objectives to achieve this goal include creating and managing a fundraising rolling programme to generate the voluntary income. This programme will contribute to projects that arise from collaboration with Group members, our tenants and other residents, to improve and regenerate the areas where they live. The programme will identify income sources including collaborative funding opportunities with relevant partners for example, Local Authority partners for regeneration

6 Strategic Objectives:

(1) To ensure that existing neighbourhoods meet local need, are valued by those who live there and are managed effectively to promote community cohesion and sustainability

- We will undertake rigorous analysis of neighbourhoods to identify problems, gaps, and underlying needs, including residents' perceptions and those of other agencies.
- We will collect baseline data on neighbourhoods to provide the basis for target setting and monitoring.
- We will develop a clear, shared process for prioritisation, decision making and resource allocation for neighbourhood regeneration projects, involving residents and communities in the process.
- We will develop a range of practical interventions to tackle the regeneration of neighbourhoods including Somer Community Action in Neighbourhoods (SCAN) projects and a SCAN toolkit, as well as partnership working on community safety, health and employment.
- We will adopt a Neighbourhood Excellence approach across the organisation with all staff understanding their role in neighbourhood management, working closely with colleagues and residents to deliver a coherent service that is accountable to local residents.
- We will take a preventative approach to homelessness, which supports vulnerable residents to maintain their tenancies.
- We will develop and implement local lettings schemes in neighbourhoods where community sustainability is of concern.
- We will ensure that we take a comprehensive approach to asset management and involve residents in the targeting of improvements linked to local area priorities
- We will ensure mechanisms are built into project planning to enhance the long term sustainability of regeneration activity, including Somer Community Action in Neighbourhood (SCAN) areas and other community investment activity.

(2) To ensure that consideration for community sustainability is inherent in the process of building new communities

- All major new developments will have a community investment plan which identifies the Trust's commitment to supporting the local community throughout the development process and longer term.
- To aid the process of building sustainable communities, where possible we will develop and promote mixed tenure housing within communities.

- We will work with developers to enhance access to training, work experience and employment for local people linked to the construction of new homes.
- We will offer opportunities for residents to obtain a stake in their property through asset ownership schemes such as shared ownership and social home buy.

(3) To empower residents and communities to actively engage in issues that affect them, enabling people to lead or participate effectively in local decision making and to solve local problems.

- We will enhance the ability of vulnerable groups to participate more effectively in their community, providing access to activities and opportunities which build confidence and skills.
- We will produce clear information for residents and other stakeholders on the process and criteria used for targeting activity on regeneration and community investment.
- We will develop mechanisms, such as neighbourhood contracts, in partnership with communities to enable greater communication and accountability at a neighbourhood level.
- We will explore ways of devolving power and resources to residents and communities where possible to enable them to manage budgets/assets/services locally.
- We will aim to secure funding to support initiatives, which are resident led and will become self-sustaining in the long-term, adding value to the community.
- We will actively encourage and support the development of resident and community groups to increase local accountability and strengthen engagement at a local level.
- We will ensure residents and communities are equipped with the information, skills, tools and resources to effectively participate in achieving the aims of this Strategy.
- We will develop a marketing and communications strategy for all major projects to maximise opportunities for resident engagement and publicity.

(4) To tackle the underlying causes of poverty and social exclusion affecting residents

- We will ensure a proactive approach to working with key partners such as the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership to maximise opportunities for joint working on community safety, for example through PACT groups (Partners and Communities Together).

- We will develop the full range of preventative approaches to anti-social behaviour which aim to support families and individuals to address personal and local issues and promote community cohesion.
- We will carry out research into the needs of and mechanisms for involving specific communities of interest, such as Black and Minority Ethnic communities, new communities and younger tenants.
- We will ensure the active engagement of children and young people living in our communities and provide them with opportunities to participate in the design and delivery of services to their communities.
- We will promote financial inclusion through a preventative approach to tackling rent arrears and the development of information, advice, financial and support services for residents.
- We will take a co-ordinated approach to tackling fuel poverty which includes providing energy efficient homes, advice, information and support to residents on heating and running their homes.
- We will examine ways of supporting social enterprises as a means to strengthening the local economy and promoting employment opportunities.

(5) To enhance value for money and added value to the communities where we operate in the context of wider strategic priorities with local authorities and other partners

- We will take a proactive approach to partnership working and community leadership linked to our main areas of operation ensuring strong links with Local Strategic Partnerships, Community Strategy leads, local and regional Housing Strategies, Local Area Agreements and support for Local Compacts.
- We will monitor and assess performance across all our neighbourhoods to ensure an evidence based approach to resource allocation.
- We will develop ways of evaluating the value for money and 'value added' of activities delivered as part of the Community Strategy to inform future decision making and learning in this area.
- We will explore ways in which the delivery of the Community Strategy can be developed to maximise opportunities for income generation and grant funding.
- We will ensure that the major works programme is aligned with the regeneration and renewal activity of the Trust, maximising the use of resources at a neighbourhood level.
- We will work closely with partner agencies to maximise the use of Trust venues and facilities for the delivery of local services in response to community need.

- We will work to develop facilities & services to meet the needs of the community in partnership with residents and other agencies.
- We will ensure the Group's procurement approach actively seeks to ensure that any business functions undertaken are accompanied by a positive return to the communities in which we operate.

7 Delivery, Monitoring and Evaluation

- 7.1 Aims, objectives and targets which support the goal of this Strategy will be included in all other Trust strategies and action plans to ensure a co-ordinated approach to deliver and ownership across the organisation.
- 7.2 The Community Investment Manager will co-ordinate the delivery of the Strategy and its Strategic Action Plan, supported by a cross organisational monitoring group which will meet on a quarterly basis.
- 7.3 We will ensure that delivery of the Strategy is accompanied by staff training and development programme to support cross-organisational awareness and capacity building and that job descriptions reflect the vision.
- 7.4 We will develop performance indicators for community investment activity and report on performance regularly to staff, residents and stakeholders.
- 7.5 Reflecting the ethos of this Strategy, where possible evaluation methods need to be participatory, which means involving local people. This needs to be relative to the size and scale of the project and to reflect both quality and quantity.

Appendix A

Key factors contributing to sustainability

(Taken from A Toolkit of Sustainability Indicators (Edition2) D Long, European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University 2001)

Demand for housing

The demand for housing is the principal measure of community sustainability. Demand is divided into two categories: current demand and long-term demand. Low demand for social housing, we concentrated in a particular community is a strong indication that it is unsustainable. The long-term aspects of demand have been emphasised by researchers who have linked fundamental changes in economy, age structures and the aspirations and consumption behaviour of tenants with changes in social housing sustainability. These latter features constitute a more strategic influence on sustainability and are more important in setting the context for social housing development.

Reputation (or image) of the community

Housing management staff emphasise the weight accorded by tenants to the reputation or image a community possesses. Often a community's reputation will simply be a reflection of the failure of agencies to deliver on other factors. However positive or adverse reputations can eventually become an important influence on the demand to live in a community, particularly amongst applicants, regardless of the original conditions which produced that reputation.

Crime and anti social behaviour

Criminality and anti-social activities are regularly cited in surveys by tenants as their most important concern about continuing to live in a community. The adverse impacts that activities such as drug dealing or petty vandalism can have on the demand for housing are obvious. The fear of crime is far more prevalent than the experience of crime. For sustainability, it is therefore important to consider both actual levels and perceived levels of crime.

Social exclusion and poverty

Social exclusion and poverty are highly correlated with residents' dissatisfaction with their community. Poverty can undermine a community's attractiveness by eroding residents' ability to maintain their properties or support local facilities like shops and clubs. It can also affect other features that contribute to attractiveness, such as performance of local schools.

The accessibility of employment, facilities and services

The organisation of housing and facilities has changed significantly in the last two decades. The changing distribution of work and the range of essential facilities and services has placed much greater emphasis on households having access to transport. The emergence of ICT technologies is further likely to alter the way services are delivered in communities. Therefore, for a community to remain sustainable, it is important that residents have access to employment, services and facilities, consistent with what most people would consider reasonable.

The quality of the built environment

The quality of a community's environment consists of three elements. The first is the state of the built environment that is the extent to which there are vandalised or dilapidated buildings. The second concerns the state of the green environment, including the amount and condition of green and brown land available. The third is the degree to which the community's environment is well maintained, for example, via the removal of fly-tipped rubbish.

The quality, design and layout of housing

The relationship between the physical aspects of a community's housing, its design, layout and build quality and the sustainability of the demand for that property is superficially simple. If accommodation is too small or otherwise does not match households' requirements, the demand for that accommodation will be less sustainable. However it is important to recognise that the physical suitability of property also depends on the effective delivery of complementary supporting services, for example care taking.

The extent of social cohesion

Social cohesion is difficult to quantify, but nonetheless frequently mentioned as an important contributor to the health of a community. Concepts, such as friendliness of residents or a sense of community may be measures of the degree of mutual support present in a community. The extent to which a resident can depend on neighbours to mind a child in an emergency or the vigilance of a homewatch group can make a community an easier place in which to live and thereby more attractive.

The mix of the community

The pre-requisite of creating communities with diverse tenures and diverse types of households is almost received wisdom within the social housing movement. It is said that sustainability can be enhanced, for example, if developments avoid concentrations of low income households that are unable to support local shops and leisure facilities. However, this demonstrates that it is the relationship between the composition of the community and its facilities that is important and not merely the concentration of particular groups. The same applies to the relationship between groups. Developments which place youths and older people in close proximity can be unsustainable.

Glossary of Terms

<p>Sustainability</p>	<p>...the capacity for continuance more or less into the future.</p> <p>Housing Corp 2000</p> <p>People continuing to want to live in the same community and being able to, both now and in the future</p> <p>European Institute for Urban Affairs 2001</p>
<p>Community</p>	<p>A grouping of up to several thousand households, whose occupants share common experiences and bonds derived from living in the same locality Housing Corp 2001</p> <p>Body of people living in one place, district or country Body of people having religion, ethnic origin, profession etc in common Fellowship (community of interest) Commune Joint ownership or liability</p> <p>Oxford English Dictionary 1996</p>
<p>Community Development</p>	<p>Community Development is the strengthening of the social resources and processes in a community, by developing those contacts, relationships, networks, agreements and activities outside the household that residents themselves identify will make their locality a better place in which to live and work.</p> <p>Joseph Rowntree Foundation May (1995)</p>
<p>Sustainable Development</p>	<p>Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; not simply the use of resources at a rate which could be maintained without diminishing future levels but development which also takes into account social implications</p> <p>Dictionary of Geography 1997</p>

Financial exclusion	The inability to access financial services such as a bank account or affordable credit.
Social inclusion	'Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve inclusion income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individuals' rights and duties and increased social cohesion'. (Inclusion, 2002)
Capacity building	Developmental work and activities, (for example the provision of financial or computer training) which increase the abilities of an organisation or a community to take action or provide services. It is used to support the process of helping local groups to take part in the social and economic regeneration of their area by encouraging and developing people's skills and confidence, building up an infrastructure by setting up and strengthening networks, and improving organisation and procedures.
Resources	People, time, equipment, materials, services, energy and premises.
Continual Improvement	Involves identifying areas for improvement, developing and implementing plans for improvement evaluating the results and using the findings to develop further improvements.
Local Area Agreements	<p>These agreements provide a single framework through which government departments can allocate additional funding to local authorities and their partners. Their aim is to reduce and simplify funding streams and give more scope for local authorities to concentrate on local priorities. The funding focuses on the themes of children and young people, safer and stronger communities, and healthier communities and older people.</p> <p>Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004).</p>

Local Strategic Partnership	Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) are non-statutory bodies, bringing together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors, so that different initiatives and services can support each other and work together. Most partnerships are based on local authority district boundaries. Their function is to develop a community strategy, and involve local people in shaping the future of their neighbourhood and in how services are provided.
Local Compacts	The Compact is an agreement between voluntary and statutory organisations about the way they work together. The B&NES Compact, is one of many that has been agreed across the country with it's aim to improve mutual understanding and encourage a more effective working relationship.
Regeneration	Reviving run-down or deprived areas, for example by providing employment and training schemes, improving housing, developing transport links, offering local health services, landscaping and creating green spaces from derelict areas etc.
Social regeneration	Process of tackling the social problems that lead to deprivation, such as crime and drugs misuse. The process is different from physical regeneration, which tackles run-down buildings and communal areas, and economic regeneration, which is aimed at creating jobs and wealth.
Deprived areas	Regions or areas characterised by significantly higher levels of unemployment and lower rates of income per head compared with the national average.
Empowerment	To enable or provide someone with the information, advice, ability, authority or power required to perform a task or achieve an aim. Empowerment enables people to take responsibility for themselves and helps them to make decisions about their own lives.