

**Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**  
**Business Plan Summary 2007-2037**  
Information on priorities for housing

# Decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods





## Summary

Southampton City Council is the largest Landlord in the South East of England with over 18,000 properties let to households including tenants and leaseholders. One in five of every households in Southampton lives in a home owned by the City Council. Meeting the needs of our current and future residents is at the forefront of this business plan and drives the way we look after and manage these properties.

Southampton City Council is committed to providing decent homes in decent neighbourhoods to ensure that all council owned homes meet the decent homes standard by 2010 as well as meeting as many tenant's aspirations as possible.

The most recent tenant satisfaction survey shows that 76% of tenants are satisfied with the condition of their home, and 78% are satisfied with the overall service we provide. This plan is designed to increase these satisfaction figures.

## Background

In June 2005 the Council presented its Housing Stock Options Appraisal to the Government Office of the South East in which the Council decided to retain Council housing and the management service in house. This decision was based on detailed stock condition data and a rigorous financial appraisal of the Council's ability to meet the decent homes standard by 2010. Most importantly tenants and leaseholders were at the heart of the decision making - working with independent advisers, and seeking views through a variety of mechanisms, residents overwhelmingly endorsed the approach to retain Council housing in the city.

This Plan, **Decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods** sets out capital requirements and investment plans for Southampton's Council housing stock over a 5, 8 and 30-year timeframe to enable us to track our progress against the decent homes standard, meet tenants' aspirations and respond to longer term investment needs.

## The strategic context

**Decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods** is a part of Southampton's overarching Community Strategy and the Housing Strategy for the city.

Through the Southampton Partnership, the Council and its partners are working hard to drive forward the Community Strategy, which will improve the quality of life in the city - particularly with regard to the future economic success of Southampton.

The Housing Strategy outlines the priorities for the housing sector in delivering this vision. These priorities are:

- Developing Balanced and Sustainable Communities
- Improving the Condition of the Housing Stock
- Improving Energy Efficiency and reducing Fuel Poverty
- Preventing Homelessness
- Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Vulnerable People
- Promoting Neighbourhood Renewal

The HRA Business Plan specifically relates to how Council housing is managed to support and deliver against these priorities. **Decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods provides** a long term plan for managing and improving the council's own housing stock to contribute to the overall progression of wider corporate and city-wide goals.

## Decent Homes

As part of a national drive to improve the quality of housing, the Council is committed to meeting the decent home standard by 2010.

In 2001 87% of our homes failed to meet the decent homes standard. By 2006 this number had fallen to 32% - a 55% reduction in the number of non decent homes over the last 5 years.

We have compiled detailed information on the condition of the Council's housing stock, and analysed this to determine the cost of backlog component replacements and bringing all homes up to decent homes level. This information has been used to plan and prioritise our immediate programmes and the investment strategy in this plan to ensure that no council owned homes will fail to meet the decent homes standard by 2010, unless through customer choice and preference.

In order to meet the decent homes standard by 2010 the council estimates that a further £51m (64.3M) (excluding fees) will be required to bring the rest of the council's homes up to a decent homes level. This is built into the HRA Business Plan.

We are helping to meet the decent home standard by improving the overall energy efficiency of our stock through improved insulation. This HRA Business plan commits us to exploring ways of increasing sustainability of our homes, for example through greater use of renewable energy sources.

As well as planned investment in the stock, the quality and performance of our day to day and programmed repairs services are key to maintaining housing conditions. By implementing the actions agreed in **Service Excellence**, the Best Value Review of Housing, improvement in repairs performance has been significant in recent years with more repairs being completed first time and within the required timescales. This has released significant funding for direct investment in capital funding. We need to increase this level of performance further over the next five years to release further funding to meet tenant's aspirations. The HRA business plan acknowledges the need to reduce property re-let times by incorporating best practice methods for void management.

The HRA business plan also identifies a need to look at the possible benefits of mobile working technology. It also identifies a need to look at the way in which we organise the delivery of our service across the neighbourhoods in which we work. This will involve our staff in contributing ideas and experience which will influence our views on how to move forward.

### Strategic Priorities for decent homes are:

- Improve tenant satisfaction with the quality of their homes and with the overall service we provide
- Meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010
- Provide excellent repairs and maintenance services
- Increase energy efficiency

## Decent Homes Plus

The government's Decent Homes standard is a basic minimum standard that all councils should reach by 2010. Our Decent Homes Plus initiative is based on our residents' aspirations of how they want their neighbourhoods and communities to look for the future. It meets wider corporate objectives such as tackling crime and the fear of crime, and incorporating environmental improvements on our estates.

The priorities for Decent Homes Plus investment are based on extensive resident consultation, including that carried out for stock option appraisal.

### The priorities are

- Improve the communal areas in, and around the external areas around walk up blocks
- Replace lifts and enhance security in tower blocks
- Improve special decorating programme
- Complete the double glazing programme
- Provide disabled adaptations
- Modernise the Sheltered Housing Stock.



## Decent Neighbourhoods

Improvements through the decent homes programme have been very well received by tenants – with satisfaction ratings often in the high 90% region. But all of this work is internal so the appearance of many estates is largely unchanged.

Consultation and research has consistently shown that council tenants rate the quality of their wider home environment as importantly as the quality of their immediate homes. This business plan marks a step change in the Council's commitment to transform the external environment of our estates.

This will be funded in part by developing an asset management programme to dispose of surplus HRA assets to release £3m of funding within the next five year period. Further, these disposals will be targeted at releasing land for housing development to help create more homes and mixed tenure communities on our estates. Work is currently underway to identify sites for improvement and redevelopment such as underused shopping parades without a viable commercial future and derelict garage sites.

A programme of external improvements to tower blocks and environmental improvements around walk up blocks will contribute to this transformational change.

Within the Council the housing management service, together with open spaces and community safety provide a raft of essential services to maintain the quality of life of estates. By joint working with the police and other agencies we are moving towards even more comprehensive neighbourhood management services.

Resident involvement is critical in making neighbourhoods decent places to live. Involving residents in decisions on projects which affect their lives, and encouraging citizens to take part in projects which improve their community is integral to the neighbourhoods agenda. The division of the city into five neighbourhoods has allowed the council to identify key targets for different neighbourhoods whilst also developing central themes which relate

to all. A programme of patch planning is underway to ensure that the right estate improvements are identified and actioned for each locality.

There is an overlap between unemployment levels in the city and our estates. Given the planned investment levels there is scope to develop training and employment opportunities in local labour schemes for the benefit of Southampton residents.

### The Strategic Priorities for the Decent Neighbourhood agenda are:

- Create decent neighbourhoods in which people are happy to live
- Proactive asset management to create mixed tenure communities
- A programme of transformational projects to improve the appearance of our estates
- Provide excellent neighbourhood management services
- Develop, nurture and sustain a sense of pride and local identity through resident involvement and the emerging neighbourhood agenda
- Develop training and employment opportunities in local labour schemes



## Resource planning

The resources for investment for Council housing come from a variety of sources mainly including tenants' rents and direct support from the government. For the first time in 2006/07 the Council has reached the point where it is paying money over into the "national HRA" and no longer receives HRA subsidy. The sums paid over will inevitably increase over the period of the business plan.

All available financial resources have been identified to support our plans for the management and maintenance of our housing - both now and in the future. Assumptions have been made in the preparation of this business plan over the 30 year period and resources aligned with the priorities identified.

To further complicate the resources plan, rents for residents have also been capped by the government at below the level required by rent restructuring and the level of supported borrowing are below the levels previously indicated by the government. Despite these reductions in income to the council, this business plan identifies sufficient resource to meet the 2010 Decent Homes target and also meet many of the tenants aspirations with respect to the Decent Homes Plus priorities. The council will continue to explore ways to make ongoing revenue funding efficiencies in order to fund capital expenditure.

## Consultation

The council's existing well-established tenant and resident participation structure has been used to obtain views about the development of the HRA Business Plan. Consultation with the Tenants' Capital Group continues to allow residents' to understand the funding structures that are in place which allow the council to expend money on Decent Homes and Decent Homes Plus programmes. Residents' concerns centre on promoting greater choice, affordability, the condition of the existing housing stock, the need to link housing actions 'beyond bricks and mortar', making best use of land in the city, bringing empty homes back into use, regenerating run down areas of the city and meeting the needs of vulnerable people. These are all key issues where the on-going effective management of the council's stock can, and will, play a major role.








## Action planning & achieving our objectives

To achieve the goals set out in this Business Plan a number of key actions have been identified including their linkages to overall strategic housing priorities, the person responsible for the task, project milestones, indicative costs and a timetable for implementation. Progress will be monitored through the Council's Performance Management Framework, ensuring that all of the Council's plans work towards delivering the long-term vision of the city's Community Strategy. The priorities outlined in this Business Plan will play a major role in securing the economic, social and environmental well-being of all council tenants as well as leaseholders and local residents.

This **Decent Homes in Decent Neighbourhoods** Business Plan is driven by the results of consultation. Taking it forward is very much about team-work and this year's plan builds on involving residents and Council staff to ensure a cross cutting corporate approach. Many staff have been involved in the development of this plan and tenant association representatives have endorsed the approach that has been adopted in updating this year's plan

## Further information

Southampton City Council is committed to ensuring that all of its customers have equal access to key plans and services. This business plan is therefore available, on request, in **larger print**, Braille  , on audio tape and on disk . It is also available in other languages from Southampton City Information on Tel: 023 8083 3333.

If you would like the full version of the HRA Business Plan, please go to our website address:  
[http://www.southampton.gov.uk/housing/housing\\_policies/default.asp#0](http://www.southampton.gov.uk/housing/housing_policies/default.asp#0)

This HRA Business Plan sits along side the 2007-2011 Housing Strategy. To avoid duplication the Housing Strategy is often referred to as a reference point in this document and information is only repeated where it is considered to be necessary.

## For further information about the content of this business plan please contact:

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This information is available, on request, in **larger print**, Braille  on audio tape  and on disk . It is also available in other languages or we can read a brief summary and explain it to you. Please contact telephone 023 8083 3333 for help.

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