



# **Uttlesford District Council**

## **Housing Strategy 2015-18**

**Jan 2015**

## **Preface**

As I am sure you know Uttlesford is a beautiful rural area rated by many as one of the best places to reside in the country. This along with our commutability to London and proximity to Cambridge makes this district a most desirable place to live. This in turn inflates house prices making it difficult for young people and local families to get a foot on the housing ladder.

We also have a lack of availability in both the privately owned and rental markets of bungalows and other suitable types of property for our more mature residents. This is particularly a problem in many of our villages. This makes it difficult for people to move from larger family homes into something more appropriate for their changing needs.

Housing is a key priority for councillors in Uttlesford. The housing and planning departments are working together to help deliver the accommodation that meets the needs of those living and working in Uttlesford. We are doing this through both our new Local Plan and Housing Strategy.

I'm really proud to say that this Council is ahead of many as we started a building programme a few years ago. Having completed two phases of council built new housing in Leaden Roding, we now have an ambitious development programme replacing out of date sheltered housing with new houses and bungalows in Stansted and upgrading other sheltered housing in the District to make it fit for the future and a desirable place to grow old in.

As a council we continue to work closely with the RCCE to buy more time and help for Parish Councils to bring forward plans for exception sites. This provides local people an opportunity to continue to live in the areas where they already have roots and personal connections.

We believe that there are many ways of delivering housing, be it working with developers and registered providers or encouraging empty home owners to become landlords. We know times are very challenging in so many ways but we want to make the most of the opportunities that are available and I believe we at Uttlesford are up to the challenge!

Cllr Julie Redfern  
Portfolio Holder, Housing

# Chapter 1: Summary and Introduction

The Council's new Housing Strategy draws on a wide ranging consultation with stakeholders as well as building on existing evidence and local knowledge. As the new Local Plan is drafted, the Housing Strategy will form a key part of the evidence base of the Local Plan.

The Council is committed to producing and adopting a sound Local Plan and has set out the programme for completing this work. The Council will continue to work towards the delivery of the Housing Strategy through both Local Planning and Development Management.

The new Strategy also stands alongside the HRA Business Plan, Homelessness Strategy and Developers Guide and sets out how we plan to deliver our key priorities and objectives for the next three years.

The Evidence Base for our Housing Strategy is provided as an appendix to this document to ensure that data can be kept up to date. An updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) will be published during 2015 and this data will be added to the evidence base once complete.

## Our key objectives

To meet the housing requirement for Uttlesford and to make sure that the housing being provided creates balanced communities by delivering sustainable, safe, attractive and healthy places to live while meeting local housing needs in terms of type and tenure including affordable and special needs housing.

To provide and maintain accommodation that meets the needs of older people living in Uttlesford.

Maintain our housing to a high standard ensuring our tenants have a good quality of life.

## Achievements from 2012-15

- Redevelopment of Holloway Crescent complete
- Growth area funding gained and used to provide rural housing in Hatfield Heath
- Completion of a second Passiv haus scheme with Hastoe and a further one planned
- Delivered 284 affordable homes as part of market housing development on sites across the District.
- An annual Landlord forum

- An annual Housing Strategy conference
- Delivering 1 and 2 bed bungalows on new development sites
- New commuted sum policy that is providing a pot of funding for affordable housing development in the District.
- Set up a tenant regulatory panel and delivering a comprehensive co regulatory framework.
- Reviewed opportunities for delivery of further regeneration and new build including exploration of alternative delivery models
  - Mead Court redevelopment on site and progressing well
  - Catons Lane, Saffron Walden – redevelopment of a garage site with 6 houses. Planning permission secured. Start on site anticipated for March 2015
  - Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden – Remodelling of existing sheltered scheme. Planning application secured. Start on site programmed for April 2016
  - Reynolds Court, Newport – new build redevelopment of existing sheltered scheme. Planning application submitted. Start on site targeted for October 2015.
  - Other sites, including sheltered schemes, garage and infill sites, and excess garden land are being assessed for development viability
- Successful delivery of the investment programme including the delivery of environmental improvements
- Development of a new Anti-Social Behaviour policy and procedures
- Development and adoption of a new Allocations Policy
- Implementation of annual tenancy inspections
- Implementation of an in-house Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme
- New tenancy strategy
- Brought 185 empty properties back into use since October 2013
- Assisting in the development of the Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme

- Administered and provided 62 grants totalling £455,428 to enable disabled people to live as comfortably and independently as possible in their homes
- Administered and provided 18 grants totalling £31,167 to residents in receipt of means tested benefits to carry out home repairs and improve energy efficiency
- Investigated 105 complaints of poor conditions in private sector housing

## Chapter 2: The National Context

### Key policies

The government's national policies for housing were set out in "Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England" in November 2011. This summarised a number of housing policies that were already being implemented and added some new proposals aimed at unlocking the housing market and getting the building industry moving again. There have been further initiatives since then, particularly in the 2013 spending review.

The drivers for government housing policy are: increasing the number of available homes; improving the rented housing sector; providing housing support for older and vulnerable people and helping people to buy a home.

### Legislative changes

The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities new powers to discharge homelessness duties into the private sector, a new duty to introduce a Tenancy Strategy, and new flexibilities to determine housing allocations and qualification criteria. It also introduced reforms to social housing tenure which enabled social landlords to grant tenancies for a fixed length of time.

The Localism Act introduced significant housing related changes, including:

**Social housing allocations reform** – social housing is in great demand and the Act gives local authorities more freedom to develop policies about eligibility to enter the housing register. While this means that local authorities can prevent people who do not need social housing from joining the list, they are still obliged to ensure that social homes accommodate those most vulnerable.

**Social housing tenure reform** – this allows for more flexible arrangements for people entering social housing in the future by enabling social landlords to grant tenancies for a fixed length over time.

**Reform of homelessness legislation** – this enables local housing authorities to discharge their statutory homeless duty into a suitable private rented accommodation.

**Reform of council housing finance** – this enables local authorities to retain collected rent and spend it on local priorities.

**Right to buy** – Discounts increased from £16,000 to £75,000 to encourage tenants to access the housing market and buy their Council property.

The **Welfare Reform Act 2012** makes the biggest change to the welfare system for over 60 years. It introduces a wide range of reforms which aim to make the benefits system simpler. The main elements of the welfare reform are:

- Universal Credit
- Benefits Cap
- Personal Independence Payment
- Council tax benefit
- Housing Benefit

Of equal significance to the raft of new legislation passed is the dismantling of the existing infrastructure within which local authorities have been used to operating. Key changes have seen the removal of regional government, the abolition of the Audit Commission and the demise of the Housing Corporation and its successor body the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Housing associations moved from being Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to Registered Providers (RPs) and their regulation and funding was assumed by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). In the transition, regulation became 'light touch' with an emphasis on value for money and financial viability.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme introduced Affordable Rent, a new form of social housing and the main type of new housing supply. Housing providers can let a property at an Affordable Rent (inclusive of service charges, where applicable) of up to 80% of the gross market rent reflective of the property size and location. Affordable rent will also be used to support funding for future delivery.

### **National planning policy framework**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied. It provides a framework within which councils and local people can produce their own distinctive Local Plans or Neighbourhood Development Plans, reflecting the needs and priorities of their communities.

It specifies that local authorities have a duty *"to plan for a mix of housing for different groups, including older people, based on robust data, needs analysis and local demographic projections."*

It also set out the requirement for local Authorities to maintain a five year land supply of deliverable sites for housing

### **New Homes Bonus**

The New Homes Bonus was introduced during 2011/12 and has meant that for every new home and empty property brought back into use, local authorities receive the equivalent of the annual council tax raised, together with an additional £350 for affordable units. This scheme intends to incentivise local authorities and local communities to accept and encourage residential development.

## **Help to buy scheme**

The 'Help to Buy' scheme has been introduced to help first time buyers by providing Government loans of 20% of the price of a newly built home, with no interest to pay for the first five years of the loan. This is intended as a stimulus to generate a greater number of people able to take up home ownership and to support the building of new homes.

## **The Care Act 2014**

The wellbeing of people is at the centre of the new Care Act. Councils now have a duty to think about the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of people who need care. Councils also have a new duty to provide preventative services to keep people healthy in the first place.

The aim of the act is to put people and their carers in control of their care and support. In addition the Act will put a limit on the amount anyone will have to pay towards the cost of their care.

The Care Act contains core legal duties and powers relating to adult social care. Local authorities will be responsible for providing a broader care and support role towards the local community.

We will need to recognise and incorporate the strategy that Adult Social Care and the West Essex Clinical Commissioners develop into the Housing Strategy.



## **Chapter 3: The Local Context**

### **Partnerships and Policies**

#### **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**

Locally-owned partnerships between local authorities and business that play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and creation of jobs. Uttlesford works with two LEP the South East LEP (SELEP); and the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership (GCGPEP) Both are focused on helping to drive forward sustainable economic growth in our area – with local business, education providers, the third sector and the public sector working together to achieve this.

#### **West Essex Commissioning Care Group (CCG)**

In April 2013, the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group became the statutory body responsible for buying healthcare services on behalf of 290,000 people in the Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford districts. The commissioning group is made up of 38 general practices who work together to ensure the best possible healthcare is available to everyone in west Essex.

Representatives from the CCG sit on the Local Strategic Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board. Working jointly will help to meet the future needs of residents in Uttlesford in the future.

#### **Housing Related Support Partnership**

Officers are represented on the Housing Related Support Partnership group which is made up of officers from the District Councils across Essex, County Council officers, Provider representatives, Police, Probation, mental health commissioning and Essex Drug and Alcohol Team (EDAAT).

The aim of this group is to inform and recommend the strategic direction of the housing related support (HRS) programme in Essex. It will identify opportunities for joint or aligned commissioning of services which will meet a wider range of outcomes, especially within the context of the developing Social Care, Public Health and Health agendas. The group will also look at the best use of reduced and non-ring-fenced resources.

#### **Local Strategic Partnership – Uttlesford Futures**

The Uttlesford LSP “Uttlesford Futures” is a collaboration of organisations including the district council, the county council, the local health service, the emergency services, the voluntary sector and statutory social care partners.

**Their vision is to bring partners together to help resolve community priorities and challenges, with a view to maximising effectiveness and sustainability.**

LSPs allow public bodies to work together on projects they wouldn't be able to do on their own. Uttlesford Futures' work is guided by the priorities that are set out in the district's [Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2018 \[143kb\]](#).

The key themes in this strategy are:

- Children and young people matter
- Staying healthy
- Developing business
- Feeling safe
- Protecting the environment
- Getting around

These themes come from a combination of priorities that have been identified as being important locally and ones which central government have said that LSPs need to look at.

The Housing Strategy works alongside the Sustainable Community Strategy and both documents aim to complement the work of each other.

### **Corporate Plan 2014-19**

The Council has recently published its Corporate Plan 2014-19 and has the following priorities:

- Remain a **low tax** Council
- Continue to listen and respond to our communities so we stay focused on the delivery of **high quality** key services that matter.
- We will have shared the benefits of growth with our communities in an **responsible** way that protects and enhances our environment
- Have improved **prosperity**

### **Local Plan**

The adopted Local Plan, together with national policy and guidance, sets out the framework for development within the District. The Council is working to produce a new Local Plan and recently adopted a new Local Development Scheme which sets out the timescale and process for completing this work.

The Housing Strategy forms a key part of the evidence base for the Local Plan as well as Development Management decisions on applications and will need to be taken into account.

## **Strategic Housing Market Assessment**

Uttlesford District Council worked with the adjoining authorities of Brentwood, Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest and Harlow in 2008 and commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake an assessment of the housing markets of these districts, which for the purposes of this study is collectively called the London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 sub-region.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is a framework that the district council can follow to develop a good understanding of how housing markets operate. It assesses housing need and demand and will be used to development the housing policies in the Local Development Framework.

An update was completed in 2010 and a further update commissioned by Epping Forest, Harlow, East Herts and Uttlesford Councils will be published later this year. This will be used to update our evidence base once published.

## **The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan sets out how the Council will maintain its homes and its priorities for the future.

The purpose of the business plan is to demonstrate that the council can maintain its housing assets, and deliver the levels of service, home and neighbourhood improvements. It is first and foremost a financial document, which determines how the council will meet the needs of present and future tenants, demonstrating that Government and local targets can be achieved and ensuring the long-term viability of the stock.

An effective Business Plan has become crucial since the government announced the reform of the rules governing local authority housing finance and the introduction of the self-financing system. This is a major change in national housing finance which introduces new opportunities for the Council's housing service but also exposure to risks. It is therefore critical that the HRA continues to be managed on sound business principles

The reforms have opened up some exciting opportunities for the council. The financial modelling demonstrates that there are sufficient funds to enable the council to play a pivotal role in not only developing much needed social housing but also delivering council priorities to grow the economy.

The document can be found at [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

## Chapter 4: Scene Setting – The Uttlesford Area

Uttlesford is a sparsely populated rural locality in Northwest Essex. The District borders Hertfordshire to the West and Cambridgeshire to the North. It is the largest District in Essex at 63,752 hectares and is mainly rural in character with two market towns - Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, a range of key villages; Elsenham, Takeley, Great Chesterford, Newport, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted and a number of smaller parishes.

Uttlesford has a population of around 83,500 (2014 figure) which is set to increase over the next 10 -15 years with new housing development. 53% of residents are aged 25 – 64. Around 30% are under 24 and 16.5% are over 65. When compared to the East of England and England, it is clear that Uttlesford has less young people and more older people. With a lower number of working age adults supporting both the retired and the young.

There are good road and rail links into London, Cambridge and Harlow from settlements in the M11 Stansted-Cambridge and A120 Stansted-Braintree corridors, although public transport in the more rural locations is poor. Stansted Airport lies within its boundaries.

### Key Messages from the evidence base

- The Uttlesford district is projected to increase from 83,500 people to 105,800 by 2035.
- The number of residents living in the district who are aged 65 and over is expected to increase from 15,800 people to 28,000.
- Growing ageing population with 1,070 people aged over 65 in Uttlesford are thought to have dementia. This figure is estimated to rise to 1,920 by 2030.
- 70% of the population own their own home.
- Average house price of £421,100 compared to regional average of £281,900 (Sept 2014)
- Average house price is 10.9 times average income.
- Average income in Uttlesford is £24,575 per annum.

The evidence base shows that house prices are high in Uttlesford and incomes low, meaning that mortgages are unaffordable for a large percentage of our population. This places a strain on the Council's housing stock and the private rented sector. Young people, families and those providing our key services (for example care staff, teachers, cleaners etc.) are moving out of Uttlesford away from family and support to be able to buy their first home.

Our population is getting older, living longer and requiring greater care. This is already having implications for the housing market. Requirements for extra care, residential homes and a specialist dementia facility are needed to meet these needs.

## **Chapter 5: Partnership Working**

Strong partnerships are an essential part of this strategy and ensures that key projects can be delivered even with limited resources. Partners include all of the Local Authorities in Essex through the Essex Housing Officers Group, Registered Providers, the Homes and Communities Agency and Essex County Council. Another key partner for Uttlesford is its Local Strategic Partnership, Uttlesford Futures which is the key driver for Uttlesford's Community Strategy.

### **Housing Strategy Partnership**

As a result of the successful Housing Strategy Conference held in July 2012, the Council hosts a yearly conference to share best practice, monitor achievements and set future objectives. This has helped set the objectives for this new Housing Strategy.

### **Housing Board**

The Housing Board was set up to champion housing issues within the authority, to monitor the Housing Strategy and Business Plan and work on specific time limited housing projects. The group are currently progressing the councils new build programme and the redevelopment of Mead Court Stansted. The group includes Councillors and Tenant Forum members and reports to Cabinet.

### **The Tenant Forum**

Tenant Participation is seen as a vital link between the Council and its tenants. There is one Forum representing Uttlesford, made up of 12 Council tenants and one leaseholder from within the District. The Forum members are consulted on a multitude of different areas of the Housing Service including rent setting, repairs, housing policy, etc.

Two tenants from the Tenant Forum (one of whom is the Chairperson) also sit on the Housing Board covering housing issues.

### **Homelessness Partnership**

The Council has a homelessness partnership that meets quarterly. This is the forum for partnership working and to discuss and implement the Action Plan of the Homelessness Strategy. Partnership working underpins the delivery of a comprehensive and holistic housing options and homelessness service. Invariably the delivery of sustainable housing solutions requires the addressing of non-housing problems, this requires a multi-agency approach. As advice and support services can be delivered by an often complex and fragmented range of organisations, without partnership working and a co-ordinated approach, it is easy for people to slip through the net.

## **Private Sector Landlords Forum**

Locally and nationally some of the worst housing is in the private rented sector, and the Council has recognised the need to work proactively with landlords and letting agents to achieve improvements. The Council organises a private sector landlord forum once a year. Topics have included the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, tenancy deposit protection schemes, the Local Housing Allowance and bringing Empty Homes back into use.

## **Chapter 6: Consultation**

### **Housing conference**

A successful Housing Conference was held on 3 November 2014 to help inform the new Housing Strategy. District and County Councillors, Parish Councils, key partners and Officers came together to hear about and debate future issues and initiatives that will affect the Council in the next three years. Presentations were made about the new allocations policy, rural housing, future provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites, findings from the emerging Strategic Housing Market Assessment and an update from Essex County Council about delivering the health and social care agenda.

Workshop groups then addressed the key issues in more detail. Discussions included the need for a new key worker policy to meet the needs of low paid workers providing services in the District (in particular health workers), exception site housing to meet the needs of the older population (maybe include some private/shared ownership, Gypsy and Traveller sites distributed across Uttlesford, incorporating health facilities as part of new developments.

### **Registered Providers (RP) event**

An event was held with our RP partners to discuss our affordable housing development programme, how our current policy is working and look for ways to work together more closely.

A lively debate took place about clustering on schemes, the provision of lifts in blocks of flats, parking courts, scheme viability. This has helped us scope our new Guide for Developers which will be published in 2015.

### **Learning Disability Action Group and meetings with service users at Home Farm Trust**

Officers took part in Local Action group meetings with providers, support services and service users to understand the issues faced by the Learning disability community. A workshop was held with service users living in Uttlesford and East Herts to understand their aspirations for their future housing need and a follow up session held with staff who manage Home Farm Trust in Ugley.

Service users have agreed to help us pull together an easy read copy of the Housing Strategy. This will help them understand the future housing policies of the Council and ensure that they can help influence them.



## **Workshops and home visits with older people**

Workshop sessions were held in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow along with some home visits for those less able to access our workshop sessions. The aim was to understand the future needs of older people living in our District in order to better plan for their needs.

## **Research with young people**

We carried out a survey within one of the local schools, to find out what their 16-18 year old pupils felt their housing options were in the future. Many were planning to go to university and anticipated staying in those areas afterwards, others wanted to move to London. Very few saw their future in Uttlesford due to the cost of house prices and private rental costs.

## **Health and Wellbeing Group**

This group work towards one of the themes in the Sustainable Communities Strategy. Their work helps inform and set future priorities in the Housing Strategy. The group consists of health professionals, Essex County Council, Mind, Citizens Advice Bureau, Council for Voluntary Services Uttlesford, West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, Alzheimer's Society, Age UK, Carers UK.

## **Tenant Forum/Housing Board**

The Tenant Forum and Housing Board play a key part in the preparation of this new strategy from influencing new policy to monitoring key progress made.

## **Parish Councils**

All of our Parish Councils will be given the chance to comment on this new Housing Strategy through the consultation process and their comments will be considered and used where possible. Their comments were very useful in the drafting of the last Housing Strategy.

## Chapter 7: Addressing Our Key Priorities

- 1. Increasing Housing Supply Across all Tenures. (To meet the housing requirement for Uttlesford and to make sure that the housing being provided creates balanced communities by delivering sustainable, safe, attractive and healthy places to live while meeting local housing needs in terms of type and tenure including affordable and special needs housing).**

*This section under development – further consultation needed to inform this section*

The Council has an ambitious programme of development moving forwards to ensure that we meet the needs of local people living in the District along with meeting specialist housing needs.

### **Council house building**

Having completed two phases of council built new housing in Leaden Roding, we now have an ambitious development programme replacing out of date sheltered housing with new houses and bungalows in Stansted and upgrading other sheltered housing in the District to make it fit for the future and a desirable place to grow old in.

### **Developing affordable housing as part of market led schemes**

We will continue to deliver affordable housing on market led sites, working with registered providers to ensure that the completed homes meet local need and that tenants receive a good service from their landlord.

For a number of years, we have been working with Registered Providers on market led schemes and also rural exception sites to deliver affordable housing. During this time, our partners have changed, new providers have expressed an interest in working in Uttlesford, whilst others can no longer build viable schemes and have stopped developing here. As with our own housing and part of good practice, we monitor our performance and ensure that our tenants gain a good service from us as a landlord. We are planning to extend this further and analyse the performance of our registered providers as landlords, to ensure that those who are allocated a Housing Association property are provided with a good service. This work will be carried out through 2015/16.

### **Rural housing**

Delivering rural housing on exception sites is an important priority in Uttlesford. In the last 3 years, we have delivered schemes in Arkesden, Wimbish and Hatfield

Heath. Future schemes are progressing in Little Hallingbury, Great Hallingbury, Newport, Chrishall and Hatfield Broad Oak. We plan to continue our partnership with RCCE and ensure that rural housing continues to be delivered in our villages.

### **Growth area funding**

We were fortunate to receive an allocation of Growth Area funding in 2010 for two affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites. The first scheme completed in February 2015 and residents have now moved in. This scheme is built to Passiv haus standards and means that residents will experience very low heating costs in their homes. The second scheme is progressing well and should be submitted for planning during 2015.

### **Gypsy and travellers**

The Council is currently carrying out an Issues and Options consultation. This document forms the first stage in the production of the Uttlesford Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan. The purpose of the public consultation is to invite views on the issues and options and on specific sites identified in this document. This process will run until February 2015. Progress will then be made through 2015/16 alongside the new Local Plan.

In the last Housing Strategy we identified the need for a scheme for those at risk of **domestic violence**. A piece of Council owned land was identified and a partner chosen. This scheme is now progressing and will complete in 2016/17.

We also identified the need for another **homeless facility**. We currently work with Genesis Housing on a scheme in Saffron Walden that successfully meets the needs of single (often young) people who approach the Council as homeless. It helps them get back on their feet, provides them with advice and support and helps them move on to independent living. We are now looking to provide a scheme in Great Dunmow, a site has been identified in the Local Plan and we are talking to partners about how to progress this. This scheme will emerge through the life of this strategy

### **Meeting the needs of our council tenants**

We will continue to relaunch the tenant participation service under the 'Get Involved' banner and visit local areas holding community fun days. These have been really successful in encouraging residents to engage with Council services.

Annual tenancy inspections are now in place and ensure that tenants are given the help and support they need in maintaining their tenancy.

We have successfully set-up a tenant regulatory panel who are delivering comprehensive co regulatory framework. Their current project will pull together service standards for sheltered housing.

An Anti-Social Behaviour policy has recently been put in place which will give greater guidance for staff and residents when there are problems in a neighbourhood.

We have also introduced a new Allocations Policy which places greater emphasis on those with a local connection. This policy was introduced in January 2015 and will ensure that those applying for housing have the relevant links to Uttlesford before joining our housing register.

All of these documents can be found on the Council's website [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

## **Health and Wellbeing Group**

We will continue to take part in the Health and Wellbeing group and the wider Local Strategic Partnership. These groups help us to understand the wider issues in the District, inform our work plan and progress projects together. This includes a project we are progressing which will help us understand the needs of the ageing population in Uttlesford and how we meet these needs in the future. This will be completed during 2015/16 and published jointly.

We are also planning to work with other providers represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that we understand other specialist requirements in Uttlesford. This includes The Alzheimer's Society, Carers UK and Mind.

## **Equalities**

We want to ensure that all of our residents experience the same level of service when approaching the Council. Inclusion is very important to us and we are working towards the Achieving Level of the Equality Standard. This involves analysing our services and ensuring they all reach the same high standard. Our Single Equality Duty Scheme helps us to ensure this.

We are committed to completing an equality impact assessment on all of our new policies as they are published to ensure they meet this standard.

## **Black and minority ethnic requirements**

As our evidence base shows, the majority of residents are white British, however we want to ensure that our housing and services meet the needs of the whole community. We will continue to analyse data about the District, review our housing waiting list and ensure that those from BME communities are treated fairly and have the same chances available to them as the wider community. (See evidence base at Appendix 2)

## **Mobile homes**

The Council is responsible for the regulation of mobile homes used for habitation, the main provision being by means of licensing to protect the health, safety and welfare of the occupants. The Council licences 38 caravan sites totalling 237 caravans.

Since the introduction of the Mobile Homes Act 2013 the council will be better able to make sure site owners are complying with the terms of their site licence.

## 2. Helping People to Live Independently

*This section under development – consultation with providers and ECC to inform this section*

### Older persons housing

The Council has an ambitious programme of development to ensure that its sheltered housing schemes meet current needs. The Mead Court redevelopment in Stansted is on site and progressing well. This scheme will complete by September 2015 and will provide 29 houses and bungalows for affordable rent and 4 flats to be used as temporary accommodation.

Hatherley Court, Saffron Walden – Remodelling of existing sheltered scheme. A Planning application has been approved and a start on site programmed for April 2016.

Reynolds Court, Newport – new build redevelopment of existing sheltered scheme. Planning application submitted. Start on site targeted for October 2015.

We will continue to request 1 and 2 bed bungalows on S106 schemes, this means that older people can downsize to accommodation that is fit for purpose but still maintains their independence. It also meets a need for those with a physical disability who require accommodation on one floor.

As part of S106 obligations, we have negotiated with developers to provide two extra care schemes. One in Saffron Walden and one in Great Dunmow. These will provide a mix of affordable rented, shared ownership and units for sale to meet the needs of those over 65 who require an element of care in their home. This will complement our sheltered housing service and the private retirement villages and care homes in the District.

The Council continue to encourage residents to organise activities in sheltered housing. This includes armchair aerobics, bingo, coffee mornings, computer training and visits out of the schemes. This helps combat social isolation often experienced by older people living alone or supporting a partner with health issues.

### Specialist housing to meet local needs

As part of our consultation on the Housing Strategy, we met with providers of **learning disability** schemes in the District and also spent time with service users living in Uttlesford. It became apparent that service users wanted to live independently rather than having to share facilities.

We are already progressing a scheme in Saffron Walden to provide a number of flats for those with a learning disability and funding has been gained from Essex County Council. This will be delivered during 2016/17. The scheme will enable service users to live a more independent life.

We are also having early discussions with one of our providers in Ugley along with Essex County Council to look at the possibility of providing a number of independent living flats for those currently residing in residential care. This would help meet the needs of those wanting to lead a more independent life.

We will continue to further liaise with current providers of specialist housing to ensure that their needs are met in the District. A review will be carried out to assess the housing requirements of those with **mental health** issues to ensure their housing needs are met.

We currently require developers to build new homes to lifetime homes standards. These standards apply to all new housing including blocks of flats for both social housing and private housing. We also require developers to provide an element of wheelchair accessible housing in new developments over 10 properties. These properties are important in helping us meet the needs of residents who use a wheelchair or those with a mobility problem.

We will also be working with a care provider to progress a dementia scheme that is planned in Uttlesford. This scheme will help meet the increasing needs of those with high level dementia, which is levels 5, 6, and 7 on the Global Deterioration Scale for Assessment of Primary Degenerative Dementia who we currently struggle to accommodate and as a result residents need to be relocated outside the district.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)**

The Council administers and provides DFGs allowing disabled people to live as comfortably and independently as possible in their home. Since 2012, 62 grants have been awarded to a value of £455,482. The Council works in partnership with Papworth Home Improvement Agency who are available to act on behalf of the applicant if the applicant chooses to engage their services.

In 2014 the funding allocation for DFGs has passed from central government to Essex County Council (ECC). Historically the funding allocation for DFGs has been one of the lowest in the Country and the Council regularly adds to this funding from its own capital budget. We will work with ECC to increase our funding allocation.

### **Home Repair Assistance**

The Council offers discretionary grant assistance to occupiers of dwellings and mobile homes to carry out essential structural repair work or improvements. All applicants need to be on a means tested benefit to receive the grant, which is up to £3000 or up to £5000 in the case of mobile homes where thermal insulation or energy efficiency measures are carried out in addition to repairs. For additional work

over the grant limit, an interest free loan of up to £7000 can be given, which becomes repayable once the property is sold or the applicant no longer lives there. Since 2012, the Council has provided 18 HRA grants totalling £31,167. We will continue to offer this service to those in need.

### **3. Ensuring Decent, Safe and Healthy Homes**

*This section under development – further consultation with partners to inform this section*

#### **Programme of council housing stock improvements**

The council is continuing to deliver a significant programme of investment in the first five years of the HRA business plan - the largest investment in the stock/service for many years. Since the introduction of self-financing over £11.2million has been spent to improve the standard and availability of council housing.

Our Council housing development programme is now established and includes a number of sheltered schemes, garage and infill sites, and excess garden land being assessed for development viability. This will create a number of homes for those on our housing register. Negotiations are on-going with the HCA to bid for National Affordable Housing Programme (2015/18) Affordable Housing Grant in the future.

#### **Private sector housing**

The private rented sector makes up an important part of the housing market in UDC. 13% of all households in the district are privately rented. In the past 10 years the percentage of privately rented housing has increased by 5%.

The Council provides advice, assistance and enforcement on matters such as safety, disrepair, overcrowding, and energy efficiency in owned or rented homes, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and mobile homes. In addition, the Council provides a range of home improvement services offering assistance with home repairs, improvements and adaptations.

Poor housing has a direct link to poor health, comfort and mental wellbeing. The work undertaken by the Council contributes directly to the health, protection and wellbeing of residents

Since 2012 Environmental Health Officers have investigated 105 complaints relating to poor housing conditions .

Due to the economic climate and challenges around housing demand and supply it is likely that the private rented sector is likely to continue to grow. This sector is the most under regulated sector of housing and contains the highest proportion of non-

decent homes. In 2008, less than 50% of private rented homes housing people on benefits were considered decent.

One of the key challenges we face is how to improve standards in the private sector when the property maintenance and energy efficient are at the discretion of the landlord. We are therefore looking at opportunities to raise awareness with tenants and landlords to ensure high standards are achieved. Our participation and marketing of the Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme is one example of this.

We are keen to continue to raise standards in the private rented sector and plan to commission a stock modelling survey in 2015 to provide the Council with data on key housing indicators that will allow us to focus our resources and target specific housing related problems.

Since October 2013 we have employed an empty homes officer. This has increased our ability to bring more properties back into use and respond to a greater number of complaints. This work will continue throughout the life of the Strategy.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are known to present a high risk in terms of general property standards and fire safety. Larger HMOs require a license to operate although the Council has identified only 1. We will utilise the skills of the empty homes officer to identify more HMOs and implement initiatives working with our partners in the fire service to address any hazards.

In 2015 and beyond, it is our intention to contribute to the Council health and wellbeing agenda. As part of this work we attempt to measure the cost savings to the NHS from the Councils interventions.

The Council will continue to encourage owners to bring their empty home into better use through cooperation and using enforcement provisions if necessary. The enforcement provisions include the power to compulsory purchasing a property. Other provisions include the application of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) that gives the council the right to possession of the dwelling but not ownership. Since 2012 the Councils intervention has resulted in 185 properties brought back into use.

### **Energy efficiency**

Fuel poverty and excess winter death are issues in Uttlesford. The latest Local Authority profile indicates that 9.4% of the Uttlesford districts households were deemed fuel poor (based on the "Low income, high cost" methodology) in 2012. This is less than the national average (10.4%), but the highest in Essex. (Essex highest: Uttlesford 9.4%, Essex lowest: Basildon 6.1%).

From 2011 - 2012 there were 54 excess winter deaths in Uttlesford. This is around 29.5% additional deaths, this is higher than the national average (16.1%) (Essex highest: 33.8% Braintree, Essex lowest: 11.73% Rochford).



We are rolling out the Government Green Deal ECO programme to target energy inefficient properties and deliver better health outcomes essential to reduce cold weather related illness and winter mortality.

We are also offering a scheme whereby residents can sign up to reduce utility bills by switching provider. This scheme is working really well and providing savings for residents.

The Council requires the development of new build properties to meet national sustainable standards across all tenures to ensure that high levels of energy efficiency can be embedded within high quality development.

## **Monitoring the Housing Strategy**

The Housing Strategy action plan will be monitored and updated twice a year, a report will then be presented to the Housing Board and Tenant Forum.

The evidence base will be reviewed quarterly and updated as new data is published.