

# A strong economy and decent housing

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**T**onbridge and Malling, within the West Kent sub-region, has traditionally enjoyed a strong and buoyant economy. Compared to other areas of Kent, there are higher levels of household income, low unemployment, excellent levels of educational attainment, a highly skilled resident workforce and local businesses with high growth potential. However, there have traditionally been some weaknesses. Out commuting levels are high which makes the area vulnerable to employment shifts in the capital. There are pockets of more deprived communities with higher unemployment and lower educational attainment. Until recently, some firms have found it hard to recruit people with the right skills as house prices are comparatively high and competition for labour is significant. Compared to east Surrey, the local economy is smaller and GVA is less.

Education for young people aged 14-19 is currently undergoing a transformation. The West Kent Learning Federation is leading on a process which will result in more choice for all young people and better support for the most vulnerable. Funding will be provided to support young people through vocational routes as well as through more traditional academic routes. The new diplomas will offer a wider range of opportunities in areas such as manufacturing, construction and science, with courses matched to local labour market demand.

The previous Community Strategy focused on implementing the action plan of the West Kent Area Investment Framework (AIF), supporting the provision of vocational courses, increasing the advice available to young people on careers and well-being issues, increasing affordable housing and supporting vulnerable people to live independently. Excellent progress was made on the actions in the AIF and preparations for a new document are currently underway. A number of local schools have been redeveloped in readiness for the delivery

of the new 14-19 opportunities. The LCSPs are enabling partners to deliver better support to young people in and out of school, with regular and robust monitoring of young people not in education, employment or training. The number of affordable housing units exceeded the target set and innovative partnership approaches have improved the supply of homes for vulnerable people.

The economic climate now affecting the Borough is very different from that which was in place when the last Community Strategy was produced in 2006. The credit crunch of mid 2008 and the resulting global recession is leading to significant economic stress: unemployment is rising as businesses seek to reduce costs by making redundancies and business failures are increasing. There are fewer job vacancies emerging, the private sector housing market is largely stalled and consumer spending is significantly reduced.

Economic forecasters suggest that the current economic downturn will start to ease in mid 2010. However, it is clear that over the period of this Strategy to 2012, local businesses will continue to struggle, recruitment levels may not fully recover and the numbers of longer term unemployed will increase. The focus of the work of the West Kent Partnership will therefore be to co-ordinate assistance to those businesses and workers in need and plan ahead to ensure the area receives maximum economic benefit when the recovery arrives.

Economic priorities for this plan are to improve the skills of young people, help local small businesses flourish and support people on benefits into work. The actions for this theme are set out on page 24.

The borough faces in a number of challenges in respect of housing. The cost of housing across all tenures in the borough remains unaffordable to many. Homelessness is a growing problem and there are particular difficulties in addressing the housing needs of younger and older people. The inclusion of the Housing Strategy within the SCS emphasises the crucial role of housing to a sustainable community and reinforces strong links with the Local Development Framework. The Housing Strategy is set out in more detail below. The LSP has a clear leadership role in driving forward this agenda and the key action for the LSP is to support the delivery of the housing strategy and monitor its performance and impacts. The actions and performance measures are set out on page 24.

## Housing Strategy 2009-2012

This Housing Strategy sets out priorities and commitments to be delivered over the next three years. It builds directly on the priorities identified through the wider consultation carried out in support of the SCS as well as detailed research on the local housing market. There have been some significant achievements during the past three years (set out below) but there is still much to do to address housing needs. The housing market and housing needs can be subject to rapid change, recent economic events have had dramatic and swift effect. In order to respond to these changes, there is a need to invest in researching local housing needs and the housing market through periodic Strategic Market Housing Assessments (SMHAs). This will ensure the most up-to-date information is used to inform policy and practice and that housing and planning functions are sufficiently integrated to respond.

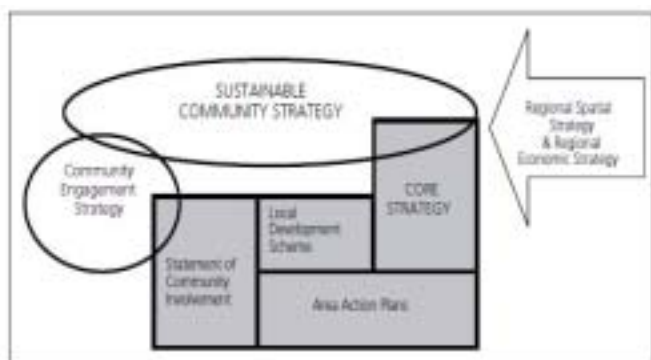
## Key Achievements 2006-2009

- Provision of X affordable housing units
- Adoption of Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (AH SPD)
- Completion of Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Completion of Gypsy & Traveller Area Assessment
- Reviewed list of RSL Preferred Partners
- With partners the development and adoption of the first West Kent Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan
- Housing Needs Service brought in house
- Introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL)
- Review of Allocations Policy
- Reduction in the Use of Bed and Breakfast and other forms of Temporary Accommodation from X to X
- X number of people re-housed from the housing register
- X number of homelessness preventions
- Housing Register decreased by X applicants
- Home Improvement Agency (HIA) transferred to Intouch
- Led and oversaw the North & West Kent Private Sector Renewal Partnership
- Licensed X Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)
- Completion of X HIA grants
- Completion of X DFG grants

## Creating sustainable communities

Housing and spatial planning make a vital contribution to sustainable communities by helping to:

- support economic development and the local economy, ensuring a good supply of quality housing at a range of prices close to jobs and employment;
- strengthen community cohesion, through good planning, design, and the provision of a range of house types to secure mixed communities in consultation with the local community;
- improve health and wellbeing by reducing hypothermia, asthma and respiratory illness through decent quality housing in the social and private rented sectors, preventing homelessness, and enabling people to live independently;
- improve education, as decent, stable and permanent accommodation can result in improved educational attainment;
- secure better outcomes for children and young people, by reducing the number of families in temporary or overcrowded accommodation;
- secure a more active life for older people, by supporting independent living and providing lifetime homes;
- protecting the environment – by building sustainable homes, meeting standards for reducing carbon emissions and tackling environmental problem in existing homes.



The key priorities for this strategy have been informed both by analysis carried out in the most recent Strategic Market Housing Assessment and the views of residents and partner organisations. The five key priorities are:

- Provision of affordable housing
- Tackling homelessness
- Private sector renewal and energy efficiency
- Assisting vulnerable households
- Addressing crime reduction

Good quality, accessible housing is a fundamental requirement for a prosperous and thriving community and there are considerable challenges in providing the quantity and quality of housing that local people need. The five key priorities set out on this and the following page form the basis of the Housing Strategy. The objectives that underpin each priority will be found in the Housing Strategy Action Plan which will be published separately.

## Provision and access to affordable housing

Demand for affordable housing is far in excess of supply. The West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment (November 2008) identified an annual shortfall of 432 homes, which is significantly higher than new programme delivery to date. The economic downturn has added to the challenge of meeting the shortfall in affordable housing, and providing the quantity, quality and type of housing that local people require continues to be the highest priority. Key objectives will include:

- Working with partners to identify further land and funding opportunities for both direct provision by RSLs and provision through the planning process
- Taking forward the recommendations of the SMHA
- Developing a housing strategy for West Kent

## Tackling homelessness

Partnership approaches in managing homelessness have a strong track record, and the greater focus placed on homelessness prevention in recent years has had a positive impact. However, the problem remains significant. The reduction in the availability of loans for new borrowers and reduced flexibility in the mortgage market, coupled with rising unemployment and difficult economic conditions, have resulted in more repossessions and rising homelessness. To compound this, high rents exclude many households from the private sector, and the supply of affordable homes continues to fall short of demand. Key objectives will include:

- Reviewing and updating the West Kent Homelessness Strategy
- Further reducing the use of Bed and Breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation
- Developing options and resources that provide alternatives to homelessness

## Addressing crime reduction

Although crime levels are low in Tonbridge and Malling, tackling crime is a priority for the Council and section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places an obligation upon local authorities to consider the crime and disorder implications on all policies and practices. Housing has a significant contribution to make towards achieving reduced levels of crime and public reassurance. Key objectives will include:

- Considering the community safety implications of new strategies and policies
- Ensuring that design of new homes helps create safer and securer environments
- Reducing crime through the use of enforcement and home safety initiatives

## Private sector renewal and energy efficiency

Although the proportion of unfit private sector homes in the borough is lower at 3.2% than the national average of 4.2%, the challenge to improve sub-standard private sector housing remains significant. Responsibility for maintaining private sector housing rests with the owner, however the Borough Council has regulatory and enforcement powers, and also a role as an enabler. It works closely with landlords, tenants, partner agencies and neighbouring authorities to address the underlying causes of poor quality private housing, reduce the number of empty homes in the district and provide adaptations for those who have a disability. Key objectives will include:

- Raising standards in the private sector, including maximising the use of existing housing and improving energy efficiency
- Providing an effective enforcement service
- Making financial assistance available to eligible households

## Assisting vulnerable households

Joint working is key to developing and delivering services that will enable vulnerable members of the community to live independently. Evidence shows that many vulnerable people occupy poor quality private rented accommodation. Many have difficulty maintaining their tenancies, and finding suitable alternative accommodation. Key objectives will include:

- Ensuring an adequate supply of accommodation-based services for vulnerable people
- Ensuring that clear pathways exist which enable vulnerable people to exercise choice in accessing the support services that are appropriate to their needs
- Ensuring the provision of move-on accommodation for people who are ready to live in a more independent environment

# Proposed actions and performance measures

Publish a West Kent Investment Strategy for the period 2009-2012

Support individuals and businesses affected by the recession with a focus on building suitable skills

Deliver the new 14-19 offer, particularly the development of vocational courses to reduce the number of young people in the borough who are not in education, employment or training and increase employability

Develop an effective system to inform curriculum planning which best fits local labour market demands.

Deliver the housing strategy objectives and monitor its performance and impacts

## Lead Partner

west Kent Partnership

Skills Plus/Job Centre Plus

West Kent Learning Federation

West Kent Learning Federation

TMBC

## Associated Performance Measures

NI 110 Young people's participation in positive activities (KA2)

NI 154 Net additional homes provided (KA2)

NI 187 Tackling fuel poverty - % of people receiving income based benefits living in homes with a low energy rating (KA2)

NI 155 Number of affordable homes delivered (KA2)

NI 141 Proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least Level 2 or higher (KA2)

NI 171 New business registration rate (VAT/PAYE registrations per 10,000 adults) (KA2)

NI 152 Working age people on out of work benefits (as % of working age population) (KA2)

NI 161 Learners achieving a Level 1 qualification in literacy (KA2)

NI 162 Learners achieving an entry Level 3 qualification in numeracy

NI 117 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (as % of all 16-18 year olds)