



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Housing Strategy

2008 - 2011

Foreword



Foreword by Councillor Peter Wood - portfolio holder for housing and corporate governance.

I am pleased to introduce the Ashford Borough Council Housing Strategy for 2008-2011. It is imperative that we have a comprehensive strategy to

address the housing needs of our community not only for people already living here but also for the people who will become resident in future years.

National and regional government housing policy places great emphasis on everyone being able to exercise choice about where to live and to have access to a decent home. The government also expects local authorities to play a critical role in achieving an increase in new homes and addressing the housing needs of all their residents. These policy objectives have been carefully considered and reflected throughout our housing strategy.

This strategy has been developed in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and partners and my thanks to them for their valuable input to the process. The strategic priorities set challenging targets to increase the supply of homes, develop sustainable communities, support independent living for the more vulnerable members of our community, ensure both new and existing homes are of the highest quality and that all residents can gain information and advice on the types of housing available in the borough.

Working closely with our housing association partners, developers and planning colleagues we are providing greater numbers of affordable housing in the borough. Our rural housing programme continues to deliver much-needed affordable homes in rural parishes, thus contributing to the sustainability of rural communities.

By developing new initiatives, building on existing partnerships and forming new ones we can, together make sure Ashford grows as an attractive and sustainable community.



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1. Introduction

Housing Strategy 2008-2011

The Housing Strategy 2008-2011 provides a comprehensive statement on how Ashford Borough Council will work with partners to address the housing and related support needs of people living in the borough. The Housing Strategy sets a framework through which the council, as well as delivering services directly, can provide leadership and guidance to partners and stakeholders.

The review that produced this new Housing Strategy followed a planned process that began with the completion of the borough Housing Needs Survey 2005. Housing and Planning Services at Ashford Borough Council work closely together and the Housing Strategy review programme was timed to coincide with the development of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy to ensure that Planning Policy and the Housing Strategy both reflect and inform each other.

Since the last Housing Strategy was produced in 2003 Ashford Borough Council has fully assessed the implications of the opportunities and challenges of our 'growth area' status, conferred on the borough by the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003. There have been other changes nationally, regionally and locally since the priorities of the last Housing Strategy were developed during 2002-2003, this new strategy explains what these have been and how we have responded to them.

Ensuring that the borough responds effectively to all of these challenges and opportunities requires a robust Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy is an overarching strategy for Ashford Borough Council and currently has the following sub-strategies:

- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- Homelessness Strategy.
- Older Persons Housing Strategy.

The Housing Strategy covers housing issues across all forms of tenure and considers the impact of housing on individuals, communities and the environment. The strategy sets priorities for action and identifies the resources that will be necessary to achieve the aims, objectives and actions identified.

A summary of the achievements of the Housing Strategy 2003-2007 showing what its priorities were can be found in appendix 6.

Local opinion on housing issues

In order to develop this revised Housing Strategy the council has undertaken a wide ranging and inclusive consultation process, further details can be found below. As well as specific consultation on developing the Housing Strategy in 2006 the council commissioned Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute to undertake a survey:

- To find out how residents perceive the quality of life in their neighbourhood and the borough and provide insights into their priorities for action (part one of this report); and
- Measure attitudes to Ashford Borough Council and the services it provides.

Local residents consistently raised housing issues as being of importance to them, for example the availability of affordable housing was the 7th most important factor in making somewhere a good place to live and the 6th most important priority for action by the council.

The survey has highlighted a need generally for Ashford Borough Council to communicate strongly about what it is doing and how this is making life better locally. The Housing Strategy forms an integral part of this through both the consultation process in setting the strategic priorities and informing all stakeholders, partners and residents of the progress to achieving the agreed objectives.

Working together to achieve our aims

The key priorities identified in this strategy have been developed in conjunction with all local stakeholders. The consultation process has been inclusive and responsive. The process is summarised below:

- Comprehensive borough wide Housing Needs Survey reported in 2005.
- A housing strategy review workshop with partner agencies, organisations and interest groups was held in June 2006 as the first step in reviewing the 2003-07 Housing Strategy and to inform the key priorities and objectives of the current strategy.
- Working group sessions with local stakeholders to consider and formulate ways of addressing specific housing and related needs that were identified by the housing strategy review workshop and during the period of the last housing strategy.
- Households currently seeking homes through the council's Housing Register were asked what was most important to them in terms of housing priorities.
- Widespread consultation with local partners and stakeholders on the draft strategy including an advertised opportunity for the wider community to respond to the housing strategy via the council's website.
- Consultation with the Government Office of the South East.

Strategic Priorities 2008–2011

The key strategic priorities that emerged from consultation on this Strategy are:

1. Increasing the supply of homes.
2. Developing sustainable communities.
3. Supporting independence.
4. Ensuring homes of decent quality.
5. Providing accessible information on housing choices.

More detail about these priorities, including the objectives that flow from them can be found in Chapter 5. What we are going to do in order to achieve the objectives is set out in the implementation action plan in appendix 1. Further details on the consultation process can be found in appendix 2.