

Introduction

The Greater Haven Gateway (GHG) partnership works across eight Local Authorities (LAs) in north east Essex and south east Suffolk including; Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Tendring.

This Strategy sets out the GHG's key ideas and plans for strategic housing in the sub region and it provides a statement about our business goals, the reasons why we have chosen them, and the plan for achieving them. It also refers to the GHG partnership and its development, as a delivery vehicle, for taking this strategy forward.

This strategy has been written during a time of rapid economic and policy change and although we have taken into consideration changes in culture and practice much of the detail of new structures and policies has yet to be released. In response to this we have taken the decision to continue with key elements of our work, as outlined in the implementation plans, but to review our planned actions in six months and a year as more detailed information becomes available.

The appendices highlighted below contain more detailed supporting information and should be read in conjunction with the strategy:

Appendix A: Implementation Plan

Appendix B: Facts and Figures - Detailed evidence base which informs the strategic priorities and decision making – this is presented under the heading of each strategic objective.

Appendix C: Short description of each LA in GHG sub region

Appendix D: A list of stakeholders

Appendix E: A glossary of terms

In this strategy we have clearly identified thematic areas of work that move us, as individual LA's, and collectively, as a partnership, to work together to achieve shared aims. This approach provides a more 'future proof' style of working as it provides 'added value' in helping us achieve local agendas, within the context of Local Investment Plans, whilst simultaneously situating our work within a broader locale to create the biggest impact.

Localism will have an increasing impact on the GHG partnership as we engage more with local civil societies, such as Community Land Trusts, social enterprises and unincorporated community groups, in delivering public services with a growing emphasis on the co-production of services.

Whilst the framework of our partnership is based on districts within the sub region, we are also attracting interest from other districts to work together on projects such as the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme and the procurement of a Private Landlord's Accreditation scheme to cover a wider geographical area. Similarly we are maintaining the breadth of our partnership by working with Essex and Suffolk County Councils to achieve shared goals.

Constrained Public Spending impacting on all areas, including housing, means that difficult decisions about competing priorities have to be made. Whilst we have little influence over macro economic events that will shape the future housing market we believe that our existing partnership will provide help and support to tackle the challenges that we all face in maintaining and improving the housing options that can be provided for local communities. This will include continued efforts to respond to the imbalance in supply and demand by increasing the supply of new housing, improving and making the best use of existing stock, maintaining equitable access to housing and support to ensure that the effects of limited supply do not fall disproportionately on vulnerable households.

In this strategy we identify new areas of work but we also build on the achievements of the previous strategy including: the establishment of Choice Based Lettings (CBL); securing additional funding through the Trailblazer bid to enhance housing options; the purchase of 3 Dragons viability software and training and sharing of Best Practice.¹ We will be developing the confidence we have attained to tackle difficult market conditions that impact on the delivery of housing with a full awareness of the need to work smarter and do more with less.

¹ Explanations of these projects and further examples are included under each strategic objective later in the document.

Our Vision

Vision

To build on the maturity of the GHG strategic housing partnership to work together on issues that benefit from a collaborative approach. Our focus will be on how we can share information, experience and services to increase value for money, harness economies of scale, and improve efficiencies and the quality of services to benefit all our communities.

Definitions of successful partnerships focus on two main areas, how partnerships work together, and what they achieve for their service users. During the past six years the eight GHG LA partners have increasingly recognised that they share mutually compatible aims and that by sharing knowledge and resources they can effect change that is greater than the sum of their parts. Whilst GHG is working with, and alongside county and regional partnerships, there are significant 'family grouping' similarities within the sub region that makes working together mutually beneficial and sustainable in the long term. As a result of this commitment to work together we are developing ways to strengthen the partnership and improve the ways we work together and see this as an ongoing process.

We are also learning how to better engage with housing and non housing stakeholders by listening to and incorporating their ideas into the strategy whilst at the same time forming new alliances that position our work in a wider context. So apart from taking account of the broader picture, in the way that we deliver core housing objectives, we are also striving to contribute towards joint social, economic and health objectives and to improve access for service users.

GHG has direct service users who are customers of the Choice Based Lettings scheme and the Enhanced Housing Options Pilot programme. It also has indirect customers, for example, Local Authorities (LAs) in the sub region have together adopted the use of 3 Dragons viability assessment tool which will have an impact on developers, in each LA. The partnership also has wider stakeholders from both housing and non housing organisations that contribute to and are influenced by the work of the GHG partnership.

Introducing our Strategic Objectives

The 2005 -09 GHG strategy set out a comprehensive range of priorities and was successful in carrying out some significant joint initiatives, such as joint commissioning Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs). As a result of the experience we have gained and the progress we have made in engaging stakeholders we are adopting a more focused approach in this strategy. Recognising our commonalities we have been able to identify areas where we can work together to be both more effective and efficient and achieve added value and this means that some areas and issues will become less of a priority. The framework for working together is flexible which means that as we review the strategy in response to emerging policies and working practices, particularly in relation to localism, we will be able to incorporate relevant new objectives whilst recognising that not all partners will work together on every project.

How we developed our strategic objectives

Engagement with stakeholders, partners and customers

Our key strategic objectives have emerged from what we have learnt and achieved already, open dialogue with partners (housing and non-housing) set against the context of changing economic and market conditions. The GHG stakeholder day, in March 2010 produced a wealth of information and ideas that clustered around four thematic areas of housing plus a strong emphasis on partnership development, training and communication. This collaborative approach is reflected in the document where we have highlighted learning from stakeholders and have incorporated their ideas into the Implementation Plan. Given reductions in public sector spending comments relating to the need for

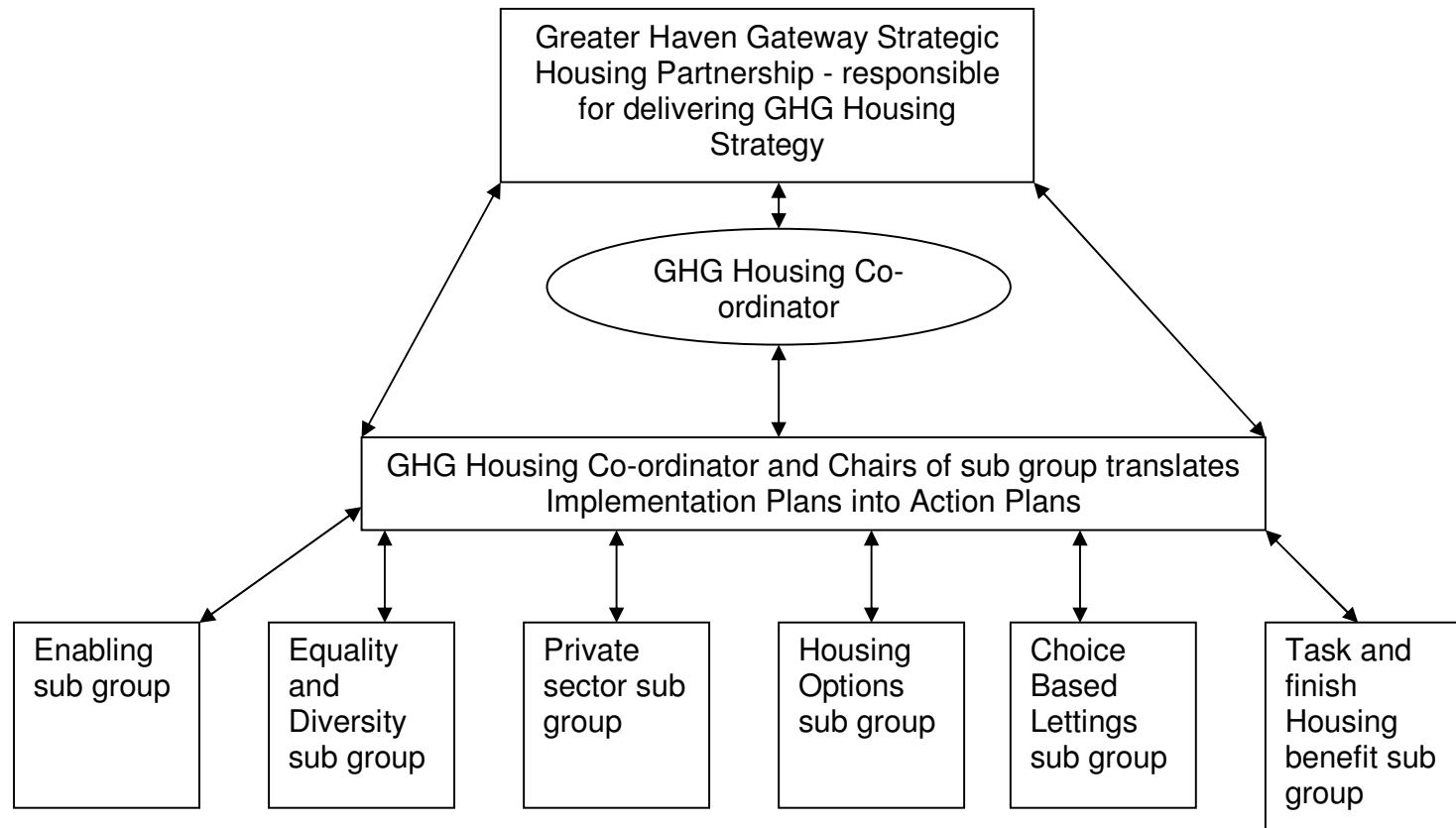
increased funding have been minimised with the focus shifting to joint working to create service efficiencies and income generating opportunities.

Working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to find ways to maximise investment in new affordable housing we will be investigating the viability of different housing delivery models. Successful delivery of this objective will depend upon learning new skills and building on relationships and partnerships with key players. This includes district and county partners in planning, economic development, regeneration, health and education to situate housing and the needs of new communities at the heart of new developments. Similarly we will be working creatively with the Haven Gateway Partnership, Registered Social Landlords, private developers and rural housing enablers to facilitate housing development that meets the needs of all taking into account the localism agenda, changing demographics, and vulnerable and diverse groups.

Implementation

Using our Business Planning model we have developed an 'Implementation Plan' to translate each of our main strategic objectives into action. The implementation plan will provide the main framework for the partnership's work but it will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it takes account of new government policies, structures and resources and new ways of working with local communities.

The GHG Steering Group is made up of representatives of each of the eight LAs and other key stakeholders including RSLs, Supporting People, Rural Housing Enablers, the HCA and other regional bodies and this group will maintain the strategic direction of the partnership. Focused sub groups will be responsible for taking the implementation plan and converting it into a more detailed delivery action plan. The membership of each sub group includes a range of stakeholders from different sectors and services who will drive the activities of the partnership forward. The GHG Co-ordinator supports the Steering Group, helps to facilitate the work of the sub groups and plays a focal part in collating and disseminating information and organising events.



Key stakeholders are represented at each level participating in the Steering Group and sub groups. They include:
Haven Gateway, RSLs, Supporting People, HCA, Regional bodies, and Rural Enablers

Strategic objective 1

SO1. Enable the development of high quality and sustainable affordable housing in places where people want to live responding to local need.

This strategic objective focuses on supporting the development of new housing taking into account the imbalance in supply and demand in housing markets² in the sub region and its contribution to developing and maintaining sustainable communities. This includes maximising and supporting the development of additional new housing to meet the increasing demand for affordable housing for low and moderately paid households that are unable to access the open market.

Population and household projections

Housing markets are influenced by many variables and population and migration figures indicate that estimated increases in population and household units will put additional pressure on the demand for housing. We understand that:

- by 2031 the projected population of the sub region will be 1.2+ million³ and this represents an increase of 28% within a 30 year period, 2001-31.
- by 2031 the number of households will increase to 585,000⁴ and this represents an increase of 36% within the 30 year period, 2001-31.

From these basic projections we can see that household size will be reducing and LAs need to plan strategically to provide substantially more dwellings and of the appropriate size (for more information see appendix B pg 1).

Linking housing with the economy

Housing is important to the wellbeing and prosperity of places. The growing importance of skills to an area's economic performance means that getting the right housing offer, including affordable housing, is essential to attracting and retaining a skills base that will encourage inward investment. Housing investment in itself can also be a powerful driver of local economic activity creating employment in the construction industry and supply chain companies and the subsequent recycling of wages spent in the local economy.⁵

A flexible housing market that can provide a mix of tenures will contribute to economic growth and local resident's employment opportunities. For example, the Port and logistics industry sector provides over 11% of the total employee jobs in the Haven Gateway, it also buys £100 million of services in the area, thus creating another 1,000 jobs in local service sectors. Growth within this sector will require 165 new employees each year over the next few years and 1,250 people to replace those employees that retire or move to other jobs⁶.

Similarly getting the right mix of housing contributes to attracting primary economic drivers, such as, business investment and human capital⁷. This is significant for districts, such as, Colchester with the new University of Essex 'Knowledge Park' and Suffolk Coastal with the Innovation Martlesham project,

² There are different housing markets within LAs and across the sub region, for example, differences between Ipswich, an urban authority, Colchester, which has an urban centre with a rural outskirts and the other mainly rural districts, some with coastal and second home markets.

³ Source: Table 4, 2008-based Subnational Population Projections Office for National Statistics (ONS). © Crown Copyright

⁴ Source: Table 406 Household estimates and projections, Communities and Local Government

⁵ Housing and economic development: Moving forward together; Catherine Glossop. Centre for research and market intelligence – November 2008

⁶ Haven Gateway Report: Issue 4, April 2010

⁷ Bramley & Morgan, 2002; Llewelyn Davies Yeang 2006; Simmie et al, 2002

who are seeking to attract mobile global 'knowledge economies' that have a highly skilled mobile workforces.

We will work with partners towards not only creating the best fit between the supply of appropriate housing and employment available but also supporting the promotion and development of local resident's skills and knowledge to take advantage of the work opportunities available.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

Soon after the 2010 Election, the new Coalition Government announced its intention to dismantle the entire set of regional structures and plans and in their place to pursue a "localism" agenda. Part of this strategy was to encourage the formation of LEPs. These it envisaged would be public private partnerships that would take a strategic view primarily on economic growth but also on housing, planning and transport matters which are inextricably linked to achieving future growth. Proposals for new LEPs were invited and recently the first batch of 22 was approved including one for an area covering Essex, Kent and East Sussex. It is envisaged that this LEP will come into being as from 1 April 2011. Suffolk was not included in the first round but has jointly with Norfolk now submitted a bid to Government for the "New Anglia" LEP. This means that the Haven Gateway will straddle two separate LEPs. However, both LEP bids include references to the Haven Gateway, for example the New Anglia bid states that "collaboration with existing partnerships (such as Haven Gateway) will be particularly important". These developments are at a very early stage but it would appear that engagement with the LEPs will be important going forward as they will be actively promoting economic development and in so doing will be seeking to ensure that barriers to growth, be they skills issues, infrastructure issue or housing supply issues are addressed. The Haven Gateway will therefore be a partnership through which the delivery of these strategic aims can be achieved.

The Greater Haven Gateway Housing Partnership was established in 2004 to respond to the then Housing Corporation's (now Homes and Communities Agency) changes to distributing funding on a sub-regional basis and to assist the Haven Gateway achieve delivery of the Framework for Growth. The three values of the HG are aligned to the core values of the Housing Partnership:

- Delivering through Partnership – particularly bringing private and public together
- Evidence-based – compelling arguments, rigorous research
- Adding value – strategic, skills-sharing, avoiding duplication

The Housing Partnership also plays a key role in enabling the delivery of one of the HG Partnerships key measures of success – affordable housing completions.

Local Investment Plans

Local Investment Plans (LIPs) in GHG are based on LA boundaries and they have been set up to help define the strategic direction for economic development, housing, wider place shaping and regeneration delivery in an area. Their core elements are to align local strategies, provide the evidence for investment priorities and create a framework for prioritising outcomes with limited resources. As LIPs become established and embedded in each area GHG have started to bring together data from each LA to create a sub regional understanding of:

- ✓ The projected and actual delivery of affordable homes
- ✓ The delivery of market homes
- ✓ The release and usage of building land for other purposes e.g. economic
- ✓ Regeneration schemes

Below is a snapshot and broad direction of travel for the sub region:

⁸ *ibid*

| Local Authority | Projected delivery of market homes | Projected delivery of affordable homes | Most significant sites |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Babergh | 1416 | 500 ⁹ | Chilton Woods development; Sudbury Town Centre regeneration; redevelopment of the former sugar beet factory site at Sproughton; and industrial complex at Cattawade, Brantham. |
| Braintree | 1467 | 423 | Premdor, Sible Hedingham; Maltings Lane, Witham; Mill Hill, Braintree; and Greenfields Community Housing land programme (various sites) |
| Colchester | 3855 | 428 | Lakelands; Severalls; Garrison S2N; and Garrison J. |
| Ipswich | 1032 | 452 | Unblock 20 hectares of land (Cranes and Felixstowe Road sites) to help create employment opportunities for sustainable communities. Proceed with three landmark sites on Ipswich Waterfront encouraging further development opportunities within the Town. |
| Maldon | 450 | 361 | Key areas for development: Maldon / Heybridge expansion; Burnham-on-Crouch (north); Rural Housing Programme; Moat Community Development Initiative |
| Mid Suffolk | 1208 | 478 | Key sites – Stowmarket expansion areas at Chilton Leys, Ashes Farm and Farriers Road; Snoasis, Great Blakenham; Stowmarket town centre regeneration; Rural housing package in partnership with BDC; Needham market – Chalk Quarry site and Unilever site. Completion phases of Cedars Park development in Stowmarket. |
| Suffolk Coastal | Potentially 2,000 | 82 or 64 ¹⁰ | Most significant sites: Ipswich eastern fringe, east of the A12 at Martlesham is being considered as is development in Felixstowe |
| Tendring | 1103 | 472 | Key areas include Jaywick re-development : West Clacton: Harwich and Frinton & Walton: |

This additional information will enable us to identify schemes that have a potential impact beyond LA boundaries, opportunities for working together more creatively, shared learning and possible joint procurement. In addition the evidence base produced by each LA will contribute to a more sophisticated profiling of the sub region enabling us to identify shared needs and ambitions.

Affordability

Given that economic inclusion does not necessarily follow on from economic growth, GHG is keen to ensure that more disadvantaged residents are able to participate in any rising prosperity in the wider economy. To develop a more sophisticated understanding of the housing markets we will be drawing on individual LAs Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs) to bring together a sub regional SHMA.

⁹ 100 units on rural exception sites per year

¹⁰ (depending on mix) + 235 properties at nil grant.

This will give us improved data to be able to evidence areas of commonality and the basis for working together on issues, such as, the impact of changing demographics on supply and demand and promotion of the best products to address affordability.

Evidence shows that on average 37% of first time buyer households in the sub region are unable to afford to buy a flat or maisonette (for more detailed information see Appendix B pg 7. With first time buyers unable to afford entry into the bottom end of the housing market this slows down mobility throughout the housing market, as both households wanting to buy larger properties and older person households that want to downsize cannot find buyers.

Average property prices across the sub region have increased dramatically in the past nine years despite the recent downward trend in market conditions. The average property price in the sub region in 2010 is £205,442 compared to the East of England average property price of £248,230 More information about property prices and market activity is detailed in the evidence base, page 10 in appendix B).

Maximising the supply of affordable housing

The need for new affordable rented homes each year across the sub region far outstrips supply. Without regional targets each LA, within the sub region, sets its own target for the delivery of affordable housing based on evidence of need that informed the development of Core Strategies in Local Development Frameworks. The overall target for the sub region will reflect local aspiration, ownership of need and the resources available.

We will take advantage of incentives, such as, the New Homes Bonus Scheme and the community benefits this can bring from new housing and economic development. We will also examining the scope to increase housing supply through the reform of planning system that gives more power to local people to make decisions about house building in their local area. This will include supporting different structures, such as, Community Land Trusts to build new affordable homes.

We will also be working with partners to analyse the government's proposed changes in terms of how additional income from the creation of new RSL "affordable rents" (80% of market rents) will support house building. We will also examine how the increase in RSL rents to 80% market rents and the proposed changes to housing benefit will impact on households on low incomes with housing need. We will be aiming to develop a better overall understanding of the market which will help us produce the right product to meet the housing and financial needs of households in GHG.

We will also continue with existing streams of work to maximise affordable housing by using the three Dragons viability software to test site viability and negotiate with developers to bring sites forward and achieve planning policy targets. In addition we will review the process and use of s 106 agreements so that negotiation and communication with developers is consistent across the sub region. At the same time we will be exploring new opportunities, such as, working with partners to agree a concordat to assess the strategic importance of public land, prior to it going onto the open market, with the aim of identifying and evaluating creative options for land use and land assembly.

Rural housing

New affordable rural housing plays an important role in helping to maintain and sustain rural communities. Additional households using and supporting, schools, shops and services can make a difference between viability and closure. Settlement types vary across the sub region:

- Ipswich and Colchester have significant urban centres of 100%, and 69% respectively
- Tendring has large rural areas but also has up to 74% of the population living in urban areas

- other districts are more rural with smaller market towns as centres of population, in Babergh for example up to 72% of the population live in rural areas (for more information see appendix B, page 3) ¹¹.

We will be working on a number of projects with Essex and Suffolk Rural Housing Enablers to promote rural housing and support an increase in the number of Rural Exception sites delivering affordable housing. There is a wealth of rural housing development experience within the sub region and we want to ensure that case studies are shared so that Parish and District Councillors, funders, planners and people living in rural areas understand the principles and practical benefits.

Achievements 2006-2010 GHG housing strategy:

- ✓ Delivered 1,175 affordable homes for people in housing need..... exceeding Homes and Communities Agency targets for the sub-region for 2006-08;
- ✓ Improved our understanding of housing need in the sub-region and making the way we carry them out more efficient. Strategic housing market assessments (SHMAs) were completed across the districts;
- ✓ Developed more robust planning policies based on the above information.....s.106 Affordable Housing contribution thresholds have been lowered and percentages of affordable housing required increased across the sub region;
- ✓ Improved the way we assess the ability of sites and developers to provide affordable housing as part of planning obligations..... by procuring the Three Dragons viability assessment tool (funded by Haven Gateway Partnership and Maldon and Braintree DCs);

We have also been listening closely to what stakeholders have been telling us from their different perspectives and have incorporated as many of their ideas as possible into this new strategy.

- ✓ *Learning from stakeholders*
- ✓ There are good partnership arrangements with Essex and Suffolk Rural Housing Enablers to promote and provide affordable housing on rural exception sites
- ✓ The role of housing in developing sustainable communities and the links between housing and employment needs to be recognised more fully
- ✓ We need to work more closely with developers to ensure that the supply of affordable housing reflects actual need, such as, the need for family accommodation in places that people want to live
- ✓ There is a positive relationship between Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and LAs but there is room for improved links between their development teams

¹¹ Figures not available for Mid Suffolk and Maldon

SO2. Improve the condition and use of existing housing taking into account social and environmental factors that impact on quality of life.

We want to improve the condition and use of existing housing. Although keen to develop more affordable housing we are aware of the need to maintain a balanced approach between increasing the supply of new housing and improving existing stock.

Quality and supply of private rented sector

Information from district SHMAs indicate that the percentage of private rented dwellings in each LA varies from between 6% and 16% across the sub region. It is an important sector because the demand for affordable housing exceeds supply and owner occupation is beyond the reach of many therefore the private rented sector is the only alternative option. We want to work with private landlords to stimulate an increased supply of good quality, well managed private rented accommodation across the sub region. The expansion of a quality private rented sector will enhance the housing options available to help meet the needs of existing residents and the projected increase in population over the next decade.

A major theme identified by stakeholders was the development of a sub regional landlord's accreditation scheme. Working jointly with other districts in Essex and Essex County Council (ECC) the GHG are working to establish a Landlord's Accreditation scheme which will encourage landlords to voluntarily comply with good standards in relation to the condition and management of their properties and tenant relations. ECC are assisting with the process of procuring an organisation that will independently administer a scheme that will be self funding through its membership. The provision of landlord training, events, legal advice and discounts for goods and services will act as incentives and support for landlords to improve management of their accommodation.

To support landlords, particularly small landlords with only a few properties, we will be working with RSLs to identify the viability of a scheme for private landlords whereby RSLs provide private landlords with a service for repairs, tenancy and void management.

GHG will set up a task and finish housing benefit sub group to share information and good working practices to ensure that Landlords receive a consistent housing benefit service throughout the sub region. The sub group will also assess housing benefit and local housing allowance changes and advise the GHG Steering Group on the impact to inform strategic planning.

Data

In the past few years several districts within GHG have jointly commissioned Strategic Housing Market Assessments resulting in efficiency savings and the added bonus of producing comparable cross district data. We now want to use this model and assess the scope for more jointly commissioned House Condition Surveys to compare stock condition survey data across the sub region and build information on the decent homes standard in private homes¹².

¹² While originally introduced solely to raise standards in social housing, the Decency Standard has been extended to vulnerable people living in private sector accommodation.

Fuel poverty and energy efficiency

An important area of work which has been carried over from the previous GHG strategy is the development of a strategic approach to reduce fuel poverty and increase the number of warm homes in the sub region. There is a wide variation in the percentage of private sector (non RSL) homes with an energy efficiency SAP rating of 35 or less across the sub region, ranging from 2% to 37%.¹³ More detailed information can found in Appendix B, pg 15.

The strategy will focus on sharing information and good practice within the partnership to develop proportionate responses and solutions to tackling 'hard to heat homes', particularly Category 1 and non-decent homes. We will work to improve liaison with other services that already visit homes e.g. occupational therapists, Home Improvement Agency handyman services, and community nurses to help raise householder's awareness of energy efficiency support and schemes. We will co-ordinate relevant information for non-housing service providers to use so they can identify and signpost householders to services to improve their housing conditions. We will Pilot this project in one LA and then review and evaluate its effectiveness and then, if appropriate, we will introduce the model across the sub region.

Empty Homes

In 2009 in total some 6,286 private sector dwellings in the sub region have been vacant for 6+ months¹⁴, approximately 6% more than in the previous year, 2008. We want to improve our understanding of these figures by categorising different types of Empty Homes and then use those categories to collate information from across the sub region. For example we know homes become and or remain empty for a variety of reasons; lack of funds for refurbishment, reluctance to let out, long term care/ hospitalisation, and inaction of owners unable to sell or let. Then using this baseline information we will share our experience and knowledge of Best Practice about how to tackle Empty Homes in each of the different categories. From this analysis we will produce a criterion that prioritises categories of Empty Homes and methods to bring them back into use, targeting dwellings with the greatest likelihood of being brought back into use that meet housing need.

This approach will make best use of resources by pooling experience to develop a framework which each LA can use to tackle local priorities. To address the priorities we will work with the Homes and Community Agency to help access funding to carry out this work.

Under occupation

Making the most effective use of existing social housing is an important element of meeting housing need and this includes examining occupancy levels. We want to improve the data we have on both under occupation and overcrowding in RSLs and Council stock and analyse trends in household changes and growth to inform use of the stock. This will give us a better understanding of the scale and types of under occupancy and overcrowding and the age groups where this is most prevalent.

Once we have we this improved data we plan to carry out some qualitative research, with Anglia Ruskin, to gain a more in-depth understanding of existing tenant's motives and decisions for choosing or refusing to downsize. This will inform the development of an incentivised 'downsizing' package, which could include practical support to move, such as, removals and organising changes to utilities.

¹³ Source: 2008 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix

¹⁴ 2009 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (excludes private homes vacant for 6+ months for regeneration and housing schemes)

Achievements - 2006-10 GHG housing strategy:

- ✓ Returned empty properties to use – we worked with Colne Housing Society, on the Safe Haven Project, to secure funds from East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Housing CoRSLoration (www.safehavenproject.org.uk); Empty properties were brought back into use on 5 year lease and rented to CBL applicants. In subsequent years Empty Homes were also brought back into use in Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, Babergh and Suffolk Coastal districts.;
- ✓ Worked in partnership to develop a sub regional leasing scheme toolkit developed by Colne Housing Society;
- ✓ Improved our understanding of the condition of private sector homes in the sub-region by undertaking stock condition surveys jointly commissioned by Colchester, Suffolk Coastal and Ipswich;
- ✓ Developed exemplar schemesin Mid Suffolk– earth shelters, in Braintree – grass roofs, and in Suffolk Coastal housing with allotments;

We have taken into account what our stakeholders have told us in formulating what we want to achieve through this objective.

- *Learning from stakeholders*
 - ✓ We need to maintain a balance between the supply of new affordable housing and the improvement of existing stock
 - ✓ Set up a short term housing benefit sub group to develop consistency across the sub region, sharing working practices around discretionary direct payments, speed of payments etc.
 - ✓ Set up a sub regional Landlord's Accreditation scheme to improve access to and management of quality private sector accommodation
 - ✓ Identify whether Registered Providers could provide management, void and letting services for private landlords
 - ✓ Identify the number of people who are under occupying affordable housing and develop an incentive package to encourage them to move to smaller accommodation

Strategic objective 3

SO3 Maximise customers' housing choices and mobility taking into account changing housing needs and demographics.

Strategic objective three focuses on maximising housing opportunities and choices for all residents in the sub region taking into account both specific and changing needs. It demonstrates our commitment to delivering services fairly to all and providing equal access to suitable housing including complying with the Equalities Framework to ensure minority groups are not disadvantaged.

Gateway to Homechoice

Gateway to Homechoice, the GHG sub regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme, was launched in 2009. The scheme features a common allocations policy and housing register. It provides additional housing choices and mobility as applicants only have to apply to one authority but they can 'bid' for vacant properties across the sub-region. In 2011 Waveney district will be joining the scheme alongside the other founding seven LA areas.¹⁵

Now that CBL is established we will be investigating the Business Case for streamlining the administrative functions into a single shared sub regional team to see if efficiencies can be made. Similarly we will be examining the potential for CBL to generate income e.g. through advertising on its web site, to either reduce costs or expand the services Gateway to Homechoice can provide.

Through CBL we are able to generate supply and demand data on a sub regional basis and we will be using this facility and the annual customer survey to analyse trends and highlight issues to inform research projects, e.g. understanding the choices and aspirations of older people registered for affordable housing. This research will contribute to a greater understanding of issues to inform strategic planning for older people.

Equal access

We know that the GHG is becoming an increasingly diverse sub region following population growth and net in-migration. The percentage of BAME households has increased and diversity within this group has become greater. The 2011 Census will provide more definitive data than the current estimates but for existing information see appendix B pg 2. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out for CBL and the GHG Equalities and Diversity sub group has drawn up an action plan to monitor and evaluate the fairness of allocations and access to housing. The plan includes monitoring and analysing statistical trends to highlight and address any inequalities that may emerge and also adopting housing guidance on the new Equalities Framework. We will be using the expertise of the Equalities and Diversity sub group to EqIA this strategy and any new projects generated by GHG to identify and eliminate both direct and indirect discrimination.

¹⁵ Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk and Suffolk Coastal

Disadvantage and deprivation in Jaywick

The levels of deprivation in the Grasslands and Brooklands area of Jaywick are as high as those found in the inner-city neighbourhoods of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. The area comprises around 900 properties with the wider Jaywick area adding another 600 properties. The Super Output Area covering the core regeneration area is the 3rd most deprived in the country. The population is ageing and a significant number of the highly transient population are entirely dependent on informal care arrangements. Most are not in a position to re-enter the workforce and a high proportion are therefore on benefits. The current situation in Jaywick has a significant fiscal and public service cost. Just as importantly, there have been only limited attempts previously to address the economic disadvantage of the area alongside the need for large scale housing intervention.

Jaywick is a low-lying coastal area which is significantly affected by the risk of flooding. Using the anticipated rise in sea levels as predicted in government planning guidance PPS25, the level of protection for Jaywick will decline in the future unless the sea wall height is raised. The level and extent of flood risk facing the core area of Grasslands and (most of) Brooklands is a major constraint on private sector investment in the area.

Over recent years there has been a decline as many owner-occupiers have sold their chalets to speculative private landlords. Many of the existing chalets are in a poor condition, poorly maintained, and unable to be improved due to the plot sizes, the impoverishment of the owners, or the unwillingness of owners to invest in their properties on economic grounds. Around 80% of the accommodation is now in the private rented sector.

Tendring District Council does not have the resource in terms of affordable housing or private sector rented housing to tackle this problem alone and dealing with Jaywick is recognised within the Essex Community Strategy as a key priority. Tendring District Council is examining ways to introduce a local lettings policy in Jaywick which would help to prioritise those seeking housing to move from the area. At present the major obstacle is the potential backfilling of units where residents are rehoused. One option which is being explored within the owner occupied sector is for owners to voluntarily gift their property to the council, for subsequent demolition, on the basis that they are rehoused within affordable housing in secure or assured tenancies.

In order to provide sufficient choice and incentive for owners to gift their property to the council it would be beneficial to the scheme to be able to offer as wide a pool as possible of properties to potential applicants of the scheme to be able to relocate either within or outside the Tendring area. GHG will explore the options for working together at a strategic level to support the long term housing needs of Jaywick residents.

Housing Options

The allocation of social housing will not meet all resident's housing needs so an important priority for GHG is to improve customer's knowledge of the housing options available to them so they have information to make informed choices. GHG is undertaking a two year 'Enhanced Housing Options (EHO)' Pilot (2009-11), funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government and Department of Work and Pensions. In 2011 the EHO project development group will be working on embedding

and integrating this project into the sub region through a new GHG Housing Options sub group. A key aim of the project is to provide a web based interactive housing options toolkit, called Housing Help and Work Advice, which provides tailored housing options relevant to customer's circumstances and needs.

Changes to tenancies

We will seek to develop a sub-regional strategic tenancy policy, to fulfil the government's requirements of local authorities. Through the partnership we will also seek to influence RSLs policies on tenancies. These will set out whether they will grant lifetime tenancies or tenancies with fixed terms, the duration of the fixed term and the circumstances in which they would be reissued at the end of the term.

Older people

Given the increase in life expectancy and the ageing profile of the UK a significant area of work is improving our understanding of the issues facing older people and how we meet their housing needs. This topic was raised by stakeholders in all of the four thematic workshops we held. Pressure to meet the needs of an ageing population will be compounded in some districts in GHG because they are very attractive to people looking to retire to the country or coast. As a consequence, in addition to the resident ageing population, GHG saw a net migration into the sub region of 1,100 people aged 65+ years in 2009¹⁶(for more information see appendix B pg 22)

We want to work with partners to explore extending the Enhanced Housing Options web based model to include specific housing information, options, and access to advice for older people and older people's services. This would involve auditing existing options and services available in each district to meet older people's housing needs and making this information readily available. Part of scoping this project would be an assessment of digital exclusion within this age group.

With the likelihood of more older people remaining in their homes we would like to increase the availability and affordability of Aids and Adaptations equipment by investigating the potential for setting up a recycling scheme or mechanism for reusing items within the sub region.

Supporting People

In GHG sub region Supporting People (SP) is carried out by two partnership programmes divided along Essex and Suffolk county boundaries. In line with many other publicly funded services they have reduced grants and administration budgets which will impact on what services they can support and how they work with provider and strategic partners.

Suffolk

In response to this new environment Suffolk SP has produced a short strategic statement to identify its priority objectives and GHG will be working with them to contribute to their delivery. For example:

¹⁶ Moves within the UK: Registered year ending June 2009 – National Statistics Crown Copyright

Customers

- LAs provide services to many of the SP priority customer groups and we will continue to work together to maximise the benefits we can provide for teenage parents; young people at risk; gypsies and travellers; offenders; single homeless people with support needs; and victims of domestic abuse.

Services

- Through the GHG Enhancing Housing Options (EHO) project we are helping to develop resources to better prepare young people for independent living by providing 'sustaining tenancies' training and young person's "Passport to Independence" Accreditation scheme. Both of which have the scope to be extended into more SP environments.

Approach – connecting the SP programme with other key issues such as worklessness

- Similarly the EHO project has developed the 'Housing Help & Work Advice' web based programme. This facility, by virtue of being web based, can be accessed anywhere, by an individual or with a support worker, to identify options for housing, employment, training, and support can be brought together and offered holistically. This programme can be used in any SP situation.

Partnership

- In the same way as all services GHG and SP will be looking to do more with less both partnerships will be looking for opportunities to link services and fill gaps in the most cost effective way.

Achievements 2006-10 GHG housing strategy:

- ✓ Improved access to affordable housing...by introducing a sub regional Choice based lettings (CBL) scheme with full sub regional mobility. This scheme has a Common Allocations Policy across all districts and participating RSL's, enabling a greater level of mobility across a wider geographical area. This scheme is used nationally as an example of Good Practice;
- ✓ Increased choice and met the needs of people with physical disabilities by including adapted properties in the CBL system;
- ✓ Improved consistency across the sub region in allocating move on accommodation.... through CBL allocations process
- ✓ Facilitated floating support for people in their own homes ...provided by SNAP in Suffolk and SWAN in Essex
- ✓ Equality and Diversity sub group set up to ensure equality for all ...carried out an Equality Impact Assessment of CBL and developed an action plan to ensure scheme is fair and accessible;

- ✓ *Learning from stakeholders*
- ✓ Develop a shared sub regional assessment team for CBL
- ✓ CBL has increased customer choice and access to affordable housing although there are still concerns about people who need support to access the scheme
- ✓ There is scope for a sub regional scheme to recycle adaptations equipment
- ✓ Maintain a focus on meeting the diverse housing needs of BMEs, Gypsies and Travellers, and people with physical and learning disabilities
- ✓ There is more scope for joint working work with PCTs and the voluntary sector to assist vulnerable people

Strategic objective 4

SO4 Provide enhanced housing options based on an understanding of the links between health, well being, training, employment and housing to help prevent homelessness and support vulnerable people.

Strategic objective four focuses on providing enhanced housing options, to help prevent homelessness, and improving awareness of and links between other services to support vulnerable people. Economic and housing options cannot be separated and we are working strategically across the sub region to embed an awareness of employment and training opportunities alongside housing choices (for more information about employment deprivation and worklessness see appendix B pg 28).

Although the trend across the sub region is that the rate of homelessness acceptances have been reducing over the past two years (2008-09 and 2009-10) we know that the accommodation needs of non priority groups is a significant concern¹⁷. Indeed Suffolk Supporting People identifies a vision for marginalised people that it defines as 'People who generally fall outside the statutory system when it comes to accessing or receiving services' championing them to ensure that there are sufficient services to meet their needs.

Threatened or actual homelessness are often linked to affordability issues and we know that income levels vary across the sub region. Similarly high employment deprivation scores are indicative of housing need as poverty and housing need are often linked.

Within the sub region:

- Tendring is amongst the top 100 districts (out of 354) with the highest income deprivation ranking¹⁸.
- some districts within the sub region have significantly higher percentages of the of the working age population claiming key benefits compared to the East of England average - for more detailed information see Appendix B pg 30 .
- Benchmarked against the East of England three quarters of GHG LAs have a higher percentage of Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) claimants who have been out of work for more than 12 months - for more detailed information see Appendix B pg 30)

NEET information relates to young people aged 16-18 years that are not in education, employment or training. Although we do not have NEET information on a sub regional basis looking at Suffolk and Essex compared to the East of England gives an indication of trends. It shows that in 2008 and 2009 both Essex and Suffolk have a greater proportion of 16-18 year old NEETs than the average for the East of England - for more detailed information see Appendix B pg 29).

As can be seen from the above data income deprivation and worklessness are pervasive issues across the sub region and impact on people's housing options. GHG is committed to facilitating services that assist people to improve their life chances and make informed choices to meet their housing need.

¹⁷ Data provided by GHG LAs

¹⁸ Source: 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation

Enhancing housing options - Housing, Help & Work Advice

For those seeking housing, this GHG Pilot project is making the links, between housing information, advice and guidance and worklessness by:

- improving tenant sustainability through new tenancy workshops
- increasing life opportunities for young people through training, support, and signposting to housing and employment
- developing a DVD to support accessing training opportunities
- developing the Young Person's "Passport to Independence" Accreditation training course to improved young people's ability to manage themselves, increase life opportunities and help break the cycle of repeated homelessness

Increasing housing options in the private rented sector

Landlords will be encouraged to advertise their vacant properties via the CBL web site once we have established a Landlord's Accreditation scheme. This will increase awareness of and access to privately rented accommodation available to households that do not have sufficient priority to be re-housed into LA or RSL housing. An independent organisation will manage the accreditation scheme and will provide training and support to private landlords and this will give GHG the opportunity to raise landlord's awareness of floating support services available to help vulnerable people maintain their tenancies.

Voluntary sector

We want to continue to work closely with the voluntary sector particularly in improving service links for customers with housing support needs and we will explore ways that this can best be achieved, for example through the delivery of the EHO project. Working with the voluntary sector provides an additional critical resource for people looking for information, advice and guidance on a multiple range of issues that impact on their lives including housing.

Health and Social Care

We aim to improve service links with Health and Social Care by examining the role housing and housing-related services need to play to deliver personalised services alongside health and social care. Thames Gateway, a sub region in Essex, is piloting an initiative to agree a joint protocol between the three services and we will be monitoring the learning from the Thames Gateway initiative to evaluate the value of applying the same principles to improving the services links between housing, health and social care.

Achievements 2006-10 GHG housing strategy:

- ✓ Increased housing options.....secured £241k additional funding in March 2009 from Communities and Local Government and Department for Work and Pensions to deliver a sub regional Enhanced Housing Options Programme;
- ✓ Tackled homelessness.....identified common approaches to tackling homeless which were incorporated into LAs homelessness strategies and reviews;
- ✓ Supported development of Domestic Violence services.....new Colchester and Tendring Womens refuge and an outreach project across Suffolk;
- ✓ Improved services for Gypsies and Travellersby developing a floating support scheme in Suffolk
- ✓ Improved understanding of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needsby carrying out County based Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments and sharing learning;

- ✓ *Learning from stakeholders*
- ✓ People still need help to know what is out there – what their housing options are
- ✓ CBL has increased customer choice and access to affordable housing although there are still concerns about people who need support to access the scheme
- ✓ We are concerned about vulnerable groups and the balance between the need for support not just information and advice
- ✓ Maintain a focus on meeting the diverse housing needs of BMEs and Gypsies and Travellers
- ✓ There is more scope for joint working work with PCTs and the voluntary sector to assist vulnerable people
- ✓ Young people need help and support to be able to rent accommodation successfully in the private sector

Strategic objective 5

SO5. Increase the capacity and skills of the GHG partnership by reviewing its effectiveness and improve communication with stakeholders to capitalise on opportunities to work together to maximise resources.

The fifth strategic objective focuses on strengthening and improving the GHG partnership by building skills and developing knowledge to deliver the strategy and improving our ability to work creatively with stakeholders. This is a pivotal objective because it is vital to the delivery of all other objectives in the strategy. We are aware too that working with stakeholders is an ongoing process and we want to ensure that we have good lines of communication with continual feedback about what and how we are doing.

All LAs are involved in joint working through multi-agency projects, county and sub regional partnerships and there is the danger that partnership fatigue can occur. The GHG partnership wants to avoid common criticisms aimed at partnership working in general, such as, meetings as talking shops; unfocused agendas, duplication of work, lack of clarity of purpose, and inability to measure achievements. The GHG Partnership wants to be the most effective vehicle it can be for developing, designing and delivering strategic housing objectives based on the conviction of the benefits it can bring, including better outcomes for service users and local communities.

Recognising the benefits of partnership working we are keen to develop our individual and group skills and abilities to build and strengthen the way we work together. This includes being aware of where we are on the spectrum of partnership working and understanding what we need to put in place, to progress towards a smarter more robust way of working to achieve our shared vision and goals. By systematically reviewing the partnership we will have the right mechanisms in place to support each other in achieving the best services with the resources available, whilst maximising opportunities for innovation and shared learning.

Whilst appreciating the value of taking stock and further developing skills and knowledge we also acknowledge we have accomplished some significant examples of collaborative working and co-ownership of initiatives.

Making explicit and increasing our own understanding of how we work together will enable us to communicate with greater clarity with our wider partners. The Implementation Plan for this strategic objective will include actions that both develop the partnership and formalise the mechanism for improving communication and cultivating a more participatory culture with better stakeholder engagement.