

LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE June 2005



Falkirk Council
*Housing & Social Work
Services*



CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	2
Policy Context	4
Partnership Working	7
Housing Investment	11
Housing Market	13
Organisational Issues	18

Appendices

1. Planning Context
2. LHS 2004 – 2009 Monitoring & Evaluation Framework
3. LHS Action Plan 2005
4. Housing Partnerships Development Programme
5. Stock Condition Surveys
6. Energy Statement
7. Fuel Poverty Strategy
8. House Price Trends
9. Homelessness Local Outcome Agreement 2005
10. Private Sector Action Plan
11. Housing Service Structure



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Local Housing Strategy Update provides the first opportunity to report formally on progress in respect of key tasks and priorities set out in the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009 and to establish new targets for future strategy development. It is part of a continuous planning process which is subject to regular monitoring and review. The LHS must develop over time to both react and respond to changes in the wider social context and also to drive change where required. The national housing agenda is constantly developing and this LHS Update provides an opportunity to outline how Falkirk Council and its partners are responding to initiatives in this area. The LHS does not stand alone: it links to a range of other plans and strategies which are dynamic in nature and these inter-relationships are set out in *Appendix 1*.

1.2 This paper will provide an update on progress on key tasks set out in the LHS in relation to the following issues:

- **Policy Context**

- **Partnership Working**

- **Regeneration and Development**
- **Wider Action**
- **Housing Forum and Partnership Activity**
- **Transfer of Management of Development Funding**
- **Joint Research**



- **Housing Investment**

- **Own Stock Investment**
- **Ongoing Survey Requirements**
- **Energy Efficiency**
- **Fuel Poverty**



- **Housing Market**

- **Housing Market Analysis and Housing Needs**
- **Housing Allocations and Common Housing Register**
- **Homelessness**
- **Supporting People**
- **Housing Advice and Information**
- **Private Sector Housing**



- **Organisational Issues**

- **Restructuring of Housing Service**
- **Information Systems**

- 1.3 The paper is supported by a series of Appendices which provide further detail on particular aspects of LHS development and implementation

Appendix 1, Planning Context: illustrates the linkages between the LHS and other plans and strategies.

Appendix 2, LHS 2004-2009 Monitoring & Evaluation Framework: indicates how priorities have been taken forward and notes either progress or the current status of tasks which have not been completed within the timescale originally envisaged.

Appendix 3, LHS Action Plan 2005: establishes new priorities and targets which flow from *Appendix 2* and related tasks which flow from the Council's Service Performance Planning process. The Service Performance Plan informs individual work plans across the Housing Service.

Appendix 4, Housing Partnerships Development Programme: sets out planned and potential projects to be taken forward with RSLs and other partners over the period 2005-2008.

Appendix 5, Stock Condition Surveys: comprises a discussion paper to help inform future stock condition survey work and develop the Council's property database both in respect of its own stock and related Scottish Housing Quality Standard requirements and private sector stock conditions.

Appendix 6, Energy Statement: outlines the key issues and developments which will feature as part of the Council's emerging Energy Efficiency Strategy.

Appendix 7, Fuel Poverty Strategy: provides an update on the outline Strategy included in the Technical Appendices to the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009 and on the progress report included in the Standard Delivery Plan April 2005.

Appendix 8, House Price Trends: summarises the current position in relation to developments in the Local Housing Market.

Appendix 9, Homelessness Local Outcome Agreement, 2005: summarises progress on previous year's Action Plan and proposals for future implementation

Appendix 10, Private Sector Action Plan: sets out priority tasks and targets for the Council's newly established Private Sector Unit as responses are developed to issues flowing from the Housing Improvement Task Force, the Private Sector Housing Bill and private sector house conditions and needs, generally.

Appendix 11, Housing Service Structure: sets out the new structure for the Housing Service following recent recognition

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 Since the completion of the Council's Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009 there have been a number of developments in relation to national and local policy issues which are acknowledged in this Update. More detailed comment on some of these issues are provided in this paper and its appendices, however, at a strategic level the important policy developments are noted below.

Housing Estate Regeneration Fund

- 2.2 This funding stream aims to assist local authorities that are retaining their housing stock to increase the supply of affordable homes in the area in partnership with RSLs and to support demolition schemes and estate-based environmental improvements additional to those being funded through the Standard Delivery Plan. In Falkirk, a bid for HERF is being prepared based on priority estates identified in the Local Housing Strategy (see paragraphs 3.6 and 3.9).

Housing (Scotland) Bill

- 2.3 The forthcoming Housing (Scotland) Bill aims to address issues in relation to the quality of private sector housing and the backlog of disrepair in this sector. The Council has recently established a Private Sector Housing Team as part of a wider reorganisation of Housing Services (see paragraphs 5.22 and 6.2 and appendix 10) to help develop its responses to the requirements of the forthcoming legislation in the local context.

Communities Scotland's Affordable Housing Investment Programme

- 2.4 Communities Scotland has received a 23% increase in its development funding budget to make £404m available in 2005/06 to expand the supply of affordable housing options. Falkirk Council continues to liaise with Communities Scotland and other partners to identify appropriate development opportunities for new affordable housing provision.

Shared Equity – Homestake

- 2.5 This is a new Scottish Executive initiative, to be administered by Communities Scotland, which is aimed at helping people on low incomes who wish to become home owners but who cannot afford to pay the full price for a house. The scheme is to be introduced in 2005 and the Council will explore opportunities to implement the scheme locally in consultation with Communities Scotland and RSL partners.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

- 2.6 The SHQS has been established as part of Scottish Executive proposals for improving the quality of life for people in Scotland. The Executive has defined the new Standard as a benchmark for what will constitute acceptable, good quality social housing. The Council's Standard Delivery Plan, submitted to Communities Scotland in April 2005, sets out the broad investment strategy through which the Council will ensure that its housing stock will meet the Standard by the target date of 2015 (see paragraphs 4.1-4.5)

Homelessness

- 2.7 The Executive has set out a high level objective of providing an adequate supply of good quality affordable housing in Scotland so that by 2012 the “priority need” assessment process that screens housing applications from homeless people should no longer be required. The Council recently submitted planning information as part of a national information gathering exercise to assist the Executive to assess what remains to be done at a national policy level to enable this objective to be achieved. At the local level, the Council’s Homelessness Local Outcome Agreement sets out the actions that the Council and its partners are taking towards achieving the Executive’s aims (see paragraphs 5.12-5.14 and appendix 9)

Fuel Poverty

- 2.8 Communities Scotland’s Corporate Plan, 2005-08 reiterates the importance of eradicating fuel poverty as far as is reasonably practicable by 2016. The Council continues to develop its local Fuel Poverty Strategy in response to this national priority (see paragraph 4.9 and appendix 7)

Community Regeneration Fund (CRF)

- 2.9 Falkirk Community Planning Partnership has submitted its Regeneration Outcome Agreement to Communities Scotland and discussions continue in terms of the allocation of CRF monies to identified priority areas and issues.

Community Planning

- 2.10 The Falkirk Strategic Community Plan is currently being reviewed and updated with the aim of publishing a new Plan by Autumn 2005. In addition, a Local Community Planning framework is being developed through the establishment of a dedicated team within the Council’s Community Services. Positive liaison arrangements have already been established with Housing and Social Work Services to ensure appropriate links are made with LHS priorities in terms of housing regeneration.

Development Planning

- 2.11 The Council’s Structure Plan has identified four locations where residential development will be encouraged to assist regeneration, namely, *Special Initiatives for Residential-led Regeneration (SIRRs)*. These are –

- Banknock,
- Bo’ness Foreshore,
- Manuel Works, Whitecross,
- Slamannan.



- 2.12 It is acknowledged that in all these areas there are different constraints in relation to physical and social infrastructure which need to be addressed before housing development can progress. In preparing the necessary masterplans and development frameworks, there may be scope to explore opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing in the areas concerned.

Sustainability

- 2.13 The Council's *Sustainable Falkirk Strategy 2002* committed the Council to working towards sustainable development in relation to *Local Agenda 21*. The Local Housing Strategy process will contribute towards this agenda by taking into account the integration of environmental, social and economic factors in promoting housing development and investment. Particular regard will be paid to the quality and location of new developments, eco-friendly specifications in housing designs and contracts, recycling of materials from redevelopment projects and other environmental safeguards.

LHS 2004-2009

- 2.14 The *Local Housing Strategy 2004-09* continues to set the strategic framework for housing activity in the area. Monitoring and evaluation are an integral part of the ongoing planning process and underpin the effectiveness of the LHS. Regular monitoring of targets identified in 2004 shows that whilst significant progress has been made, some actions remain outstanding. A full update on progress to date is set out in Appendix 2 whilst Appendix 3 sets out new targets for tasks currently outstanding as well as targets for new projects and initiatives that have emerged since the LHS was approved.
- 2.15 It is still too early in the LHS process for the effects of most of the actions completed thus far to be fully evaluated and the development of an effective evaluation process is identified as an outstanding priority.
- 2.16 Monitoring and evaluation of LHS implementation is also closely linked to the Housing and Social Work *Service Performance Plan (SSP)* process which is a key element of the Council's business planning framework. The Housing and Social Work SPP is accessible through the Council's web site (www.falkirk.gov.uk)

3.0 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Regeneration and Development

- 3.1 Regeneration strategies for particular priority areas identified in the LHS are now being implemented. Programmes involving rehousing and demolition, leading to redevelopment or refurbishment, are underway in Langlees, Falkirk, Craigleith Road and Wood Street, Grangemouth and Corbiehall, Bo'ness.
- 3.2 In Langlees, at Inver / Birnam Courts, implementation of redevelopment proposals has had to await the conclusion of a protracted Compulsory Purchase Order process. However, acquisition of all properties affected has been completed and demolition work has recently been completed. It is anticipated that construction work on the 44 new dwellings to be provided by Link Housing Association will commence in August 2005. This will provide 34 general needs properties for rent along with 4 dwellings for wheelchair users and 6 units intended for shared ownership. Proposals are also being developed for a further 60 low demand tenement flats in nearby Lomond Drive. A scheme involving rehousing and demolition, to release a cleared site for some form of low cost home ownership initiative, is currently being explored.
- 3.3 In respect of Craigleith Road, demolition work has begun on one vacant block and is programmed in another. Work is ongoing to rehouse one tenant in the final remaining block so that full site clearance can be achieved. It is intended that the site be redeveloped by Link Housing Association to provide 28 dwellings for rent.
- 3.4 In Wood Street, the rehousing of remaining tenants continues with one vacant block having been demolished. Further demolitions are programmed to follow in the near future. Proposals are being prepared for a mixed tenure development combining housing for rent and housing for sale. This area may feature in the Council's HERF bid which is currently being developed.
- 3.5 Corbiehall in Bo'ness is an area of low demand tenement flats which have been stigmatized for a number of years. The properties feature in the *Bo'ness Town Centre Regeneration Strategy*. The Council has appointed ING Estates as its development partner for this initiative and work is in progress to finalise a refurbishment scheme for the 58 properties involved. The refurbished properties are intended for sale and discussions will continue with Communities Scotland on the possible inclusion of some element of low cost home ownership in the final scheme. Refurbishment of the blocks at Corbiehall will be among the first of the town centre regeneration projects to be delivered.



3.6 Draft Action Plans for ten *Future Housing Priority Areas* also identified in the LHS have been prepared to provide a basis for consultation with tenants and other stakeholders. These areas are closely linked to *Community Regeneration Fund ROA Priority Areas* and work is in progress to link physical regeneration proposals with wider investment in the social and economic infrastructure of these areas. The areas concerned are:

- ❖ Falkirk: Hallglen, Camelon West, Bainsford East & North,
- ❖ Grangemouth: Kingseat Avenue area, Kersiebank
- ❖ Bo'ness: Deanfield
- ❖ Denny: Bridge Crescent and Little Denny
- ❖ Slamannan and Limerigg



3.7 The *Falkirk Strategic Community Plan* sets an overarching framework in which wider regeneration priorities are taken forward on a partnership basis. The *Falkirk Community Planning Partnership's Regeneration Outcome Agreement* sits alongside the Local Housing Strategy in terms of identifying areas or issues requiring action if regeneration objectives are to be achieved in a coherent and sustainable way. The *Regeneration Theme Group* has the key co-ordinating role in terms of housing, community and town centres regeneration and brings together services and partners to ensure that agreed priorities are progressed, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis (see appendix 1)

3.8 Monitoring arrangements have also been established to identify housing areas which may present problems in the future and involve the use of a range of housing management indicators such as void rates and turnover levels, the allocation of properties to particular households and the level of rent arrears and welfare benefit take up.

3.9 As noted above, a bid is being prepared for funding from the *Housing Estate Regeneration Fund (HERF)* to be submitted during the summer of 2005. The bid will include proposals for several priority areas where there is a need to undertake redevelopment work leading to new housing provision with an RSL partner and also where there is a desire to complement housing investment with other estate-based environmental improvements.

3.10 New sheltered housing provision with the Link Group is being progressed at Broad Street, Denny as part of the Council's wider *Denny Town Centre Regeneration Strategy*. This particular project involves the reprovisioning of sheltered housing contained within the low demand Church Walk development which is intended for demolition as part of the planned restructuring of Denny town centre.

- 3.11 Since the LHS was submitted in March 2004, an Option Appraisal exercise on flats in Carron Road, Bainsford has been concluded. It is now clear that the properties which comprise 66 19th century sandstone flats, will not meet the SHQS without significant investment which is unlikely to satisfy either any 'value for money' criteria or tenants' aspirations. The project is complicated by the presence of a number of properties sold under the Right to Buy as well as several commercial premises. Demolition and redevelopment options are now being explored and costed in consultation with residents, owners and the District Valuer. It is anticipated that an Action Plan for these properties will be developed by March 2006.
- 3.12 The Council's *Housing Partnerships Development Programme for 2005 -2008* as agreed with Communities Scotland is included at *Appendix 4*.

Wider Action

- 3.13 The Council recognises the added value that *Wider Action* funding can bring to regeneration activity and is keen to work with Communities Scotland and RSLs in developing local projects. However, from the Council's perspective, there remain some issues requiring clarification, namely:
- ❖ the relationship of certain *Wider Action* activities, such as estate management, money advice and anti-social behaviour initiatives to existing Council services and contracts
 - ❖ the focus of *Wider Action* on RSL stock which does not necessarily accord with identified local priority areas.
- 3.14 The Council's Community Regeneration Theme Group will continue to explore this issue to ensure that appropriate linkages are made and the benefits for the local community are maximised.

Housing Forum and Partnership Activity

- 3.15 In assessing the Council's Local Housing Strategy, Communities Scotland highlighted no significant areas of weakness in the LHS but in terms of areas for further development, a number of comments were made in respect of making more explicit reference to partnership working in the LHS process and to the role of RSLs in the Council area.
- 3.16 Whilst some of the issues raised were seen to be presentational in nature, nevertheless, the Council is keen to continue to develop joint working with RSL partners and sees the *Falkirk Housing Forum* as a mechanism through which discussions can take place.
- 3.17 A meeting of the reconvened *Housing Forum* was held on 14 March 2005 to consider a variety of topics and it was agreed that future meetings of the *Forum* should adopt a more topic-based focus rather than a wide-ranging agenda. RSLs and other partners could then ensure attendance at those meetings of particular relevance to them. It was agreed that there might be scope to develop a small number of sub groups to deal with specific issues.

- 3.18 In this context, it is proposed to arrange a meeting of providers of housing for older people in Autumn 2005 to consider how RSLs and the Council can improve joint working and, perhaps, move towards a common allocations policy based on an agreed shared assessment of needs. This work will have clear links with the review of Supporting People arrangements and the development of a *Common Housing Register* noted below.

Transfer of the Management of Development Funding

- 3.19 The Council awaits with interest the outcome of ongoing discussions between the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland, the SFHA and COSLA on this issue.
- 3.20 Falkirk Council has already noted its interest in assuming responsibility for the management of development funding and looks forward to working with RSL partners in taking forward new social and affordable housing provision in the Council area in due course.

Joint Research

- 3.21 In developing appropriate housing strategies for the Falkirk area, the Council is keen to work with its key RSL partners, Communities Scotland and other relevant partners, such as neighbouring local authorities, to identify areas of common interest and it is clear that there is scope to consider a joint research programme. Falkirk Council looks forward to participating in the proposed research project on the housing needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (B.M.E.) communities. One other topic of particular interest to Falkirk Council (although it may have wider relevance) involves analysis of the effect that the Right to Buy legislation has had on now elderly household, who are choosing to remain in mainstream, family-sized housing, rather than moving to purpose-designed “pensioners’ housing” (typically one bedroom bungalows) as was more common in the past.
- 3.22 There may also be scope to compare rent levels across the social rented sector, possibly across the wider Forth Valley area, to ascertain if there are any issues associated with access to particular types or areas of housing.

HOUSING INVESTMENT

Own Stock Investment

- 4.1 The Council's *Standard Delivery Plan* has been submitted to Communities Scotland. In summary, the position adopted in the SDP is that the Council's current combined capital and property related revenue resources are sufficient to allow an affordable and sustainable housing investment strategy to be put in place which will see the Council's housing stock brought up to the SHQS by 2015 and maintained at that level thereafter.
- 4.2 The Council's stock strategy, as set out in its LHS, is based on the retention of a major core housing stock, complemented by selective stock disposal, leading to the restructuring of unpopular, low demand, high cost properties.
- 4.3 The Council continues to implement a three-year Housing Investment Programme for its own stock. Key elements of this programme include fabric improvements, kitchen and bathroom replacement and energy efficiency works which are all directly relevant to *Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)* requirements. Future investment programmes will be shaped to ensure detailed compliance with SHQS requirements at a local level. This will include a redesign of future planned maintenance programmes to ensure such activity complements capital investment as the Council works toward achieving the SHQS.
- 4.4 The Council's Investment Programme also includes provision for non-SHQS works such as fencing, landscaping etc. to ensure a comprehensive response to the physical and environmental needs of the Council's housing estates. HRA investment will be complemented by Community Regeneration Fund monies and, potentially, by the HERF, depending on the outcome of the Council's bid.
- 4.5 Responses are being developed to tackle specific energy efficiency priorities in relation to certain non-traditional houses. These include Dorrans-type properties near Bonnybridge where a modern electric heating system, powered by a domestic wind turbine, is included in the Council's 2005/06 Capital Programme and the development of a Combined Heat and Power Project for five blocks of High Rise Flats in Falkirk is to be progressed utilising funding from the *Community Energy Programme*

Ongoing Stock Survey Requirements

- 4.6 Preparation of the Council's Standard Delivery Plan highlighted the need to further populate the Council's stock condition database with more robust information at a local, neighbourhood and individual dwelling level. A survey methodology has been prepared to help guide future activity in this area and it is proposed that survey work will commence in 2005/06 to inform investment programmes from 2006/07. A starter paper on an outline methodology for future stock condition survey work, for further discussion with the Council's LHS/SDP consultant, is set out at *Appendix 5*.

- 4.7 General stock condition survey work may need to be complemented by more specialist surveys in respect of asbestos and energy efficiency. It is also recognised that information on private sector stock conditions is limited and future survey proposals will require to address this. Particular attention may be given to older private sector properties and stock sold under the Right to Buy given the significance of such housing in the Council's investment programmes.

Energy Efficiency

- 4.8 Meeting national energy efficiency targets remains a key aim for the Council given that the principal area of failure in respect of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard relates to the energy efficiency performance of the Council's housing stock. Work continues on developing an *Energy Efficiency Strategy* and a draft Statement outlining key issues for inclusion and further development is provided at *Appendix 6*.

Fuel Poverty

- 4.9 An outline *Fuel Poverty Strategy* was submitted as Appendix C (12) to the Local Housing Strategy 2004 –2009 and this was updated in the Standard Delivery Plan completed in April 2005. Progress continues to be made in this area and the latest position statement is provided as *Appendix 7* to this paper.

HOUSING MARKET

Housing Market Analysis and Needs Assessment

- 5.1 Since the LHS was submitted, work has continued on analysing the operation of the local housing market, particularly in relation to affordability and the provision of housing for people with special needs. A Position Statement on trends in local house prices in the private market is provided at *Appendix 8*, but in summary increasing house prices in the area suggest that there may be an emerging problem of affordability in the area. Given the continuing decline in the availability of social rented housing, there will be a need to monitor closely this situation over the remaining period of the 2004-2009 LHS to ensure that issues in relation to access to housing can be addressed through the LHS and Structure/Local planning processes.
- 5.2 In the light of the local situation described above, as well as developments in the national policy framework, it is intended to undertake an analysis of affordable housing issues in the Falkirk Council area by December 2005. This will (a) assess the current situation and outline a proposed response to this and (b) provide detailed information on the affordable housing options available in the area and how people in housing need can access them. This will feed into the Council's *Housing Options Database* and the developing *Housing Advice and Information Strategy*.
- 5.3 In relation to housing for people with particular needs, significant work has been done as part of the review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. The allocation of sheltered and very sheltered housing has now been removed from the main points scheme and is now based on the principles of *Single Shared Assessment* whereby a more holistic assessment of a person's accommodation and support needs is undertaken. In the future, following assessment, a *Personal Housing Plan* will be prepared for each person requiring to be rehoused to more specialist accommodation. This will be reviewed after six months if the individual has not been rehoused by then.
- 5.4 As part of the allocations review, a full re-registration of applicants for sheltered housing has been undertaken and the waiting list for sheltered and very sheltered housing is now a much more accurate statement of actual need. It is intended to replicate this work, by December 2005, with all applicants who have indicated that they need specialist or adapted housing as a result of physical disability and to develop *Personal Housing Plans* as required. This analysis will directly inform the Council's *Housing Partnership Development Programme* as well as its programme of adaptations to its own stock.
- 5.5 The development in recent years of the Supporting People philosophy which aims to support most older people in their own homes seems to have led to a change of emphasis within supported housing for the elderly and it is likely that there will be further changes in the coming years. There is clear evidence that not only are people living longer, they are also living longer in better health than in previous generations as a result of improved medical care. It seems that such circumstances mean that people are able to wait longer before making any move to supported accommodation.

- 5.6 As noted in paragraph 3.21 above, there is some evidence to indicate that increased levels of owner occupation resulting from the Right to Buy means that some older people do not wish to move into “pensioners housing” at as early a stage as may have been the case with their parents’ generation. In addition, with the provision of varying levels of floating support and home care, older people are able to remain in mainstream housing until a much later age than before. In the light of the review of the allocations policy for housing for older people, and the indications that many elderly people seem to stay in mainstream family housing for longer, it is proposed to carry out local research to identify the effects that these changes may have on the operation of the local social rented housing market, both in relation to the provision of housing for older people and the provision of mainstream housing for families. A target for completing this research has been set for March 2007 and it is anticipated that the results will inform the Local Housing Strategy 2009-2014.

Housing Allocations and Common Housing Register

- 5.7 The Council operates a needs-based points scheme for the allocation of its housing stock. Following an extensive review process involving a wide range of stakeholders, a revised policy was implemented from 1 April 2005.
- 5.8 The housing waiting list was re-registered with the result that the overall waiting list fell from around 12,000 to just over 8,000. However, the effect of this is not consistent across the Council area: demand continues to outstrip supply in certain estates whilst, in other areas, low demand and an excess of supply create different circumstances to which future housing and investment strategies must respond.
- 5.9 As noted above, in certain Priority Areas, low demand coupled with high investment needs is highlighting the need to restructure the local housing supply through demolition, redevelopment and the provision of new affordable housing for social rent and low cost home ownership. In other areas, the development of *Block Profiling Schemes*, *Area Lettings Plans* and a system of incentives for new tenants – together with targeted investment to improve stock condition and the wider local environment – aim to make the available housing more attractive to applicants thereby stimulating waiting list demand.
- 5.10 Progress on the development of a *Common Housing Register* has been slower than originally envisaged as a result of the implementation of the revised Housing Allocations Policy and re-registration of the waiting list. In addition, from the RSL perspective, Paragon Housing Association has noted practical difficulties in being involved in the development of three separate CHRs whilst Link Housing Association has implemented a choice-based lettings system, Home Hunt. Work is currently underway with partners to take stock and refocus on this issue in respect of mainstream housing with the three other main providers of such accommodation, Paragon, Link and Weslo.

- 5.11 With regard to housing for older people, it is clear that in order to ensure that available housing and support is allocated to those with the greatest need, there requires to be more consistency in the allocations policies of the various providers. An initial information-sharing event was held in May 2004 to consider areas of both congruence and difference in terms of housing allocations and, following on from work to review Supporting People contracts, it is now intended to meet with providers in Autumn 2005 to try to explore how a Common Housing Register could be established for housing with care.

Homelessness

- 5.12 Tackling homelessness is a key priority for the Scottish Executive and significant resources have been targeted to both preventing and alleviating homelessness in recent years. Progress is monitored and recorded through a *Local Outcome Agreement (LOA)* and *Action Plans* and the LOA for 2005/06 was submitted to the Executive on 29 April 2005. A copy of this LOA, updated in June 2005, is provided at *Appendix 9*.
- 5.13 A major current issue is the proposal to abolish the priority need assessment criteria by 2012. A recent planning exercise has been undertaken nationally to help predict the effect that this proposal will have on the operation of local housing markets in terms of access to, and availability of, affordable housing. Following an assessment of the national situation, there will have to be dialogue with the Executive and Communities Scotland on how best to facilitate provision of new housing in the context of the resources available.
- 5.14 In terms of planning responses to homelessness and related issues locally, it is intended to prepare an *Annual Homelessness Statement* by September 2005 and annually thereafter. This will:
- set out the Council's, and its partners', aims and objectives in terms of preventing and alleviating homelessness,
 - give an up to date position statement on the services and facilities provided,
 - review activity in the previous financial year and analyse any emerging trends
 - set out an Action Plan detailing how the Council and its partners are working to reduce homelessness in the area.

Supporting People

- 5.15 Supporting People (SP) Reviews have been undertaken in respect of sheltered housing, services for people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems. On the basis of these reviews, and the SP settlement for Falkirk Council, contracts will be negotiated with partners to ensure that the available resources are targeted appropriately.

- 5.16 In terms of housing support services for homeless people and young people, Supporting People reviews will be undertaken in the current year and it is anticipated that this will result in some service redesign. The Council will work closely with partner agencies to provide services that better meet local needs by supporting vulnerable people to address the issues which they face.
- 5.17 It is recognised that the Supporting People agenda has an important role to play in sustaining quality of life both for vulnerable individuals and, in some cases, for the communities around them. It is therefore intended to integrate and strengthen the process of assessing housing support needs. Consideration is currently being given to how the Supporting People management and review process can be refined within the Housing and Social Work Service and appropriate partners such as Health. Emerging from this, the development of local frameworks and joint working protocols, including single shared assessment, will be a major priority for the coming year.
- 5.18 It is also proposed to further develop the Council's *Housing with Care* programme in the light of *Better Services for Older People*, paying particular attention to sheltered accommodation, the needs of people with a physical disability and the provision of housing management support services.

Housing Advice and Information Strategy

- 5.19 The provision of accessible, easily understood and accurate information is an essential component of any comprehensive housing strategy that aims to meet people's needs and aspirations. This requires to be supported by well trained staff who are able to provide high quality advice on housing issues. In this context, the Council is in the early stages of developing a *Housing Advice and Information Strategy* and now has a dedicated officer leading on this process.
- 5.20 Over the next eighteen months to two years, a review of all the housing information provided in the local area will be undertaken and new material will be published in a range of mediums to facilitate easy access. The review process will include consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including service users, special interest groups (e.g. the black and minority ethnic community), staff and local Members.
- 5.21 This activity will be supported by a comprehensive training programme that will ensure that well informed staff are available at all service points. A group of staff from the Accommodation Resources Team is currently undergoing training to achieve *HomePoint Accreditation* and it is intended to roll out this programme to Neighbourhood Offices and other Teams within the Housing and Social Work Service over the next two years.
- 5.22 Partnership with other agencies that provide housing information and advice will also be an important part of the development of the Strategy and it is proposed to consult with them during 2005 on how they can contribute to this process.

Private Sector Housing

- 5.23** A Private Sector Unit is being established within the Housing and Social Work Service to address policy, service development and operational issues associated with the Housing Improvement Task Force, Private Sector Housing Bill, Repair and Improvement Grants, Care and Repair, private sector housing conditions, mixed tenure estates, advice and assistance to owners, private rented sector etc. Key tasks and responsibilities are outlined in *Appendix 10*.

6.0 **ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES**

- 6.1 The Housing Service underwent a major re-organisation in 2004 with the primary aim of strengthening local housing management arrangements to provide a more customer-focussed service better able to respond to higher tenant expectations, the challenges presented in multi-tenure estates resulting from the Right to Buy, as well as the demands of increasing regulation and inspection. In addition, the growing strategic housing agenda was recognised and an expanded Strategic Support Unit is now better placed to respond to the housing needs of the wider community including new demands in such fields as energy efficiency, fuel poverty, private sector housing and partnership activity. The Housing Service structure is presented at Appendix 11.
- 6.2 Work is underway to determine the requirement for an *Integrated Housing Management System*. It is recognised that the specification, design and commissioning of such a major system is resource intensive and entails a significant degree of risk. As part of preparatory work, an examination of the capabilities of existing systems currently in use is taking place with a view to determining whether modifications and enhancements could satisfactorily meet both current and future operational and information requirements. This will establish whether or not there is a business case for commissioning a new system. This will be incorporated into a Project Initiation Document (PID) to establish the basis for system development or commissioning an IHMS.