

# Affordable Housing Action Plan



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# 1. Introduction

Welcome to the Torbay Housing Partnership Affordable Housing Action Plan.

The Plan has been prepared collaboratively by Torbay Council Housing Services, Strategic Environmental Policy and Development and Conservation Services, in conjunction with the Torbay Housing Partnership.

The purpose of the plan is to provide an **action based** focus to support the “enabling” of housing and in particular affordable housing within Torbay.

This document is produced with specific reference to the following;

The following aims from the Torbay Community Plan “Teaming up for Torbay’s Future”;

*“Improving access to good quality affordable homes”*

*“Improving health and social care in Torbay”*

*“Creating ‘sustainable’ communities”*

The Torbay Housing Partnership Mission Statement;

*“To deliver improved access to good quality affordable homes and related services for the people of Torbay by way of a balanced, community based, inclusive partnership”*

Priority 2 of ‘The Future of Housing in Torbay Partnership Strategy 2003-6

***“Maximise the number of high quality new affordable homes delivered in Torbay over the strategy period by effective use of funding opportunities and the planning system”***

The following influences have helped to shape the plan;

- The Torbay Community Plan and the Council’s Strategic Plan “Transforming Torbay - Making Change Happen”
- The Formation of The Torbay Housing Partnership and its “Fit For Purpose” strategy, “The Future of Housing in Torbay 2003-2006”
- The Adopted Torbay Local Plan (1995-2011) and Supplementary Planning Guidance on the Provision of Affordable Housing
- The setting up of the Housing/Planning Task Force following suggestions for performance improvements by The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

- Recommendations received from the Audit Commission during recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) feedback
- Torbay Council's Affordable Housing Retainer with Hawkcrest, which focuses on many of the areas contained within the Plan
- The recruitment of a new Housing Partnership Enabling Team following the recent restructuring of the Housing Services Department.
- An initiative to consider innovative approaches to the use of the Council's landholdings to assist in the provision of affordable housing

This Plan is constructed in two parts;

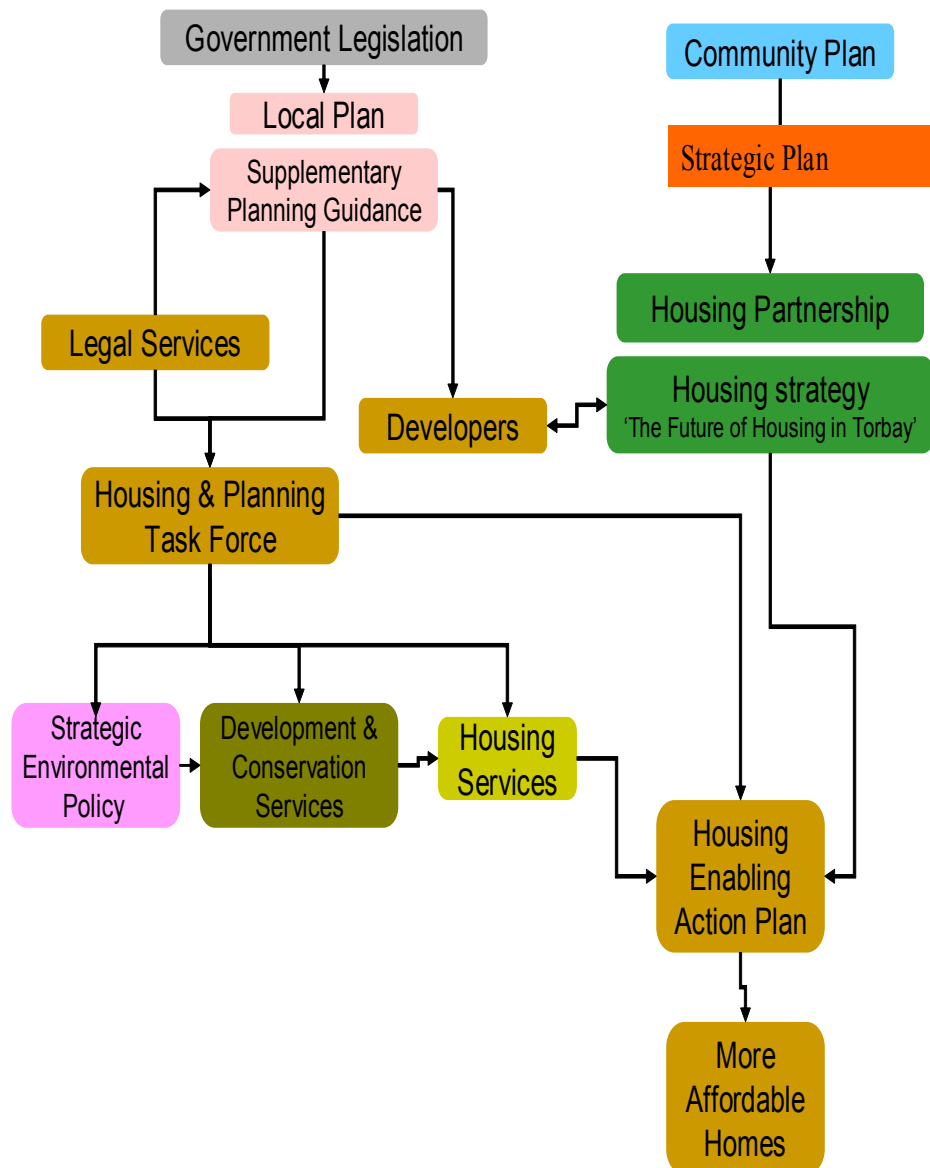
1. Text explaining each of the defined objectives, giving the background and setting out the actions proposed to resolve the issues raised
2. Appendices including various protocols to assist in good practice and delivery together with a "Task Matrix" which summarises what needs to be done, by whom, when, and how, together with details of what will be used to measure a successful outcome

The aim is to keep the Plan as simple and as usable as possible to maximise its impact and deliverability. It is intended to be adopted, "owned" and steered by the Housing Planning Task Force, as a mechanism to measure the progress being made by the Council in affordable housing and enabling, which is to be chaired by Paul Lucas, Strategic Director Community and be made up of Director Legal Services, Assistant Director Strategic Environmental Policy, Assistant Director Development and Conservation Services and Assistant Director Housing Services. This progress will also be reported back to the Housing Strategy Working Party and the Torbay Housing Partnership Steering Group on a quarterly basis.

## 2. Context

The Schematic Diagram shown below shows the context of the plan and where it sits strategically in Torbay’s partnership structure;

### Affordable Housing Action Plan - Strategic position within the Partnership Structure



### 3. *Background & Influences*

Intervention from the ODPM Homelessness Directorate's Bed and Breakfast Unit's Action Advice Team in July 2003 highlighted a number of problem areas. These relate mainly to the historic priority of affordable housing to the Council and its working approaches both internally and externally with its partners.

The main issues highlighted by the report were as follows;

- The Council's Housing Service lacked capacity and influence and needed to be strengthened
- Affordable housing had not been a key priority for the Council with low affordable housing outputs over the last decade
- The Council was experiencing spiralling Bed and Breakfast costs
- The Council should resist the practice of accepting commuted sums rather than on site provision
- Joint training between Housing and Planning Officers was required
- Joint working between Planning and Housing Officers needed to be radically improved to deliver a sustained supply of new affordable homes for rent through Section 106 Agreements
- Housing should have senior representation in meetings between Planners and Developers to discuss any proposed housing or mixed developments
- Planners and Housing Officers should actively engage with RSLs to identify the capacity of RSLs to respond to Section 106 opportunities
- The Council should consider options to use its own land for affordable housing provision
- The Council should review best practice with other local authorities - i.e. Benchmarking of Section 106 work and experience of negotiations with developers

The Council received a low ranking in the CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) in 2002. In addition, following the Housing CPA Gap Re-inspection in December 2003, it was recommended that the Council should;

- *"Review the Corporate policy on land disposals to maximise the delivery of affordable housing"*
- *"Develop targets for the number of affordable homes to be delivered by various mechanisms"*

The Council has reacted swiftly to the challenge, and has reviewed its overall approach to the provision of affordable housing.

“The Future of Housing in Torbay a Partnership Strategy 2003-2006” set the scene for the changes which would be needed to achieve the improvements required, and this plan defines the new approach in more detail, by setting out key objectives and assigning actions to each, which are shown in the attached “Task Matrix” at **Appendix 1**.

## 4. Objectives

The Affordable Housing Action Plan has the following 7 Objectives

1. *Maximise the provision of sustainable new affordable homes through the planning system*
2. *Develop a proactive and strategic approach to land and funding for affordable housing development*
3. *Support effective coordination of the Torbay Housing Partnership Development Group*
4. *Ensure Focussed monitoring of affordable housing enabling activity*
5. *Enable capacity building and skills transfer*
6. *Pursue the use of best practice and maximise publicity for the Housing Partnership*
7. *To be inclusive and innovative in the provision of new homes*

**Objective 1** - Maximise the provision of sustainable new affordable homes through the planning system

### Outcomes Sought

- A. To maximise the number of new affordable homes from sites emerging through the planning process, using a transparent and fair assessment methodology
- B. To develop a suite of options for those seeking affordable housing, to include rented housing, low cost home ownership and other “intermediate” options
- C. By taking an open and inclusive approach with developers, to minimise resistance and reduce the risk of delays in the provision of affordable housing
- D. To deliver the target numbers of affordable housing units over the next 3 years via various mechanisms, as shown in the table at **Appendix 2**

### Objective 1 - Actions

1. Set up joint working arrangements between Housing, Legal Services, Strategic and Environmental Planning Services, Development and Conservation Services and the retained Affordable Housing Negotiator, to review the suitability of sites coming forward and assess the appropriate affordable housing provision/contribution, based on the Council's policies. Where appropriate, to consider the potential for the particular development to provide the required level of affordable housing
2. Set up a system whereby development viability issues are considered by the Affordable Housing Negotiator with appropriate reports and recommendations to be made to Planning and Housing Officers.
3. Produce a "Developer's Pack" to clarify the Council's aspirations and requirements for affordable housing as part of the review of Supplementary Planning Guidance
4. On larger sites, assign the independent Affordable Housing Negotiator to lead negotiations with developers over affordable housing provision, to include involvement in the formulation of the Section 106 Agreement.
5. Prepare a Contributions Policy Document, setting out the various contributions which will be sought, together with the methodology for calculation. This should operate in conjunction with a policy for "pooled" contributions for infrastructure costs. Also consider a protocol for "arbitrating" between competing planning obligations, where site viability constrains the overall amount of contribution available
6. Produce an affordable housing flow chart to demonstrate how and when each department gets involved
7. Review Supplementary Planning Guidance, particularly in connection with mechanisms for determining the cost/value of affordable housing, and standard requirements for Section 106 Agreements (once the awaited Government guidance is issued)
8. Agree standard planning conditions for RSLs (Partnership Strategy p68 action 4 June 2004) (*Note - This existing action may need to be reconsidered in the light of grant to developers and proposals in the draft revised Circular on planning obligations to encourage standard heads of terms/model clauses and unilateral undertakings generally*)
9. Produce a development viability "toolkit" methodology to help inform calculations over the amount and type of affordable housing to be provided pursuant to Policies H5 and H6 as part of the adopted Torbay Local Plan and as a part of the review of Supplementary Planning Guidance
10. Develop proposals to increase the provision of mixed use development opportunities to reduce travel to work times (*Partnership Strategy p68 action 5 Dec 2004*)

11. Investigate mechanisms for retaining affordable housing in perpetuity where appropriate (*Partnership Strategy p68 action 6 April 2004*)
12. Investigate new ways of involving the community, including neighbourhood profiling and linked work on ward partnerships using a strategy and research team

## Objective 2 – Develop a proactive and strategic approach to land and funding for affordable housing development

### Outcomes Sought

- A. To maximise the supply of land and funding for affordable housing
- B. To operate in a strategic and co-ordinated manner to minimise duplication and target resources in the most effective way possible
- C. In conjunction with the Torbay Private Sector Strategy, create a strategic approach to development that will:
  - i). Make best use of existing stock (including RSL stock) and its overall condition in Torbay
  - ii). Revisit Torbay's approach to regeneration and renewal to ensure an integrated approach with the Private Sector
  - iii). Increase involvement from the Private Sector i.e. Developers and Landowners

### Objective 2 - Actions

1. Conduct a review of the Council's landholdings and opportunities for linked development with the Riviera Housing Trust land
2. Carry out an exercise to establish the identity of the major landowners in Torbay and liaise with them over land availability for affordable housing
3. Develop proactive land finding mechanisms, which could include investigating remodelling/change of use of existing buildings
4. Produce 2 and 10 year development plans based on Council and other site opportunities

5. Consider and consult on options for a revised site and grant distribution system for preferred partners, which maximises our ability to cross subsidise between tenures to minimise grant input, takes into account Government expectations over provision of affordable housing through planning, the availability of Housing Corporation grant and Council policies
6. Map Recycled Grant Funds available for Torbay and develop a disposal policy (As per Partnership Strategy p66 action 3 - April 2004)
7. Consider a partner RSL development consortium approach to appropriate sites
8. Continue to develop links with the Torbay Development Agency with particular regard to regeneration projects
9. Explore the feasibility of using commuted sums funded by S106 sites to provide private sector solutions for "move on" accommodation, including "Private Finance Initiative" Projects.

## Objective 3 – Support effective co-ordination of the Torbay Housing Partnership Development Group

### Outcomes Sought

- A. Maximise affordable housing within Torbay through a closer relationship between the Private and Public Sector

### Objective 3 - Actions

1. Establish Vision and formal terms of reference for the Development Group
2. Agree targets for the delivery of affordable housing by various mechanisms over the Local Plan Period
3. Review the Affordable Housing Action Plan every 3 months
4. Review the role of developers and investigate collaborative ways of working with the Development Group (Amended from The *Partnership Strategy p68 action 2 Dec 2004*)

## Objective 4 – Ensure focussed monitoring of affordable housing enabling activity

### Outcomes Sought

- A. To ensure consistent and targeted monitoring of enabling performance by housing and planning officers in a co-ordinated way
- B. To increase the profile of affordable housing by including it as a key element to be monitored in wider Council performance indicators

### Objective 4 - Actions

1. Establish a Microsoft Access based database to assess key data, with training as required (*Note - this could link to/be included within the S106 data base held by Torbay Finance Department*)
2. Capture allocation, tenure and house size data by location, linking as appropriate to any neighbourhood profiling exercises being carried out
3. Progress updates centrally to be accessed by both Housing and Planning Officers to prevent duplication and improve retrieval
4. Link to a spreadsheet monitoring the source and use of commuted sums from developers within defined timescales

## Objective 5 – Enable capacity building and skills Transfer

### Outcomes Sought

- A. To increase the development skills and enabling capacity of the Housing Services, Legal and Planning Teams generally
- B. To support and assist the newly forming Housing Services Team in order to maximise outcomes
- C. To conduct appropriate training for members and officers on affordable housing issues

### Objective 5 - Actions

1. Produce the Affordable Housing Action Plan and work with officers to monitor outcomes

2. Ensure that the work being carried out under the Affordable Housing Retainer arrangement is carried out in close liaison with Housing and Planning Officers and that the methodology and outcomes are clearly set out and documented, in order to build capacity and transfer skills
3. Review members and officers training needs for affordable housing and prepare/deliver appropriate training
4. Develop an improved corporate understanding of development viability issues and judgements on what is a reasonable affordable housing contribution on a site by site basis

## Objective 6 – Pursue the use of best practice and maximise publicity for the Torbay Housing Partnership

### Outcomes Sought

- A. To ensure that the Council keeps up to date with 'best practice' in the field of affordable housing and that such good practice is disseminated effectively to the Housing Partnership
- B. To achieve effective promotion for individual affordable housing schemes and the Housing Partnership overall
- C. To aim towards Beacon Status for Torbay Council in the provision of affordable housing

### Objective 6 - Actions

1. Develop a Public Relations/Communications Strategy for the Torbay Housing Partnership, which should include;
  - Develop a system of "capturing" best practice and disseminating this effectively to relevant parties
  - Actively promoting all affordable housing schemes, especially at the start and completion of developments, by way of TV, radio and press to tackle any anti-development sentiment
  - Torbay Housing Partnership involvement in RSL publicity events
  - Targeting the most deprived areas and engage the community with Partnership successes
  - Reviewing Scheme signage/hoarding [include website?]

## Objective 7 — To be inclusive and innovative in the provision of new homes

### Outcomes Sought

- A. Provide innovative new housing solutions to engage residents effectively and improve their long term well being, which could include neighbourhood profiling (linked to a Community Plan initiative)
- B. To promote innovative design and energy efficiency in building

### Objective 7 - Actions

1. Explore options to empower self build housing schemes (*Partnership Strategy p68 action 7 - June 2005*)
2. Explore innovative models of providing affordable housing (*Partnership Strategy p68 action 8 - Sept 2004*)
3. Strengthen the Torbay Housing Partnership's sub regional housing market approach, by investigating cross boundary initiatives with neighbouring local authorities, in addition to setting up a cross boundary Housing Enablers Forum (*Partnership Strategy p66 action 8 - June 2004*)
4. Investigate off site manufacture of affordable homes (*Partnership Strategy p68 action 9 - June 2004*)
5. Develop a home building project, linked with the Torbay Development Agency, to focus on energy efficiency and work skills for the homeless

## 5. Reporting/Monitoring

It is intended that the plan will remain in the form approved at the date of adoption, until it is reviewed. The actions identified within will be set out within the Task Matrix at Appendix 1, and monitored/updated at least quarterly, so that the Task Matrix becomes a “live” document, reflecting achievements and changes as they occur.

The Task Matrix should be monitored quarterly by the Housing/Planning Task Force (HPTF) and the Housing Partnership Steering Group with feedback to relevant sub groups of the Housing Partnership.

The plan should be reviewed and updated annually by the Housing/Planning Task Force and Housing Partnership Steering Group, with a new Task Matrix being produced for each update.

Progress with agreed actions should be fed into any reviews of the Torbay Housing Partnership Strategy and reported quarterly to the Housing Strategy Working Party

<i>Group</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
Housing Planning Taskforce	quarterly
Executive	annually
Torbay Housing Partnership Steering Group	annually
Housing Strategy Working Party	quarterly
Torbay Housing Partnership Development Group	quarterly
Torbay Strategic Partnership – by Torbay Housing Partnership Representative	annually

## 6. Appendices - (Listing)

**Appendix 1** - SMART Task matrix reflecting the actions under each objective

**Appendix 2** – Affordable housing targets, based on Torbay Housing Partnership Development Group 10 year Plan

### **Likely Appendices (For Future Consideration) :**

- Affordable Housing flow chart to demonstrate how and when each department gets involved, depending on delivery mechanism
- Protocol for ongoing identification of Council owned land and assessment for affordable housing purposes
- Protocol for data capture and retention (drafted following meeting with planning and housing colleagues)
- Protocol for distribution of available grant (in conjunction with the Housing Corporation)?
- Developer's Pack re affordable housing requirements (to go with SPG)?
- Updated modelling assumptions for equivalent grant and development viability calculations?