

Housing



Everyone needs a basic standard of shelter, security and comfort. Anything less is likely to lead to unhappiness and ill health. Housing is an integral part of our environment, and an important indicator of quality of life.

In Hertfordshire, around three-quarters of homes are owner-occupied. The remainder are divided between local council and housing association ownership, and privately rented properties.

The housing stock generally will tend to deteriorate with age, but levels of unfitness are low compared with the total number and do not seem likely to increase. There are pockets of run down housing in the older, urban parts of the county, but these are not a significant proportion of the total stock.

The single most urgent housing issue in Hertfordshire is the shortage of affordable homes. The demand for

housing close to London is high, which results in high house prices. Restricted development land puts further pressure on the supply of homes, making it very difficult for first time buyers and people on low incomes to enter the housing market. The term 'affordable housing' describes homes that are provided with an element of subsidy, so that the rent or purchase price is less than it would otherwise be at open market prices. Affordable housing is normally provided through housing associations and most is rented accommodation.

At present about 17% of new housing being built in Hertfordshire is affordable. This is well short of the Government's 'provisional indicator' which proposes that about 47% of new housing in the region should be affordable.

At the local level, district councils in Hertfordshire set their own targets for development of more affordable

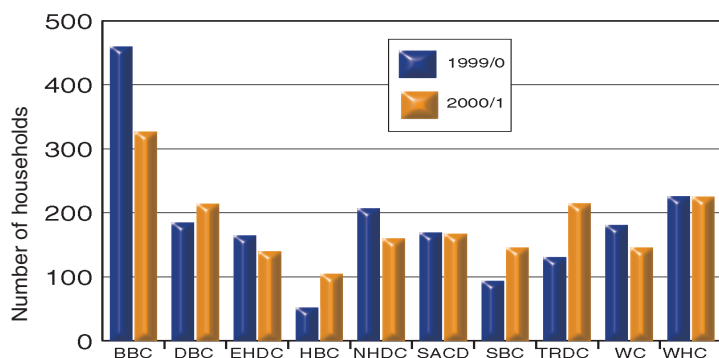
housing. Targets vary, as they are based on detailed studies of needs in each district. The current numbers of affordable homes being built fall well short of assessed needs in all districts. District housing departments can provide further information about the problems in their areas. The reasons why development of affordable housing is falling short of regional and local targets are complex. They relate mainly to insufficient public funding, together with legal and other constraints on district councils' scope to require developers to make a financial or land contribution.

Provision of social housing (council/housing association provided) and low cost privately rented accommodation is not sufficient to meet current needs. Even at the lower end of the private rented sector, demand is high, creating an opportunity for some landlords to charge high rents for substandard and multi-occupied houses.

High house prices can also affect businesses and services in Hertfordshire. Employees need to earn high wages to afford to live in the county. This has created difficulties for the recruitment of some workers, e.g. teachers.

INDICATOR HSI - Homelessness

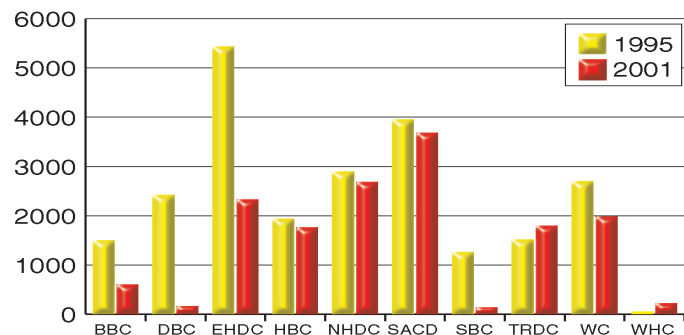
Homeless Household Acceptances



Homeless households are counted as the number of households who have presented themselves to district councils as unintentionally homeless and have been accepted as such. This means that the council has a statutory duty to provide them with accommodation. Over the last two years, the total of homeless household acceptances in the county has risen from 1,802 in 1998/9 to 1,845 in 2000/1.

INDICATOR HS2 - Statutorily Unfit Homes

Number of Statutorily Unfit Homes



Each year, all the district councils estimate the number of homes in their area which are unfit for human habitation. Statutory unfitness is assessed by reference to a national standard, which is set out in housing legislation.

In Hertfordshire, the total number of homes found to be unfit increased during the last year but numbers in individual districts have not changed dramatically over the past three years. Low figures usually result from a district having a high proportion of new houses. Housing authorities tackle the problem of unfit housing as part of their overall housing strategies, within which there are also policies to try and house homeless people in this area.

There are currently proposals to implement radical changes to the planning system which aim to tackle the affordable housing shortfall in the future.

Further information sources:

Contact your local council's Housing Department.
For more information about the proposed changes to the planning process, see:
www.planning.dtlr.gov.uk