

North Herts
HOMELESSNESS
STRATEGY

**1ST YEAR
REVIEW
'04**

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Section 1

Introduction

This document is intended to provide an update to the North Herts Homelessness Strategy, which was published in July 2003.

Section 2 of this document provides a current picture of homelessness in the district, summarising the latest data available to us.

Section 3 forms the main body of the document and sets out our progress in meeting the aims and objectives established in the Homelessness Strategy.

During the course of the year, we have continued to work closely with local organisations providing services to homeless people. A number of additional action points have arisen through this work, and these are also set out in section 3.

1.1 North Herts Homelessness Strategy

North Herts District Council's Homelessness Strategy sets out our approach for tackling and preventing homelessness.

The Strategy was produced in response to the Homelessness Act 2002. This established new duties and powers for councils, including a duty to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy. Councils are furthermore required to keep their strategies under review.

The Homelessness Strategy established three key aims:

- ▶ preventing homelessness;
- ▶ providing a safety net; and
- ▶ increasing supply and access to affordable housing.

This was informed by a review of the current levels of homelessness in the district and an assessment of the current provision for homeless people.

1.2 Working in partnership

The Homelessness Strategy was produced with the advice and support of voluntary and statutory agencies active in the district in meeting the needs of the homeless.

This review follows a consultation exercise with these stakeholders, held in August 2004. Appendix 1 provides a summary of views and feedback from the event.

In the past year, the Council has established a Homelessness Forum with the aim of fostering and building upon these close working relationships. The Forum meets on a quarterly basis and monitors the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy also forms an integral part of the Council's broader Housing Strategy, with additional consultation taking place through the North Herts Housing Forum. Our Housing Strategy achieved 'fit for purpose' in 2003.

Homelessness in North Herts

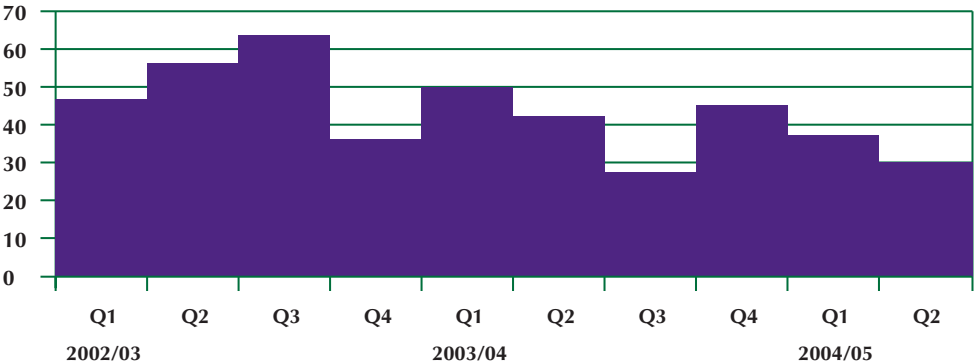
2.1 Approaches and approvals

In 2003/04, a total of 391 households made applications for homelessness. This compares with 348 households in the previous year.

Of these, 165 households were accepted as being in priority need in 2003/04. This represents just over 40 per cent of applicant households. In 2002/03, 202 households (almost 60 per cent of applicants) were accepted.

In 2003/04, a further 102 households (one-quarter of total approaches) were considered to be eligible for advice and assistance but were not considered to be homeless. This compares with 79 households in 2002/03 (one-fifth of the total).

Graph 2.1: Households accepted as in priority need



As graph 2.1 illustrates, the number of acceptances each quarter varies to some degree. On average, around 45 households per quarter are accepted as in priority need.

There is of course a wider group of people who are homeless but not considered to be in priority need. In 2003/04, 108 households (one-quarter of total approaches) fell into this category. This compares with 42 households in 2002/03 (12% of the total).

Section 2

Homelessness in North Herts

2.2 Black and minority ethnic homelessness

A small but significant proportion (15%) of applications are from ethnic minority groups. Population figures from the 2001 Census suggest that ethnic minorities might be more likely to apply as homeless, given that they comprise only 7% of the district's population as a whole.

Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of applications and acceptances in 2003/04 by ethnicity and compares this with Census population data.

Table 2.1: Approaches and approvals by ethnicity 2003/04

	Applications		Acceptances		% local pop
	Number	% total*	Number	% total*	
African/Caribbean	27	7%	11	7%	2%
Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani	6	2%	2	1%	3%
White	326	85%	141	87%	93%
Other	23	6%	8	5%	2%

Note: * as % known total

2.3 Characteristics of households in priority need

The majority of households in priority need continue to be those with dependent children or where a child is expected.

In 2003/04, these households represented almost three-quarters of total households in priority need. Table 2.2 overleaf sets out the figures in full.

Graph 2.2 overleaf focuses on the most prevalent characteristics of households in priority need in 2003/04.

From this, it is evident that there has been a sharp fall in the proportion of households with dependent children over the past few quarters. There has also been a noticeable increase in the proportion of households expecting a child.

Similarly, there has been a sharp climb in applicants aged 16/17. Although it is too early to establish if these are the beginning of lasting trends, this clearly is an area for continued focus.

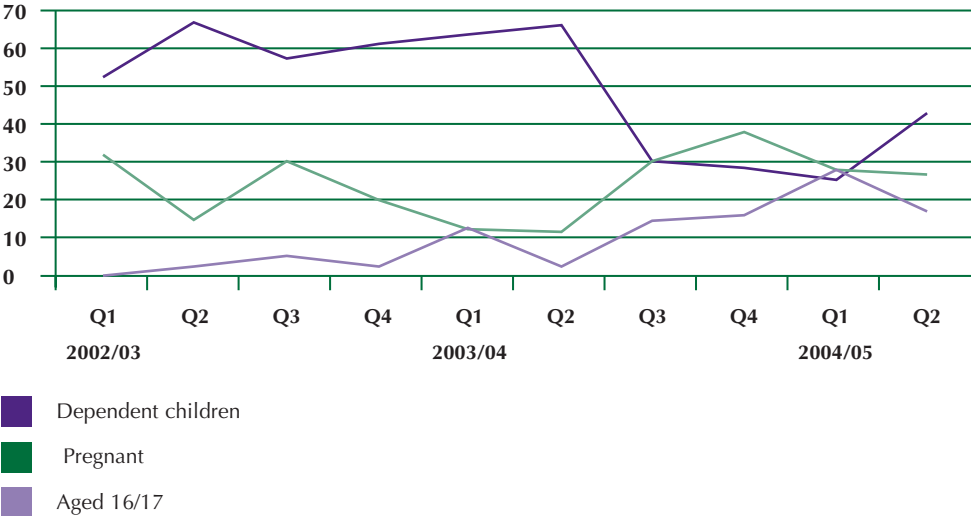
Section 2

Homelessness in North Herts

Table 2.2: Characteristics of households in priority need 2003/04

	Number	% total
Dependent children	81	49%
Pregnant	36	22%
Aged 16/17	18	11%
Physical disability	9	5%
Violence/threat of violence	6	4%
Mental illness	5	3%
Vulnerable due to old age	3	2%
Emergency	3	2%
Other vulnerable	2	1%
Care leaver	2	1%
Total	165	100%

Graph 2.2: Households in priority need - characteristics



Section 2

Homelessness in North Herts

2.4 Reasons for homelessness

Figures for 2003/04 indicate that a chief cause of homelessness has been eviction from the parental home or through other relatives and friends being unable to provide accommodation.

Table 2.3 sets out figures for households in priority need. Graph 2.3 overleaf focuses on the most significant reasons for homelessness and tracks them over time.

The most obvious trend has been the large decline in the proportion of cases arising due to the termination of assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs). These have been largely replaced by cases resulting from parental eviction.

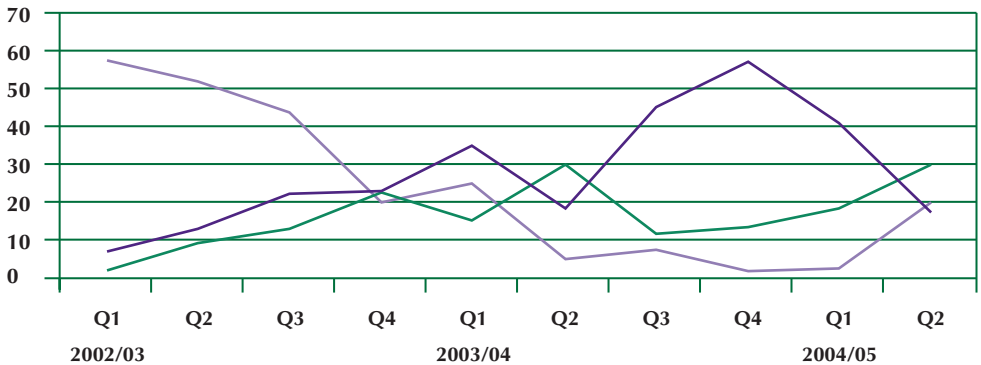
Table 2.3: Reasons for homelessness 2003/04

	Number	% total
Parental eviction	63	38%
Friends/relatives unable to house	29	18%
End of AST	18	11%
Relationship breakdown (non-violent)	13	8%
Violence	13	8%
Rent arrears	5	3%
Mortgage arrears	4	2%
Other loss of tied/rented accommodation	2	1%
In institution/care	1	1%
All other	17	10%
Total	165	100%

Section 2

Homelessness in North Herts

Graph 2.3: Reasons for homelessness



- Parental eviction
- Friends/relatives unable to house
- End of AST

2.5 Temporary accommodation

The Council has not made use of B&B hotels since the second half of 2003/04. We have therefore comfortably met the Government's target to end the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children (except in emergencies) by the end of 2003/04.

At the end of the first quarter in 2004/05, there were 128 households in temporary accommodation. This has been relatively constant over time, as table 2.4 illustrates.

The Council has a target of reducing the number of placements into temporary accommodation, included within its suite of performance indicators. At the end of 2004/05, the Council aims to have 105 placements in temporary accommodation (with none in B&B). Section 2.7 below provides further details.

Homelessness in North Herts

Table 2.4: Households in temporary accommodation

	2003/04				2004/05	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
B&B	6	2	0	0	0	0
Hostels	109	113	96	109	120	115
<i>(of which households with dependent children/pregnant)</i>	<i>109</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>88</i>
Women's refuge	3	0	1	0	0	1
RSL stock on AST	0	0	8	9	8	5
Total	118	115	105	118	128	121

2.6 National homelessness

Nationally, homelessness has continued to rise, increasing by 5% between 2002/03 and 2003/4. This contrasts with the picture in North Herts, where there has been a fall in acceptances of almost 20% over the same period.

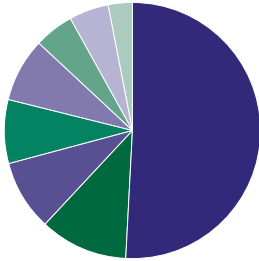
In terms of the characteristics of households in priority need, households with dependent children dominate the picture, as in North Herts. However, it remains notable that the proportion of households accepted due to pregnancy is much higher in North Herts than nationally, at 22% compared to 11%. The chart below illustrates.

Graph 2.5 furthermore suggests that the incidence of parental eviction is significantly higher in North Herts than nationally (38% compared to 22% of cases). Homelessness as a result of violence is proportionately lower in the district (8% compared to 13% of cases). With these exceptions, North Herts otherwise appears to mirror the national picture.

Section 2

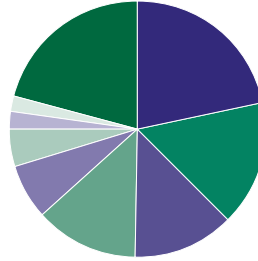
Homelessness in North Herts

Graph 2.4: Characteristics of households in priority need 2003/04 (England)



- 51% Dependent children
- 11% Pregnant
- 9% Mental illness
- 8% Young person
- 8% Other vulnerable
- 5% Domestic violence
- 5% Physical disability
- 3% Old age

Graph 2.5: Reasons for homelessness 2003/04 (England)



- 22% Parental eviction
- 16% Friends/relatives unable to house
- 13% End of AST
- 13% Violence
- 7% Relationship breakdown (non violent)
- 5% Other loss of tied/rented accommodation
- 2% Mortgage arrears
- 2% Rent arrears
- 21% All other

2.7 Performance indicators

As part of the Council's performance management system, the Council collects a number of performance indicators. This enables us to set and achieve challenging targets to improve the performance of our services.

Table 2.5 overleaf provides information on the key indicators relating to homelessness.

Section 2

Homelessness in North Herts

Table 2.5: Performance indicators relating to homelessness

Performance Indicator	Actual 2002/03	Actual 2003/04	Target 2004/05	April 04 - June 04	April 04- Sept 04
BV183* Average length of stay in: i) B&B accommodation ii) hostel accommodation of households with dependent children/pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need	3 wks 31 wks	3 wks 41 wks	0 wks 40 wks	0 wks 54 wks	0 wks 50.5 wks
BV202 No of people sleeping rough on a single night within the local authority	New for 2004/05		0	0	0
BV203 % change in average no. of families with dependent children/pregnant woman placed in temp. accomm. under the homelessness legislation, compared with the average from previous year	New for 2004/05		6.3%	3.1%	4.8%
H1a No of placements made into: i) B&B ii) other temporary accomm.		26 99	0 110	0 32	0 59
H1b No of placements at period end: i) B&B ii) other temporary accomm.		0 118	0 105	0 128	0 121
H2 % applications to the housing register receiving a decision within 5 working days once all info is received		98%	80%	95%	89%
H4 Homeless decisions made within 33 days	New for 2003/04	83.9%	90%+	84%	85%
% nominations made within 3 working days	New for 2004/05		95%+	92%	90%

Strategy aims and objectives

***Note: An action plan has been produced for BV183 to help to improve the current performance. This includes closer monitoring of rent arrears of those in temporary accommodation, early intervention for those tenants involved in tenancy management problems, targeting of those in temporary accommodation the longest, implementation of the new common housing register and possible surgeries in hostels offering advice on other possible areas for housing.**

3.1 Overview

The Homelessness Strategy has three key aims:

- ▶ to prevent homelessness;
- ▶ to provide a safety net for those people who do become homeless; and
- ▶ to increase supply and access to affordable housing.

This section details our progress in meeting our aims and objectives. A summary action plan is provided in Appendix 2.

3.2 Preventing Homelessness

We have improved the provision of housing advice by successfully producing the teachers' resource pack as well as developing mediation schemes with Herts Young Homeless Group (HYHG) and Relate. These are available for young people and families and enable some of them to remain in their homes. The teachers' resource pack also reaches those who live in rural areas.

Floating support has also been provided to help clients sustain tenancies by HYHG, to support young people, St Pancras and Humanist housing association to help those with learning difficulties and Hightown Praetorian to assist those with poor mental health.

This strategy also seeks to improve joint working with its partners, especially social services. Joint training days have been undertaken to agree protocols on managing the housing needs of 16/17 year olds and those who are suffering from poor mental health.

We have also secured finance from the ODPM to fund a court caseworker to provide advice for those who face possession proceedings.

We have also undertaken a rough sleepers count that did not find anyone, however we are mindful of the nature of homelessness situations and will monitor this situation.

3.3 Providing a safety net

We have built up good working relationships with many social landlords to ensure that we are able to access appropriate emergency housing for homeless clients. This includes securing further units from the private sector that are managed by Aldwyck Housing Association for our clients.

Section 3

Strategy aims and objectives

We have also produced a comprehensive staff procedure manual that ensures timely and consistent decision making, in line with best practice. There has also been regular training undertaken for all staff, providing updates in areas such as asylum and immigration regulations, money advice by the CAB and homelessness mediation schemes.

3.4 Increasing supply and access to affordable housing

In addition to an increased commitment to deliver almost 500 affordable homes over the next three years, we have reviewed the housing allocation policy to prioritise those who are, or will become, homeless. This means that clients are able to access settled permanent accommodation without being made homeless.

We have also relaunched the cash incentive scheme that has freed up over ten family homes for those in housing need, over the past 12 months.

In the last year, we have also signed up for the LAWN initiative, which means that we are able to refer interested clients to low demand areas in other parts of the country.

The empty homes strategy has also been completed and will enable further homes to be brought back into use.

We are also in the process of implementing a new housing computer system that will help us collect clear and concise data. This will help us to monitor our decision making more closely, allow the performance of the section to be reviewed more comprehensively as well as providing the tools for more in depth analysis on the three main aims of the strategy.

We are also due to launch a Common Housing Register for North Hertfordshire with the two biggest social landlords in the district, North Hertfordshire Homes and the Howard Cottage Society. This will make access to affordable housing easier for applicants and we hope that this will help those who are experiencing housing difficulties and could eventually be threatened with homelessness.

Appendix 1

August 2004 Consultation Event

A half-day consultation event was held in August 2004 to review the progress of the Homelessness Strategy and to discuss possible areas for future improvement.

The following organisations attended the event:

- ▶ Herts Young Homeless Group
- ▶ Hertfordshire County Council
- ▶ Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association
- ▶ Howard Cottage Society
- ▶ Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
- ▶ North Herts Homes
- ▶ North Herts Sanctuary
- ▶ North Herts & District Citizens Advice Bureau
- ▶ Relate (North Herts & Stevenage)
- ▶ Stevenage Haven
- ▶ Shelter Hertfordshire

Notes from the discussion sessions are as follows.

Aim 1 Preventing homelessness

Mediation

1. Early intervention required - liaise with households through RSLs. Housing officers need to notify housing advice sections of possible problems.
2. Relate initiatives in the pipeline to negotiate possibilities of 'homeless at home'.
3. Monitor 16/17 year-olds who have been accommodated vs those who haven't. Research would track the two cohorts to compare outcomes (e.g. whether they return home).
4. Pressure/incentive for mediation disappears once people are housed in temporary accommodation. Possibility of extending the mediation service?
5. Consider mediation after separation has taken place to see if reconciliation possible. Would need to make this advantageous to participants e.g. would gain priority on housing register.

Teachers' resource pack

6. Ensure educational value is targeted at appropriate groups e.g. care leavers.
7. Take the service to schools - both the resource pack and through greater involvement of NHDC.
8. Greater NHDC involvement could assist in promoting the reality of homelessness and imparting information on contacts for and routes to different agencies.
9. Deliver the service to a younger audience.
10. Share resources between agencies and other local authorities to promote services.

August 2004 Consultation Event

Court caseworker

11. Availability/continuity of service at risk if there is only one allocated caseworker - will be times when (s)he is unavailable.
12. Needs to be promoted.
13. Information needs to be made available earlier.
14. Look at the capacity the caseworker could handle vs likely numbers to be seen.

General comments

15. Support to sustain tenancies - late intervention an issue, perhaps due to chaotic lifestyles or because individuals are unaware of service.
16. Care leavers have complex needs - need to look to work ahead (6 months) at accommodation needs.
17. More robust monitoring of repeat homelessness required and need to extend single homelessness monitoring beyond young people. Need greater understanding of the extent of homelessness - e.g. North Herts Sanctuary's figures not consistent with NHDC's.
18. Similarly, need better handle on extent of rough sleeping so can respond appropriately, prioritise resources. This group is transient and difficult to assess as outside of official systems. Definition is restrictive e.g. issue of 'sofa surfers', 'roofless'.
19. Need to request information from DWP - identify those of no fixed abode.
20. Address perceptions of homelessness:
 - ▶ Public perceptions of homelessness - publicise issues generally.
 - ▶ Perceptions of local authority - our accessibility, responsibilities. Hold 'surgeries' in hostels to address people's concerns (e.g. view that it is not worth applying).
21. Seek agreement from RSLs and private landlords to reduce evictions (Ground 8 of 1988 Housing Act). Requires co-operation with floating support.
22. Need to consider the wider picture with regard rent arrears. Staff training required to address attitudes (which are a product of RSL organisation, target setting etc).
23. Need to reinforce protocol regarding intentionally homeless families (CSF protocol).
24. More joint working between local authority and agencies (e.g. CAB, Relate) to ensure seamless service to client.
25. Similarly, within organisations - areas of conflicting priorities need to be open to challenge.

August 2004 Consultation Event

Aim 2 Providing a safety net

Floating support

1. Look at developing wider, generic floating support scheme available to all in times of crisis.
2. Resources an issue - Herts Young Homeless Group have a large caseload (resourcing issue and how to reduce caseload).
3. St Pancras & Humanist HA provide support for people with learning disabilities; Hightown Praetorian & Churches HA support for those with mental health issues.
4. Some client groups can be difficult for front line staff to diagnose. Some may fall through the net, more awareness required.
5. Needs to be more accessible.
6. More information to front line workers so they can pass on to clients.
7. Delay in access to correct support.
8. Concerns over 16/17 year-olds' move on to permanent housing. (Life housing).

Temporary accommodation

9. Review geographical provision. Currently concentrated in certain areas, particularly Hitchin. Consider other areas where TA required.
10. Greater specialism required. 15 proposed units for mental health clients in Hitchin.
11. 'Move on' strategy from supported housing.

General comments

12. Confirm agencies which can provide support (e.g. for young people, those with mental health issues etc).
13. Again, more joined up working between agencies. Individuals' needs and whether/how they have been addressed should be recorded to ensure no duplication/conflicting actions by different agencies.
14. 'Tap into' spare support capacity and direct funding to capitalise on opportunities.
15. Better communication especially of support requirements.
16. 16/17 year-olds have more complex needs - different forms of accommodation - which need to be co-ordinated by a key worker.
17. More support for families (Relate). Improved ability to engage with young families (losing people going into temporary accommodation).
18. The Homelessness Forum is valuable - provides networks, promotes good advice, uses skills of other organisations. More work like this needed.
19. More groups need to be involved with Herts Young Homeless Group e.g. probation, NCH - leaving care, people involved in ASBOs.
20. Greater range of accommodation required for particular lifestyles.
21. More 'day' activities and support for those with drug/alcohol problems.
22. Support plan crucial to 'move on' e.g. Nightshelter.

Appendix 1

August 2004 Consultation Event

Aim 3 Increasing supply and access to affordable housing

1. Common Housing Register - if non-priority 'Band D' individuals are in temporary accommodation for longer, this will result in less move on in accommodation.
2. More provision of affordable housing for non-priority under 25 year-olds. Concerns that in order to sustain tenancy, may not be able to afford to work.
3. Develop private rented sector for under 25 year -olds e.g. single rooms.
4. Develop a landlords forum. Encourage landlords to take on clients such as those on Housing Benefit.
5. Consider how well the strategy stands up in the face of what the housing market is actually doing - size of the private rented sector (landlords selling up)?
6. Common theme - need access to information on services available so can refer etc.
7. Rent deposit scheme important. This will help free up accommodation.
8. Affordability an issue - deposits are usually 1 months' rent +. Could financial assistance with this be provided?
9. Foster families (about 800-1,000 individuals in care) have changing accommodation needs - rights of accommodation.

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

No.	Action	Progress	Deadline	Status
Aim 1: Preventing homelessness				
1.1	Produce Homelessness Strategy	Completed		
1.2	Implement learning difficulties floating support scheme with St Pancras & Humanist HA	Completed		
1.3	Implement floating support scheme for young people	Completed		
1.4	Implement crashpad mediation scheme for young homeless people	Completed		
1.5	Employ worker to co-ordinate joint working initiatives	Completed		
1.6	Produce teachers' resource pack	Completed		
1.7	To work with RSLs to reduce eviction of vulnerable households	Ongoing	April 2005	
1.8	Develop strategy with RSLs to reduce the level of evictions for rent arrears – early intervention, mediation, independent advice and debt resolution.	Ongoing	April 2006	
1.9	Fund Drug Action & Homelessness Co-ordinator at Herts County Council	Completed		
1.10	Improve access to advice services in rural areas	Completed		
1.11	Convene a Homelessness Forum to monitor implement of the Homelessness Strategy	Completed		
1.12	Support teachers in use of resource pack	Ongoing	Oct 2005	
1.13	Implement Court Caseworker project	Ongoing	Jan 2005	

Appendix 2

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

No.	Action	Progress	Deadline	Status
Aim 2: Providing a safety net				
2.1	Develop a comprehensive homelessness procedure manual	Completed		
2.2	Design a training programme for Housing Needs staff and other agencies to include money advice advocacy	Completed		
2.3	Carry out rough sleepers count	Completed		
2.4	Extend joint protocol to clients with learning difficulties, physical difficulties and substance abusers	Ongoing - physical difficulties outstanding	April 2005	
2.5	Implement the changes to temporary accommodation provision	Ongoing	2008/09	
2.6	All applications, even those by phone, are recorded on the computer and analysed	Ongoing	April 2005	
2.7	Develop directory of supported housing in the district	Ongoing	April 2005	
2.8	Set up systems to identify repeat homelessness applications	Ongoing	April 2005	
2.9	Set up a system to record the extent of rough sleeping in the district	Ongoing	April 2005	
Aim 3: Increasing supply and access to affordable housing				
3.1	Re-launch cash incentive scheme according to new government guidelines	Completed		
3.2	Increase the supply of affordable housing	Ongoing		
3.3	Revise the allocation scheme	Completed		
3.4	Implement an under-occupation strategy	Ongoing	June 2005	
3.5	Improve access to housing outside the district	Ongoing	June 2005	
3.6	Update and promote the lodgings register	Completed		
3.7	Develop and implement an empty homes strategy	Completed		
3.8	Reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation, in line with the targets in performance indicator (H1(b))	Ongoing	April 2005	

Contact Details

If you have any queries about specific issues, or any of the priorities for action, you may contact the officers listed below directly:

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The Homelessness Strategy can also be downloaded from the Housing Services section of our website at:

www.north-herts.gov.uk