



**Stevenage Borough Council
and
North Hertfordshire District
Council Homelessness
Strategy 2008 - 2013**

Foreword

Welcome to the joint Homelessness Strategy for North Hertfordshire and Stevenage.

Although production of a Homelessness Strategy is a statutory duty for all local authorities, we welcome this opportunity to outline our joint approach to preventing homelessness, providing advice and support services to those who need housing assistance and reducing the numbers who reside in temporary accommodation.

Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils have a long history of partnership working in the area of homelessness and work closely with a number of organisations in the area in providing joint services to assist those at risk of homelessness. Producing this Homelessness Strategy in partnership is a natural progression in joint working and reinforces the positive working relationship between both local authorities and other key partners that will ensure that we continue to provide high quality services.

The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum has contributed to the production of this strategy and their continued participation is vital as they will oversee the delivery of the tasks in the action plan. Their role includes driving through the measures that will ensure continuous improvement in the provision and delivery of housing advice and homelessness services for local residents.

The Homelessness Strategy is a key element in meeting North Hertfordshire District Council's vision of "*Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper*" and Stevenage Borough Council's vision of "*A town we can be proud of, a place people want to be*". As Portfolio Holders for Housing for our respective authorities, we are both pleased and proud to present the Stevenage Borough Council and North Hertfordshire District Council Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013.

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1. Introduction

The Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Homelessness Strategy has been developed to meet the statutory requirements under the Homelessness Act 2002. The document defines the strategic approach for 2008-2013 and replaces the previous Homelessness Strategies 2003-2008. Although this document spans five years, the action plan will be reviewed and published annually.

The strategy sets out the plan to tackle homelessness in the districts and has been developed by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum and representatives from Stevenage Borough Council and North Hertfordshire District Council.

A Homelessness Consultation Event was held in November 2007 to look at the causes of homelessness and to review existing homelessness services. It was attended by key partners, stakeholders and service users and their views have helped to identify the priorities contained in this document.

2. The Vision and Priorities for North Hertfordshire and Stevenage

Both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have developed strategic visions that encompass the priorities for their areas.

The strategic vision for North Hertfordshire is;

Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper

This vision was developed by the Local Strategic Partnership and is supported by a mission statement and six strategic objectives which sets out how the Council will deliver on the vision.

The Council's mission statement, ***to work collaboratively with our partners to deliver the vision***, acknowledges that the vision can only be delivered through partnership working.

The vision for North Hertfordshire and the Council's mission statement are brought together with a set of six strategic objectives;

- **Sustainable communities** – to promote sustainable development of the district to ensure we deliver adequate affordable housing, protect the environment and conserve the heritage of our historic settlements.
- **Safer Communities** – to encourage responsible citizenship and to create safer communities with less crime and less fear of crime.
- **Healthier Communities** – to promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens.
- **Equal Communities** – to target resources at areas of disadvantage in the district to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone.
- **Prosperous Communities** – to create opportunity for all by promoting sustainable economic development.
- **Satisfied Communities** – to ensure that we listen to our citizens and deliver responsive, high quality, value for money, customer-focused services.

From 2009 onwards the Council will focus on the delivery of three key themes that have been identified by Councillors as high priority, these are:

- **Town centres** – to include the delivery of the town centre strategies, support to our town centre partnerships and preserving/enhancing the street scene;
- **Sustainable development** – challenging development within our green belt and ensuring that any development which does take place is sustainable in the long term;
- **Green issues** – to include development of our climate change strategy, retention and enhancement of green spaces and increasing recycling facilities.

The new themes of Town Centres, Sustainable Development and Green Issues will be monitored from their introduction in 2009. Any subsequent tasks that need to be delivered through the Homelessness Strategy will be incorporated into the annual review of the Action Plan.

The strategic vision for Stevenage is;

A town that is prosperous, healthy, clean, green and safe. We want Stevenage to be a town with a strong sense of community in which people are proud to live, work, visit and do business. We want Stevenage to grow in a sustainable way and to be an important regional centre looking ahead and building on its new town heritage.

The priorities for Stevenage are set out in the So Stevenage Community Strategy 2021;

- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Economy, Enterprise and the Environment

The vision and priorities reflect what local people say is important to them and have been developed by the Local Strategic Partnership.

Stevenage Borough Council has adopted a framework of values to ensure that it continues to provide high quality services, and to show its commitment to working with the Local Strategic Partnership;

- ✓ ***Putting people first***
- ✓ ***Delivering value for money*** services, and
- ✓ ***Working together*** both as one organisation and in partnership with other agencies as appropriate.

The Council's ambitions and priorities reflect what is important to our local people. In developing these priorities, Stevenage Borough Council has considered national, regional and local policies relating to education, health, crime and disorder, the economy and the environment.

Ambition	Priorities
Shape our Community	Encourage Community Involvement
	Bring Communities Together
	Improve the image of Stevenage
Regenerate Stevenage	Have a growing town and economy
	Develop a modern, vibrant town centre
	Revitalise Neighbourhood Centres
Create Sustainable Communities	Provide quality, affordable housing
	Keep the town safe
	Focus on neighbourhoods
	Maintain a clean and green environment
	Help provide leisure and health services
Move towards Excellence	Use resources effectively
	Maintain customer focus
	Promote equality

The Homelessness Strategy contributes to the delivery of the vision for both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. The set of strategic objectives and ambitions outline the priorities for each council and the Homelessness Strategy will contribute generally to all areas. In addition to this, many of the tasks contained in the action plan contribute to one, or more, of the strategic objectives and priorities directly.

3. Joint Homelessness Priorities

The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will manage the implementation of the actions contained in this strategy, and their vision is as follows :

“The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum’s Vision is to develop modern, accessible and cost effective services that will provide information on housing options, deliver support to those who need it and help to prevent homelessness”.

The six homelessness priorities that emerged from consultation are:

- **Prevention of Homelessness**

To ensure a joint working approach to prevent homelessness and provide good quality advice about alternative housing options

- **Tackling Youth Homelessness**

To provide good quality specialist housing advice and homelessness services for young people

- **Single People and Vulnerable Groups**

To ensure the provision of effective advice and assistance for those who need support in identifying housing solutions

- **Reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation**

To maximise the opportunity for homeless households to access settled accommodation

- **Partnership Working**

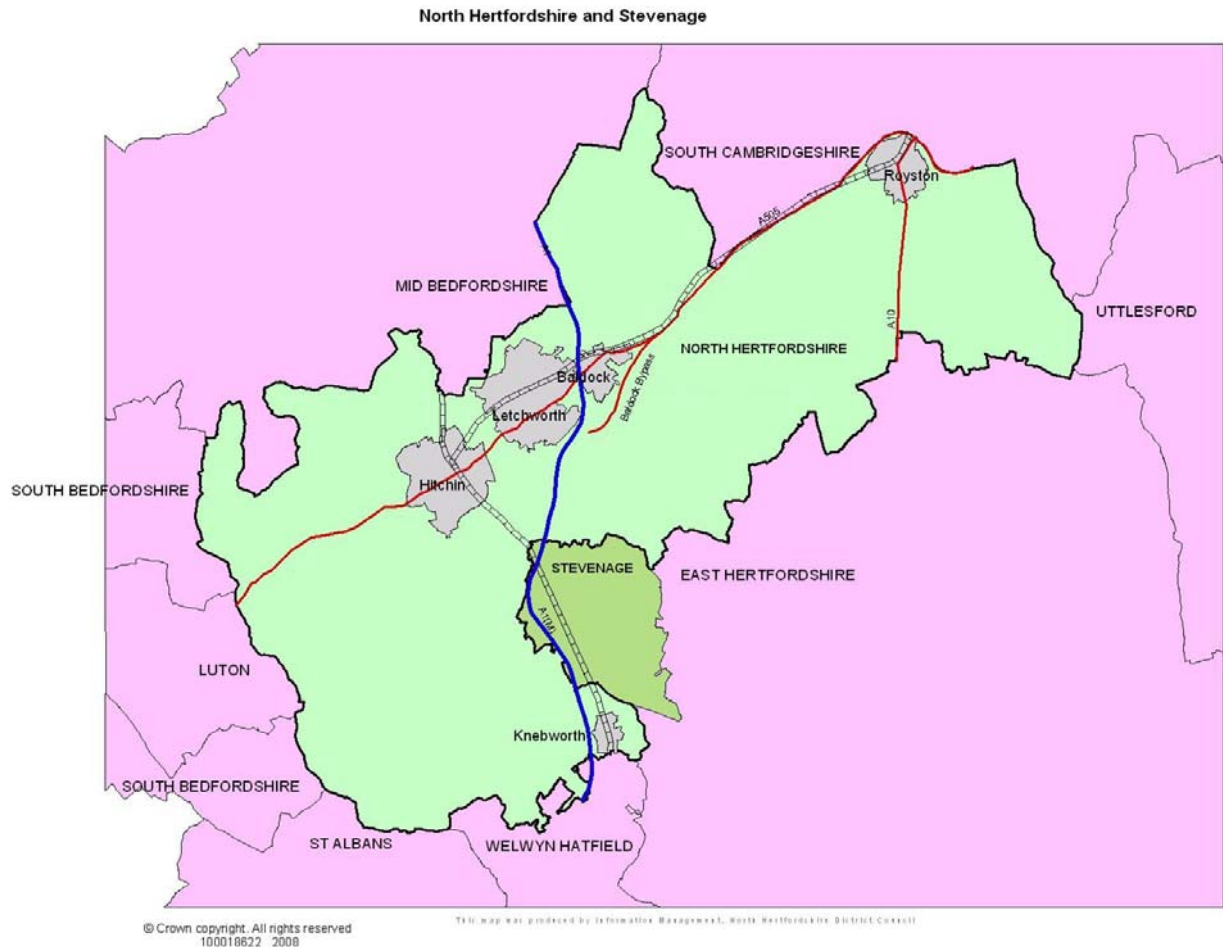
The members of the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will seek to develop appropriate partnerships in order to deliver high quality services that offer value for money

- **Continuous Improvement**

The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will monitor the performance of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, identify areas for improvement and oversee the delivery of enhanced services

4. Local Profiles

There are ten local authorities in Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Stevenage occupy the northernmost extreme of the County.



North Hertfordshire and Stevenage are situated approximately 30 miles north of London off the A1 (M). Good transport links to London make both areas an attractive location for commuters.

North Hertfordshire encompasses both urban and rural environments. There are four urban areas, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and 33 rural parishes. In total the district covers over 375 square kilometres and has boundaries with ten other local authority areas.

There are about 121,000 people living in 52,000 households within the district. The population of the district is both growing and ageing. It is estimated that the number of people residing in North Hertfordshire will rise by 14,300 between 2006 and 2021. Of this growth, 40% will be over 65 years of age and only 11% below the age of 30.

Stevenage is a compact urban area, with residential areas centred around seven original neighbourhoods. Stevenage has a population of approximately 80,000 people. The population of Stevenage is forecast to increase by 5.5% between 2001 and 2009, one of the highest growth rates in Hertfordshire. It has the highest number of people living in social housing in Hertfordshire.

The tenure profile in both Stevenage and North Hertfordshire has changed significantly in the last ten years. There are more owner occupied properties in 2007 compared to 1997. This is due to the decline in the production of social rented housing, the exercising of the Right to Buy and the construction of new homes in large estates by private developers, for example in Great Ashby.

Around 19.4% of the homes in North Hertfordshire and approximately 29.9 % of the homes in Stevenage are in the social sector, which is high compared with the East of England average 15.7% and 18.1% in England overall¹. Table 1 illustrates the tenure profile and makes comparisons with the East of England Region.

Table 1 – Tenure profile of Stevenage and North Hertfordshire
Source: Hometrack Housing Intelligence System 2008

Tenure	Stevenage Borough (%)	Relative to the East of England Region (%)	North Hertfordshire District (%)	Relative to the East of England Region (%)
Owens outright	18.40%	12.30%	26.50%	-4.10%
Owens with a mortgage or loan	44.10%	2.50%	41.30%	-0.30%
Shared ownership	0.80%	0.20%	0.50%	0.00%
Private rented - landlord or letting agency	4.30%	-3.30%	7.20%	-0.40%
Private rented – employer	0.10%	-0.30%	0.20%	-0.10%
Private rented - friend or relative	0.40%	-0.20%	0.50%	-0.10%
Social Rented	27.60%	16.00%	17.50%	5.90%
Other social rented	3.40%	-1.50%	4.50%	-0.40%
Living rent free	1.10%	-0.90%	1.60%	-0.40%
Other	0.10%	-0.30%	0.20%	-0.10%
Total	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%

¹ ONS: Dwelling Stock by Tenure and Condition April 2006

5. The context in which we work

There are many influencing factors on the provision of local housing advice and homelessness services.

The national context of homelessness

Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All: The Way Forward for Housing²(December 2000) sets out the role of local authorities as a strategic housing enabler for affordable housing and a key influencer in decisions with a direct role in the building of new homes where it provides value for money.

The Homelessness Act 2002³ placed a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of their homelessness services and publish their first homelessness strategy by July 2003. Local authorities are required to review their homelessness strategies within five years.

The Government launched the Supporting People Programme in 2003⁴. The aim of the programme is to provide a better quality of life for vulnerable people to live more independently and maintain their tenancies to prevent homelessness, institutional care and hospitalisation. It provides housing related support services to over 1.2 million vulnerable people. It is delivered locally and has the following objectives:

- A programme that delivers quality of life and promotes independence.
- Services that are of high quality, strategically planned, cost effective and complement existing care services.
- The planning and development of services is 'needs led'.
- A working partnership of local government, probation, health, voluntary sector organisations, housing associations, support agencies and service users.

'More than a roof – a report into tackling homelessness'⁵(March 2003), set out the Government's commitment to work with local authorities, public bodies and voluntary sector organisations to prevent homelessness.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children⁶(2004), is an approach adopted by the Government centred around the well-being of children and young people from birth to the age of 19. This requires all organisations providing services to children and young people to work together to protect them from harm and help them achieve what they want in life.

Plans to tackle homelessness are also outlined in the Government's strategy Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (January 2005)⁷. The strategy aims to develop more affordable homes and raise the standards of accommodation in the private sector.

² www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/qualitychoice2

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020007_en_1

⁴ www.spkweb.org.uk

⁵ www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/morethan

⁶ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/

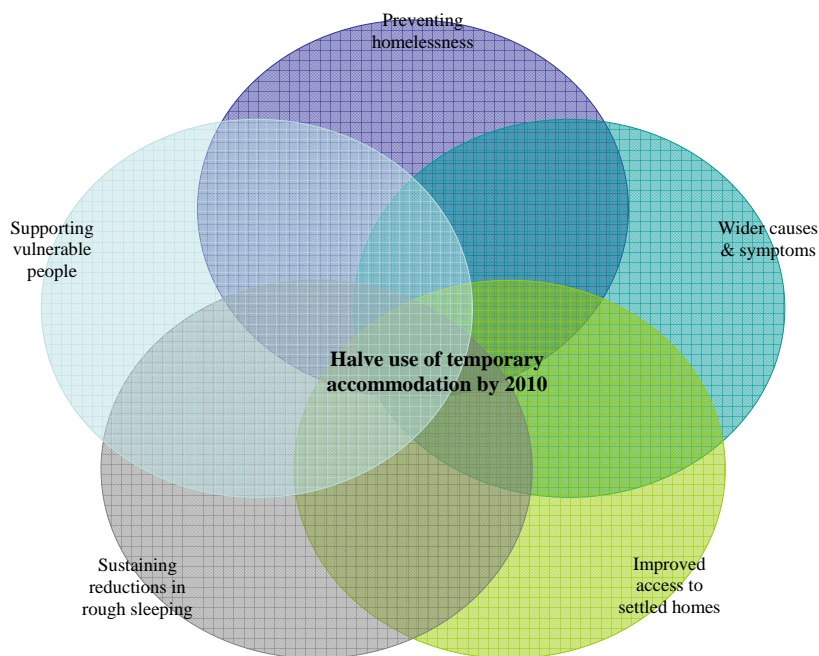
⁷ www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/homes-for-all

The Government published its strategy for tackling homelessness in 2005: Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives⁸. The strategy aims to expand housing opportunities for disadvantaged sections of society. It aims to reduce homelessness by offering preventative measures and increasing access to settled homes. The key objective of the strategy is to halve the numbers in temporary accommodation by 2010 by:

- Preventing Homelessness
- Providing Support for Vulnerable People
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping
- Providing more settled homes

Figure 1 illustrates the Government's five year strategy to reduce homelessness.

Figure 1:
The Government's five year strategy to reduce homelessness



⁸ www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/137815

The regional context of homelessness

Stevenage and North Hertfordshire form part of the East of England Region which includes East Anglia, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

The East of England Regional Assembly published its Housing Strategy in 2005⁹. The strategy outlines options for targeting housing need and homelessness, including:

- Providing a larger stock of affordable housing
- Increasing access to the private rented sector to provide temporary accommodation
- Using the two points above in combination with a policy option to develop more preventative measures for those threatened with homelessness.

The Government Office for the East of England, has also published their priorities in their East of England Housing Strategy, 2005 – 2010¹⁰.

The Government Office has also developed a Regional Homelessness Action Plan¹¹ which identifies key priorities and deliverable actions. The key priorities are derived from the region and focus on the main causes of homelessness:

- Parental Eviction
- Eviction by families and friends
- Termination of assured shorthold tenancies
- Violent relationship breakdown

The sub-regional context of homelessness

The Region is further divided into a sub-region, Stevenage and North Hertfordshire are part of the 'London Commuter Belt' (LCB). The LCB comprises of fifteen district councils. We share the view that:

- London has an impact on local homelessness
- The average cost of housing has continued to increase
- The number of people seeking homeless and housing advice has increased
- Joint working in the sub-region has a significant positive impact on tackling homelessness

The LCB authorities identify, share and promote good practice within the group. The LCB groups are divided into specialist areas which comprise of homelessness, strategic housing and development. They also look for opportunities to pool resources for economically effective solutions to commonly identified issues.

The county context of homelessness

The Homelessness Strategy will inform and contribute to the aims and objectives of several countywide strategies and plans.

⁹ www.eera.gov.uk/category.asp?cat=461

¹⁰ www.go-east.gov.uk/goeast/people_and_sustainable_comm/housing/housing_policy/?a=42496

¹¹ www.go-east.gov.uk/goeast/people_and_sustainable_comm/housing/helping_communities/475550/

The Hertfordshire Community Strategy; Hertfordshire 2021: A Brighter Future¹² encompasses all key agencies in the County with an interest in improving the quality of life and well being of local people. The strategy has identified a number of key areas, one of which is 'safer and stronger communities' this theme contains priorities such as 'encourage more cohesive communities'. The strategic objectives of the Homelessness Strategy are consistent with many of the priorities of the Hertfordshire Community Strategy.

The Local Area Agreement 1 (LAA) 2006-2009 is a countywide agreement between the local area and central government that lasts three years. It sets out the core priorities for the area to be delivered through a partnership approach that avoids duplicating or conflicting targets. The LAA is a delivery mechanism for the Hertfordshire Community Strategy, it is structured around four themes:

- Economic development and enterprise
- Children and young people
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthy communities and older people

The LAA 2 will be adopted in June 2008. However, Hertfordshire local authorities will continue to meet the targets of the LAA1 until April 2009 when LAA2 will be implemented. The Homelessness Strategy contributes to several areas including the Healthy Communities and Older People priority of "reducing the number of people aged 16-25 who leave Supporting People funded schemes in an unplanned way".

The Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 2007-2012¹³ provides a framework for the development and delivery of housing related support services for local people. The strategy recognises that vulnerable people, including the homeless, require support to achieve and maintain independent living.

The Supporting People Programme plays a central role in tackling homelessness. Its primary purpose, as defined by central government, is to:

Offer vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence.

By preventing homelessness and enabling people to live as independently as possible, the Supporting People programme contributes to making communities more stable and settled.

The local context of homelessness

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have developed local strategies that will inform and contribute to the aims and objectives of the Homelessness Strategy.

Both local authorities have produced Community Strategies:

¹² www.hertslink.org/hertfordshireforward

¹³ www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/SPpart2.pdf

- Stevenage Community Strategy, Stevenage 2021 – Our town – our future¹⁴
- Sustainable Community Strategy for North Hertfordshire (currently out for consultation)¹⁵

The Homelessness Strategy reflects and contributes to the delivery of the separate Community Strategies. They set out the long-term vision for each district. Each Community Strategy states how the Council will meet its objective of creating a sustainable community by addressing economic, social and environmental needs through the Local Strategic Partnerships.

Some of the measures identified in the respective Community Strategies will be delivered through the Local Area Agreement.

- The North Hertfordshire Housing Strategy 2008-13¹⁶

The draft Housing Strategy 2008 – 2013 for North Hertfordshire is currently out for consultation. The Council's vision for housing is:

To meet the community's needs for decent, high quality, affordable homes

The aim is to deliver sustainable housing solutions by making the most of new developments and of current stock.

The North Hertfordshire Housing Strategy identifies key local housing issues and establishes six strategic priorities for housing:

- To work towards balancing local housing markets;
- To create sustainable communities;
- To improve access to, and choice, in housing;
- To provide dwellings suitable for the diverse needs of the community;
- To maintain and improve the quality of current stock; and
- To protect the environment.

The final version will incorporate an action plan for delivering these priorities

- Stevenage Housing Strategy 2005 – 2010¹⁷

The Housing Strategy is due to be reviewed. It currently sets out the how Stevenage Borough Council plans to meet local housing need. It includes the improvement of support services for both vulnerable and homeless people.

The Homelessness Strategy and its action plan will enable the improvement of these support services. This will involve joint delivery with the Supporting People Programme.

¹⁴ www.stevenage.gov.uk/townandcommunity/sostevenage/stevenagecommunitystrategy

¹⁵ www.north-herts.gov.uk

¹⁶ www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/living/housing_and_environmental_health_service/housing_services/housing_strategy.htm

¹⁷ www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/housingpolicyandstrategies/housingstrategy

- Stevenage Affordable Housing Strategy 2007¹⁸

Affordable housing is central to the need of homeless households. The Affordable Housing Strategy provides a framework for partnership working to deliver the Council's affordable housing programme over the next three years. The Strategy also sets out the current position facing Stevenage and details the affordable housing needs in the town. The Strategy complements the Council's Housing Strategy.

- Stevenage Social Inclusion Strategy 2007-10

An action area of the Social Inclusion Strategy is to support the development of sustainable communities. The aim of the strategy is to improve opportunities for people who experience disadvantage or discrimination and are at greater risk of social exclusion in Stevenage. The Homelessness Strategy and the Action Plan will help achieve the objectives of this strategy by providing support services through accommodation and advice to:

- Young People
- Women experiencing domestic violence
- Ex Offenders
- Single homeless and rough sleepers
- Stevenage Community Safety Rolling Plan 2008-11¹⁹
- The Community Safety Strategy for North Hertfordshire²⁰

Both strategies are currently out for consultation. One of the priorities in the Community Safety Strategies is to reduce violent crime in the home and the community by working together with partners and the community to reduce fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Violence and the fear of violence, domestic or otherwise, and anti-social behaviour can be a cause of homelessness. Measures included in the Community Safety Strategy will assist joint working on the prevention of homelessness.

One of the strategic priorities of the Homelessness Strategy is to provide adequate support for vulnerable groups. These include victims of domestic violence and ex-offenders. Through better housing support services to these groups, the homelessness strategy contributes directly to the strategic aims of the Community Safety Strategy, to build a safer community.

- The Corporate Plan, North Hertfordshire District Council 2005-2015²¹
- The Corporate Plan, Stevenage Borough Council, Making a Difference 2008-2013²²

¹⁸ www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/housingpolicyandstrategies/affordablehousingstrategy

¹⁹ www.stevenage.gov.uk/townandcommunity/communitysafetypartnership/communitysafety

²⁰ www.north-herts.gov.uk/cs_strategy_1_.pdf

²¹ www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/about_council/plans_and_objectives/corporate_plan.htm

²² www.stevenage.gov.uk/councilanddemocracy/planspoliciesandperformance

The Corporate Plans for North Hertfordshire and Stevenage are high level strategic documents that set out the ambitions and aspirations for each of the Councils up to 2015. They focus on what each Council will do to contribute to achieving the Local Strategic Partnership vision, which is:

To make North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper

To provide quality, affordable housing in Stevenage

Each Corporate Plan attaches a high priority to enabling more affordable housing which will give more choice to households in housing need.

- The Stevenage Local Development Framework²³
- The North Hertfordshire Local Development Framework²⁴

The individual Local Development Frameworks (LDF) for Stevenage and North Hertfordshire will set out each Council's planning policies and spatial vision for the District. It will also allocate land for housing and other land uses and provide detailed guidance on other planning related matters.

The LDF will be closely linked to the priorities identified in the Community Strategy. It sets out to maximise the amount of affordable housing provided through the planning system. It also encourages sufficient smaller and specialist accommodation to enable older people to downsize if they so wish. The LDF will therefore play a positive role in improving the housing options available.

²³ www.stevenage.gov.uk/planningandregeneration/planningregulationsandpolicy/ldf/localdevelopmentframework

²⁴ www.north-herts.gov.uk/planning/Local_Development_Framework

6. The local position

Background

The population in North Hertfordshire is becoming more ethnically diverse. The most recent estimate from 2005 is that 12.8%²⁵ of the population in the district belong to a minority ethnic background, rising from 8.1% in 2001. Local and national data indicates that most black and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately represented in lower income households²⁶ and are likely to suffer greater housing deprivation than white British households. People from BME groups make up 7% of the population of Great Britain. However the same groups constitute 22% of households accepted by local authorities as homeless and are therefore considerably over represented²⁷.

Stevenage has a lower percentage of BME residents, with approximately 5.4% of the population (2001 census) belonging to a minority ethnic group. This figure has increased significantly since the last census in 1991. In 2003 Stevenage Borough Council commissioned David Coultie Associates (DCA) to carry out a town-wide needs assessment. The study found that 74% of BME households who wished to move but could not, said they could not afford to move, compared to 63% for the whole of the population. The study found that BME households had a higher rate of overcrowding compared with the population as a whole.

Statistical information for the Gypsy and Traveller population is limited; data for this group was collected under the BME category in the 2001 UK Census of Population. Gypsies and Travellers in permanent dwellings are very difficult to identify because the housing waiting lists do not identify them as a separate ethnic group. In June 2006 Opinion Research Services undertook an assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Northern and Eastern Hertfordshire. The study found that there is a growing population of Gypsy and Travellers in Hertfordshire and that current Traveller sites have reached their full capacity²⁸.

In Stevenage, a significant number of people do not enjoy the same quality of life as many people do in the rest of Hertfordshire - poor health, lack of qualifications, low skills and low aspirations. The Stevenage teenage pregnancy rate was nearly double the Hertfordshire rate in 2004; there has been a reduction in recent years however it is still higher than the rest of Hertfordshire.

In comparison, North Hertfordshire is a prosperous area and is ranked among the top 20% of least deprived areas in England with some pockets of deprivation in large housing estates such as the Grange and the Jackmans in Letchworth Garden City and Westmill in Hitchin.

Table 2 details the average weekly gross incomes in comparison to the East of England Region. Although the average weekly incomes for both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage in 2006 are above the average for the East of England, house prices are significantly out of reach.

²⁵

www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=276994&c=north+hertfordshire&d=13&e=13&q=455064&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1211891895348&enc=1&dsFamilyId=1812

²⁶ DWP, Opportunity for All; 5th Annual Report 2003

²⁷ ODP, Housing and BME Communities: Review of the evidence base, number 180, 2003

²⁸ Northern and Eastern Hertfordshire: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment; Opinion Research Services June 2006

Table 2:
Average weekly gross incomes for the Eastern Region Stevenage and North Hertfordshire.

	East of England £ (GOR)	Stevenage £ (Borough)	North Hertfordshire £ (District)
2002	392.4	403	466
2003	410.1	402	463
2004	431.3	415	489.5
2005	442.3	431	501
2006	456.1	462.6	498.4

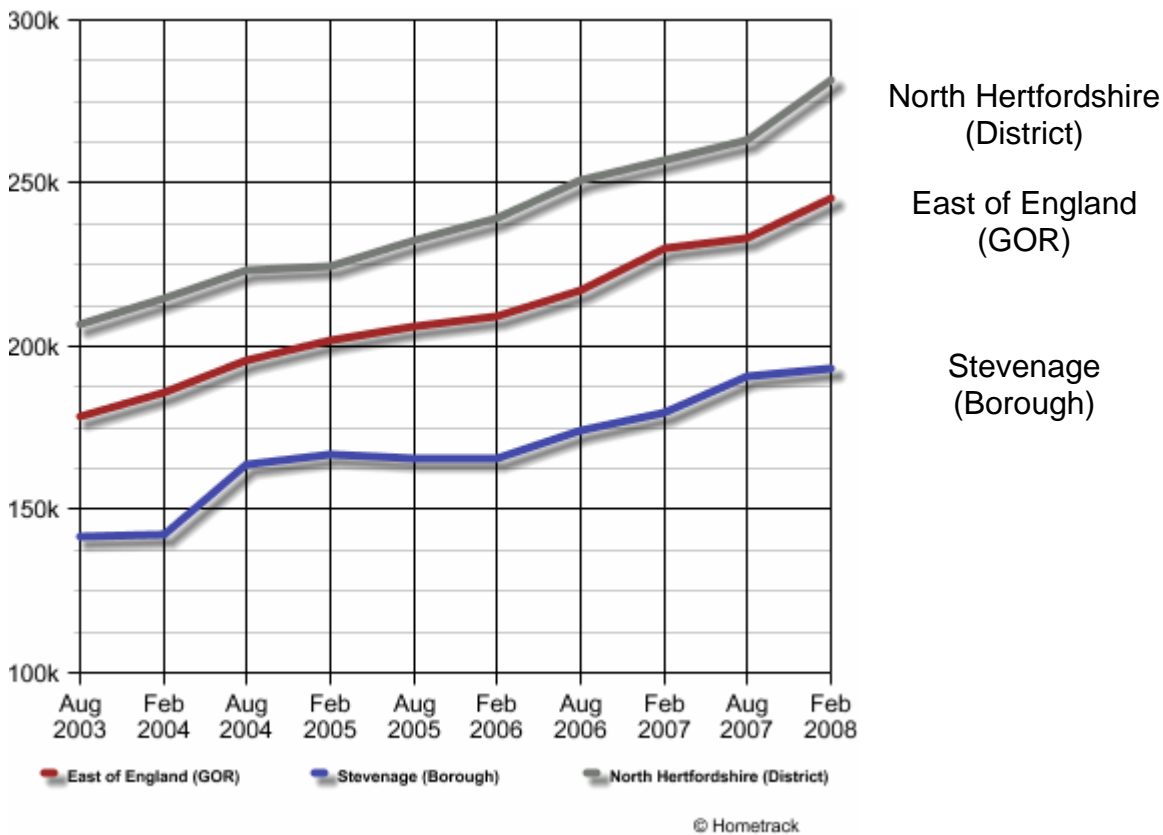
Source: Hometrack, Housing Intelligence System 2008

Note

The table shows the gross weekly pay of full time employees at local authority level using data from the latest Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. The data is displayed over time but due to the change in 2004 from the New Earnings Survey the data may not be directly comparable.

Housing for owner-occupation has become increasingly expensive over recent years. Figure 2 illustrates the steady rise in house prices from 2003 to February 2008 in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire in comparison with the Eastern Region.

**Figure 2:
Average House Prices August 2003 – February 2008**



Note

Based on Hometrack’s automated Valuation Model

In 2006, the average house price in Stevenage was £175,516 and £248,212 in North Hertfordshire²⁹. The average house price is therefore between 8.5 and 9.5 times the average annual income of residents in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire.

As a result of rising house prices the demand for affordable housing has risen. The number of households on the waiting lists has increased by 125% in North Hertfordshire and 33% in Stevenage between April 2005 and April 2007. Table 3 illustrates this point.

**Table 3:
Number of households on the Housing Register in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage**

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
North Hertfordshire District	852	1,220	1,923
Stevenage Borough	3,078	3,907	4,099

²⁹ Land Registry data, 2006

House prices are predicted to rise faster in the East of England than anywhere in the country over the next five years, estimating an increase of 52% by 2012. This coupled with the loss of social housing through the Right to Buy scheme and the predicted loss of owner-occupied homes caused by a rise in interest rates means that the pressure will grow on social housing³⁰. An increasing demand for affordable housing coupled with the reduction in supply has put a considerable strain on both local authorities. The future prospects are likely to be longer waiting lists, more overcrowding, more adult children unable to move from the parental homes and a rise in homelessness.

A more detailed analysis of the situation on housing need can be found in the:

- Stevenage Affordable Housing Strategy 2007³¹
- Stevenage Housing Strategy 2005 – 2010³²(currently under review)
- Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Housing Market Assessment (2008) (currently being finalised)
- North Hertfordshire Housing Strategy 2008-2013³³ (currently out to consultation)

Domestic Violence in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire

Domestic violence is usually committed by someone the victim will know well. This is often a partner or former partner, and the incidents occur in their own home, the very place they should feel safe. All too often these incidents happen in front of children.

Statistically, in their life times, 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence, and often victims will suffer over 30 incidents of abuse before they get help.

Both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage experience approaches from victims of domestic violence. Stevenage, both historically and at present, has an incidence of domestic violence which is higher than the National and County average. Last year over 1240 incidents of domestic violence were reported in Stevenage alone. Sadly domestic violence is a 'hidden' crime, as it takes place out of public view, but despite that, in Stevenage, it accounts for more than 1 in 5 of all offences of violence. In North Hertfordshire, 577 incidents of domestic violence were reported in the first six months of 2007/8.

Tackling domestic violence remains a priority for all agencies who deal with it. Those agencies include the Police, Stevenage Borough Council, Stevenage Homes Limited, North Hertfordshire District Council and their Housing Association partners including North Hertfordshire Homes, the

³⁰Hometruths, The real cost of housing 2007-2013, National Housing Federation

³¹www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/housingpolicyandstrategies/affordablehousingstrategy

³²www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/housingpolicyandstrategies/housingstrategy

³³www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/living/housing_and_environmental_health-service/housing_services.htm

Probation Service, Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Magistrates Courts, Hertfordshire County Council and members of the Domestic Violence Forum.

Both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage will work with victims of domestic violence to provide advice and support in order for them to decide on the most appropriate course of action. The possible response include:

- Legal remedies;
- Sanctuary scheme;
- Staying with family and friends;
- Finding private rented accommodation;
- A management transfer (Social housing tenants);
- Deposit guarantee scheme;
- Women's refuge;
- Making a homelessness application to North Hertfordshire District Council or Stevenage Borough Council, or elsewhere.

The area also has a well established support network in the private and voluntary sector, with Victim Support, the Domestic Violence telephone Help Line, Citizens Advice and the Stevenage Women Resource Centre.

The Stevenage Women's Aid offer refuge spaces in the area subject to availability, to help victims flee violence and gain advice and assistance in respect of perpetrators and family members.

Homelessness

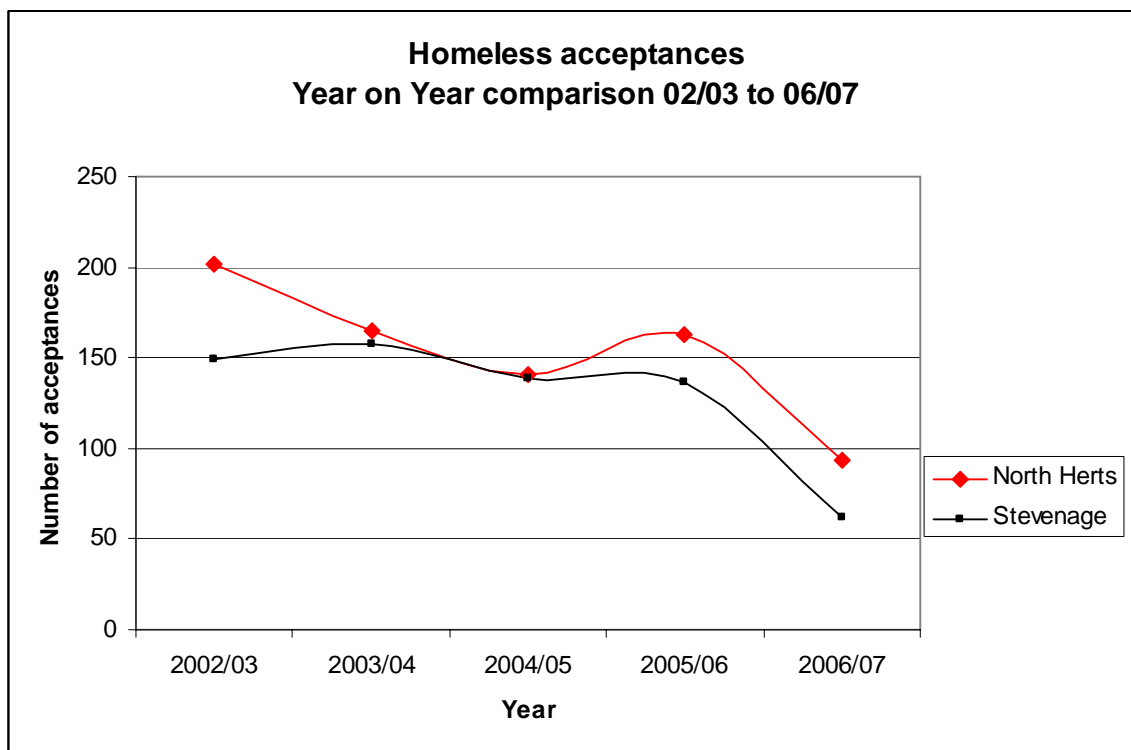
Changing patterns in housing need and economic factors both have an impact on homelessness. Stevenage has seen a rise in the number of mortgage repossession cases. This reflects the national trend over the last 12 months. The CAB is undertaking social policy work to uncover why Stevenage residents have been significantly affected. Although no robust data has yet been collated, both the CAB and the Housing Advice services believe that a second loan secured on the property is one of the determining factors leading to mortgage repossession.

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have been monitoring mortgage repossession cases over the last 12 months and will report their findings to the Sub-regional Homelessness Group and the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum to seek solutions.

Figure 3, details the number of households accepted as homeless from 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2007 in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. The table illustrates a significant reduction in the number of homelessness acceptances. In 2002/03 SBC accepted a total of 149 households as homeless, compared to 62 in 2006/07. This represents a decrease of 41% over the period in question. Over the same period NHDC, the number of households accepted reduced from 202 to 93, which represents a decrease of 46%.

Figure 3:
The number of households accepted as homeless in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage

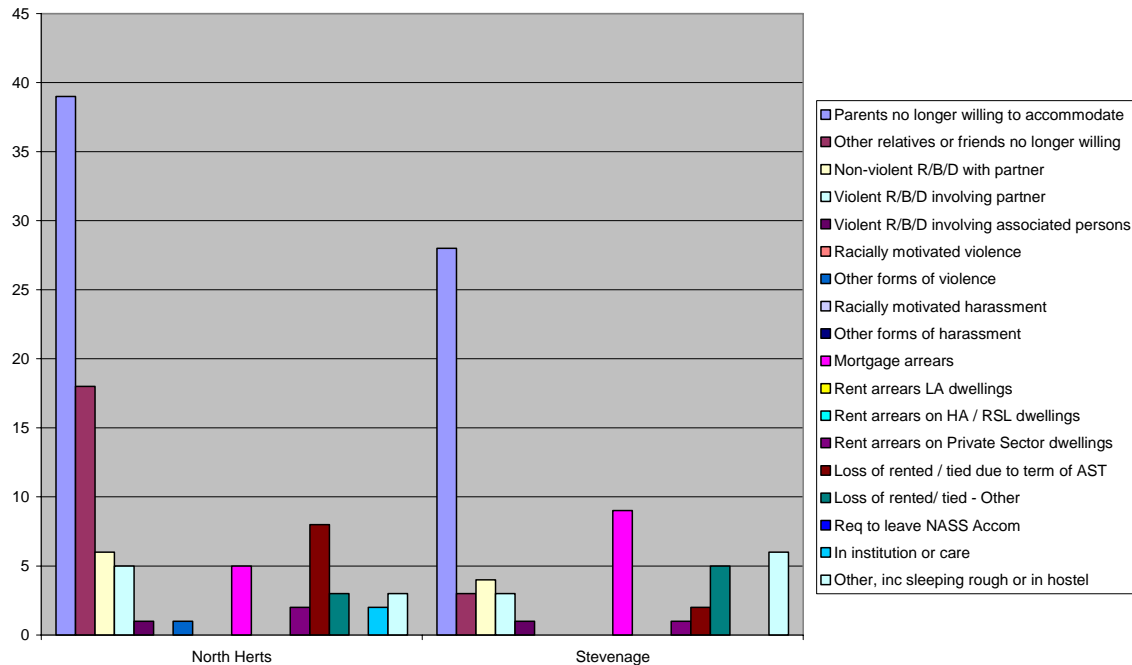
Source: P1e data



The profile of homelessness has changed significantly since 2003. Figure 4 illustrates the causes of homelessness in 2006/07. The most common cause in both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage is 'parents no longer willing to accommodate'. The second most common cause of homelessness in North Hertfordshire is due to 'other relatives or friends no longer willing to accommodate'. However this is not in common with Stevenage, where 'mortgage arrears' is the second most common reason.

**Figure 4:
The reasons for Homelessness in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage for 2006/07**

Source: P1e data



The emphasis on homelessness prevention and the implementation of prevention initiatives has played a major role in reducing the number of households accepted as homeless. A multi-agency approach has helped sustain the reduction in homelessness.

The review of Stevenage Borough Council’s Allocations Scheme in June 2006 introduced a new category of priority, ‘vulnerable household at risk.’ In this category, additional priority is awarded where the households are threatened with homelessness. This is consistent with the North Hertfordshire Allocation Scheme that seeks to assist those in housing need before homelessness becomes an issue.

North Hertfordshire conducted rough sleeper counts in 2001 and 2003, however, no rough sleepers were found. The feedback through the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum leads us to believe that there are minimal numbers of rough sleepers in both districts. This subject forms part of the performance framework and will be continued to be monitored by the Forum.

The homelessness prevention initiatives have had a positive effect on the number of households living in temporary accommodation, which has fallen significantly in both North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. In order to meet the Government’s 50% reduction in the total number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010, the following targets need to be achieved:

Stevenage Borough Council: 50% reduction target for March 2010 is 129

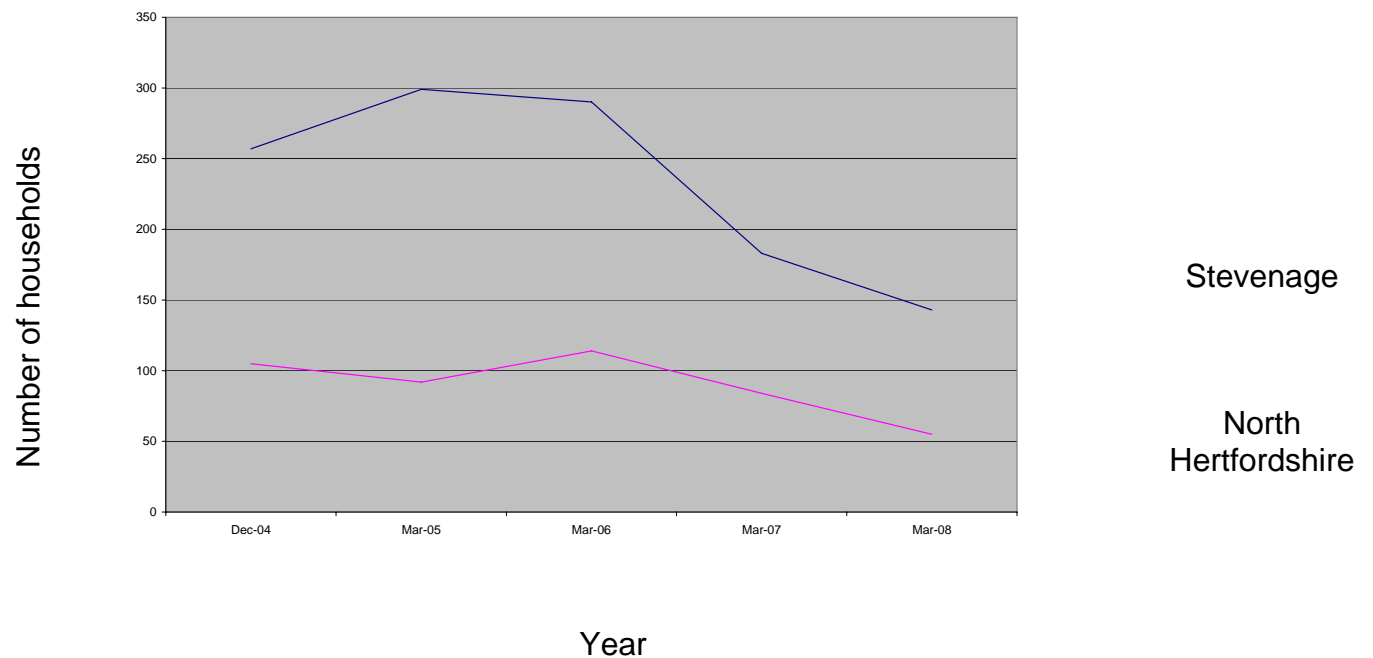
North Hertfordshire District Council: 50% reduction target for March 2010 is 52

Table 4 and Figure 5 highlight the progress made in the reduction of temporary accommodation.

**Table 4:
Reduction in temporary accommodation**

	Dec 2004	March 2005	March 2006	March 2007	March 2008
Stevenage	257	299	290	183	143
North Hertfordshire	105	92	114	84	55

**Figure 5:
Reduction in temporary accommodation**



In recent years Stevenage has received increasing approaches for housing advice and homelessness services:

2005/06 1776 (Housing Advice approaches only)
2006/07 2638
2007/08 3024

North Hertfordshire has similar figures derived from several systems and is currently reviewing the most meaningful way to monitor approaches.

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Services continue to face challenges in preventing homelessness. The current economic climate has resulted in less people being able to afford to access the property ladder. In addition to this, many existing home owners face higher mortgage costs as their fixed deals come to an end. It is estimated nationally that the high cost of housing and the credit crunch will see the number of people in need of social housing increase by one million over the next two years³⁴.

A number of landlords and High Street letting agents are reluctant to let properties to people dependent on housing benefit to service rent. This creates a barrier for many homeless households in accessing the private rented sector. This problem could be exacerbated by the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which was implemented on the 8th April 2008. The LHA will generally be paid direct to claimants, with some exceptions. For private landlords this means the loss of control over rent payments, making the acceptance of a tenant dependent upon LHA even less desirable. LHA pilot schemes noted an increase in contractual rent in poorly maintained properties which would have otherwise commanded rents lower than the market value. The impact of this may be that those families not dependant on housing benefit will face affordability issues and being forced to occupy substandard accommodation.

Some single clients continue to face problems accessing accommodation. Raising funds to service up-front costs in the private sector, together with generally limited priority on the housing waiting list mean that single people are sometimes forced to live with friends and family. Some landlords are increasing their demands on prospective tenants by requesting a tenancy deposit equivalent to two months rent in advance as opposed to the traditional one month in advance, placing a further financial burden. This client group falls out of the statutory provisions and is often pushed out of the affordability arena.

³⁴ <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=565136>

7. Homelessness Actions

The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum provides a platform for members to work together to achieve shared goals and provide high quality services. These goals, or priorities, have been identified and shaped through collective consultation. The Homelessness Strategy consultation event held on the 1st November 2007 was very successful, with almost 50 attendees. The output from the workshops is contained in Annex B.

The six priorities reflect the national framework as well as the views of stakeholders and this provides strategic direction for the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum. Each priority is reviewed below, highlighting their individual challenges.

The responses lead to specific tasks in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and the Performance Framework, where delivery and performance will be managed by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum.

Priority one: Prevention of Homelessness.

Objective: To ensure a joint working approach to prevent homelessness and provide good quality advice about alternative housing options

Challenges:

Local authorities are legally required to assist people who are under threat of homelessness by taking reasonable steps to prevent them losing their homes³⁵. Local authorities must also produce prevention focused homelessness strategies³⁶ and use government grants to deliver preventative measures.

In 2005 the ODPM (CLG) published its strategy for tackling homelessness, Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives with the overall aim of halving the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010. The key to meeting this target is preventing households from becoming homeless.

Homelessness and living in temporary accommodation is associated with a wide range of disadvantages³⁷ including:

- Mental health issues
- Physical health problems
- Poor educational attainment in children
- Worklessness
- Stigma and stereotyping
- Accidents within the home and
- Loss of informal support networks

Whether these issues exist prior to homelessness or not, they are almost certainly exacerbated by it. Therefore, preventing homelessness and ensuring that households have adequate support is fundamental to improving the life chances of households threatened with homelessness.

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils take a proactive and holistic approach to households facing housing problems. The Councils work in partnership with housing providers

³⁵ Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

³⁶ Homelessness Act (2002)

³⁷ ODPM: Homelessness Statistics, December 2003: Addressing the Health Needs of Homeless Families with Children

and statutory and voluntary support and advice agencies to deliver effective prevention measures including;

- A dedicated housing advice and homelessness prevention service;
- Private sector rent deposit guarantee scheme;
- Crashpad Mediation Scheme;
- Citizen's Advice Bureau: Court Desk Worker and Money Advice Worker;
- RSL Tenancy Support Officers;
- A Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic violence;
- Relate Mediation;
- Home visits – where threat of homelessness is due to family/friends no longer willing to accommodate the client; and
- Effective signposting and referral to appropriate support and advice agencies.

Homelessness is often the result of non-housing related issues such as mental health illness, debt, relationship breakdown and substance abuse. In the first instance housing difficulties are very often brought to the attention of professionals and agencies outside local government. The effective prevention of homelessness can only be delivered through efficient joined up service delivery through:

- Interagency protocols and working practices;
- Joint training;
- Consultation with service users; and
- Cross boundary/sub-regional/regional working.

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will work with their partners to:

- Continue to develop and refine joint working with housing providers and support agencies;
- Expand and progress housing options for households in housing need;
- Provide holistic housing advice and homelessness prevention services;
- Meet targets to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation;
- Introduce and monitor customer feedback on front line services
- Deliver more effective mediation services;
- Work with the Supporting People programme and other stakeholders to deliver a generic floating support/tenancy sustainment service; and
- Work with private sector landlords to secure private rented accommodation for households in housing need.

Priority two: Tackling Youth Homelessness

Objective: to provide good quality specialist housing advice and homelessness services for young people

Challenges:

Young people are a vulnerable group with specialised housing needs. The statutory protection available to young people threatened with homelessness was strengthened in the Homelessness Act 2002. It gave 16 and 17 year olds and young people between 18 and 20 who were formerly in care a priority need for accommodation. The local authority has a duty to secure suitable accommodation should they become homeless through no fault of their own.

The majority of youth homelessness is a result of eviction from the family home due to a breakdown in the relationship between the young person and their parents. Through appropriate intervention and support many young people can be enabled to remain within the family home or undertake a planned move. The successful prevention of youth homelessness due to parental eviction can be facilitated through:

- Early identification of young people at risk of homelessness;
- Providing advice on housing options;
- Home visits;
- Mediation;
- The provision of short-term respite accommodation;
- Raising awareness of homelessness among school age children; and
- Appropriate signposting and referral to support and advice agencies.

In some cases homelessness cannot be prevented, or the family home is not the most appropriate environment for the young person. Young homeless people have often experienced educational disruption, family breakdown, and in some cases mental health problems and drug and alcohol issues. A high proportion are not in education, employment or training³⁸. In these circumstances, young people need suitable accommodation and support to acquire the skills necessary for independent living.

Good quality housing and support can have a positive impact on the life chances of young homeless people. This can be facilitated through joint working between local authorities, housing providers, support and advice agencies and young homeless people (see priority 5; Partnership working).

³⁸ CLG: Statutory Homelessness in England: The experiences of families and 16-17 year olds (2008)

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils work in partnership with several providers of services for young people including:

- Herts Young Homeless Group;
- Connexions;
- Supported Housing Providers;
- The Youth Offending Team;
- The Community Drug and Alcohol Team;
- The Supporting People Team;
- Children Schools and Families; and
- The Mental Health Team.

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will work with their partners to:

- Identify young people likely to become homeless;
- Deliver a more comprehensive, seamless service by improving joint working between service providers;
- Raise awareness of homelessness and housing options for young people;
- Improve tenancy support for young people;
- Deliver more effective mediation services to young people and their parents; and
- Improve the support available to young people leaving care.

Priority three: Single People and Vulnerable Groups.

Objective: to ensure the provision of effective advice and assistance for those who need support in identifying housing solutions

Challenges

Non-priority need households

Homeless single people or childless couples often fall outside the full protection provided by the homelessness legislation. Local authorities have no duty to provide accommodation to homeless households without dependent children unless they have a priority need due to their vulnerability. While some may be able to resolve their own housing problems, others lack the resources, knowledge or ability to find and retain suitable long-term accommodation. Local authorities have a duty to provide them with advice and assistance on housing and homelessness prevention.

Homelessness prevention

The housing advice and homelessness prevention service is available to all households.

Housing options

Where homelessness cannot be prevented households without a priority need have limited options available to them. In the short term they will need to secure temporary accommodation either with family or friends or in direct access hostel accommodation. In the longer term, it is likely that they will have to secure accommodation in the private sector either in lodgings, shared accommodation or an assured shorthold tenancy.

Households without a priority need can be assisted with:

- Referral to direct access hostels;
- Access to the private sector rent deposit guarantee scheme;
- Signposting/referral to advice and support services;
- Negotiations with family/friends to allow them to stay for a reasonable period while alternative accommodation is secured;
- Advice on private rented sector accommodation; and
- Making an application to the housing register.

Priority need households

A single person or couple without children who are homeless through no fault of their own, will have a priority need if they are vulnerable. Local authorities have a duty to provide suitable accommodation to homeless households with a priority need. A person may be vulnerable as a result of :

- Old age;
- Mental illness or learning disability or physical disability;
- Having been in care;
- Having been a member of the armed forces;
- Having been in custody or detention;
- Violence or threats of violence.

(this list is not exhaustive)

Single homeless households with a priority need are by definition vulnerable and will, therefore, require some level of support. In practice, single homeless people often have complex needs. Accordingly, it is essential that the support needs of such households are delivered through partnership working.

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will:

- Continue to develop and refine joint working with housing providers and support agencies;
- Expand and progress housing options for households in housing need;
- Provide an holistic housing advice and prevention service;
- Increase the supply of affordable housing;
- Deliver more effective mediation services;
- Work with private sector landlords to secure private rented accommodation for households in housing need;
- Fund a private sector rent deposit guarantee scheme;
- Work with Housing Benefit to fast-track claims from households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- Continue to fund a sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence;
- Introduce and monitor customer feedback on front line services;
- Continue to support the Stevenage Women's Refuge
- Continue to play a leading role in the Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Domestic Violence Forum
- Work with the Supporting People team and other stakeholders to deliver a generic floating support/tenancy sustainment service; and
- Work with temporary accommodation providers to ensure a good quality physical environment and services that improve outcomes for residents.

Priority four: Reducing the use of temporary accommodation

Objective: *To maximise the opportunity for homeless households to access settled accommodation*

Challenges

Homelessness prevention is the key strategic tool for meeting the target of reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation by half between 2005 and 2010. However, where homelessness cannot be avoided, families with children, 16–17 year olds and vulnerable adults are provided with temporary accommodation.

To meet the target of reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010, and ensure positive effects for homeless households, it is essential that:

- Temporary accommodation provides a good quality physical environment and services that improve outcomes for residents; and
- The opportunities for households to move on to settled accommodation are maximised.

A period in temporary accommodation can benefit some households. This particularly applies to 16 – 17 year olds³⁹ who are in supported accommodation which prepares them for the transition to independent living. In such cases it is important that households are not moved on until they have the appropriate skills and support to sustain their own tenancy. Nevertheless, for most households, settled housing, with the right support, provides a better quality of life than temporary accommodation⁴⁰.

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will:

- Develop their understanding of the dynamics of the supply of and demand for temporary accommodation;
- Improve the 'move on' opportunities of households in temporary accommodation;
- Make the best use of social housing stock by working with Registered Social Landlords and Stevenage Homes Limited to produce an under-occupation scheme with attractive incentives;
- Ensure that temporary accommodation is of good quality and work towards all family units being self contained; and
- Work in partnership with accommodation providers, support services and the Supporting People Team to ensure that homeless households are appropriately supported.

³⁹ CLG: Statutory Homelessness In England: The experiences of families and 16 – 17 year olds; Homelessness research Summary No. 7, 2008

⁴⁰ *ibid*

Priority five: Partnership working.

Objective: The members of the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will seek to develop appropriate partnerships in order to deliver high quality services that offer value for money

Challenges

Partnership working underpins the delivery of a comprehensive and holistic service to households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils have long established partnerships with statutory and voluntary service providers and are developing partnerships with the private sector.

Households that are homeless or threatened with homelessness present with a wide range of issues such as:

- Debt;
- A history of offending;
- Relationship breakdown;
- Violence or threats of violence;
- Economic inactivity;
- Lack of skills/training;
- Mental/physical health issues;
- Learning difficulties;
- Substance abuse;
- Leaving local authority care;
- Leaving institutions such as the armed forces or hospital; and
- Being old or young and vulnerable.

There is a commitment to ensure that support provisions are available to persons leaving the armed forces. This involves partnership working with specialist organisations such as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA). A planned approach to leaving tied accommodation can offer opportunities to explore housing options with a view to preventing homelessness.

Many homeless people will have a complex range of problems which, in addition to their lack of housing, makes it difficult for them to access and sustain support networks.

The delivery of sustainable solutions for households facing housing problems cannot be successfully achieved without addressing non-housing related issues which, very often, contribute to their housing difficulties.

Support and advice services are delivered through an increasingly fragmented range of organisations. Hence, in the absence of a co-ordinated framework, there is a risk of people

'falling through the net' on the one hand and duplication of services on the other. In these circumstances it is essential that networks are established between services that allow for:

- Positive working relationships;
- Agreed expectations, goals and roles;
- Comprehensive client assessments;
- Clear lines of communication;
- Making best use of expertise;
- A pooling of resources and sharing of information where possible;
- Shared commitment and accountability;

Partnership working on homeless prevention and homelessness involves a considerable range of agencies dealing with a wide range of issues. The coordination of service delivery will involve:

- Service Level Agreements (SLA) between organisations and local authority service areas;
- Joint protocols;
- Agreed procedures;
- Joint decision making;
- Liaison between organisations;
- Joint strategic planning;
- Joint training; and
- Cross boundary/sub regional and regional working.

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will coordinate and streamline partnership working by:

- Reviewing established formal and informal partnership working practices;
- Facilitating new partnership working relationships where gaps exist; and
- Monitoring the effectiveness of joint service delivery.

Priority six: Continuous improvement.

Objective: The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will monitor performance of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, identify areas for improvement and oversee the delivery of enhanced services

Challenges

Continuous improvement has been included as a strategic priority in order to emphasise the need to review and develop services, and to embed this as a core value for the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum. In order for continuous improvement to take place, the following areas need to be addressed:

- North Quadrant Homelessness Forum membership is inconsistent
- The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum experiences occasional low attendance
- North Quadrant Homelessness Forum terms of reference need to be agreed
- The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan needs to be managed by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum
- The effectiveness of services need to be benchmarked in order to target resources effectively
- Systems need to be developed to assess service user opinion, comments and feedback
- Systems need to be developed in order to understand the circumstances of service users and analyse the effectiveness of services

Response:

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will seek continuous improvement by:

- Ensuring that the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum becomes the delivery vehicle for the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Capturing and analysing service user feedback and reviewing services
- Ensuring that necessary data is recorded to reflect the circumstances of service users and understand their needs
- Benchmarking services with other local authorities and exchanging good practice

8. Action Plan

The Action Plan details the agreed tasks under each priority. This will be monitored by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum.

STEVENAGE AND NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN – 2008/9

Priority 1 - Prevention of Homelessness

Objective: to ensure a joint working approach to prevent homelessness and provide good quality advice about alternative options

Ref:	Task	Lead team/partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How is success measured?	Target date
1.1	Monitor numbers of cases involving mortgage arrears or possession action.	SBC, NHDC, CAB	Within existing resources	Assess impact of current economic climate	*Feed findings into sub-regional homelessness meetings	Ongoing
1.2	To increase the accessibility and provision of debt advice	NHDC, SBC (to confirm) and CAB	NHDC - £5K CLG grant pa	High quality specialist advice to service users	*Implementation of new service	Sep-08
1.3	Improve deposit guarantee scheme	NHDC	Within existing resources, CLG grant	Increase the number of properties made available through the scheme	*Enhancements completed	Aug-08
1.4	To improve links with Housing Benefits to ensure high take up of eligible benefits including discretionary housing payments (DHP)	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum members	Within existing resources	Increase take up of benefit entitlement and full use of DHP budget	*(a) Benefit Liaison meeting initiated *(b) Entire DHP Budget spent	(a) Oct 08 (b) Apr 09
1.5	To explore the provision of mortgage rescue schemes with RSLs	SBC, NHDC, RSLs	Within existing resources	Explore and assess viability of schemes	*Mortgage rescue scheme agreed/or deemed not viable with reasons cited from viability report	Dec-08
1.6	Explore viability of countywide, or sub-regional reciprocal housing scheme in cases where violence or harassment are known	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Increased mobility throughout the area	*Mobility scheme agreed/or deemed not viable with reasons cited from viability report	Dec-08

Ref:	Task	Lead team/partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How is success measured?	Target date
1.7	To improve partnership working with private landlords and letting agents and develop the Landlord Forum	NHDC, SBC and Landlord Forum	Within existing resources	More effective relationship with the private rented sector and improved supply and access to accommodation	* (a) Regular landlord forums hosted by NHDC and SBC *(b) NHDC and SBC websites enhanced with information for landlords and the public	Dec-08
1.8	To review tenant induction at commencement of tenancy with RSLs and SHL	SBC, NHDC, RSLs, SHL	Within existing resources	More sustainable tenancies to meet the objectives of the 'So Stevenage' Community Strategy and NHDC Sustainable Community Strategy	*Review completed	Apr-09
1.9	Production of Homelessness prevention Toolkit	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	Within existing resources	Collective understanding of roles and accessibility to services	*Toolkit agreed and introduced	Apr-09
1.10	All agencies to strive to prevent homelessness wherever possible	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	Within existing resources	Improvements in the number of homelessness preventions	*(new P1E definition, Forum to agree collective target for 2008/9)	Apr-09
1.11	Explore joint funding of Sanctuary Schemes for Domestic Violence with RSLs	NHDC, RSLs, Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association	Within existing resources	Improved funding for Sanctuary Rooms for tenants of RSLs	*Viability study concluded	Sep-08
1.12	To work with the local DV Forum and the Police to establish a budget to fund the Sanctuary Scheme for victims of DV	NHDC, Police, DV Forum	TBC	Regular funding of Sanctuary Rooms	*Funding confirmed	Sep-08
1.13	Explore provision of a homelessness prevention fund	NHDC	Within existing resources	Viability assessed	*Assessment of viability completed	Jul-08

Ref:	Task	Lead team/partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How is success measured?	Target date
1.14	To develop Homelessness Prevention protocol with RSLs and SHL	NHDC, SBC, RSLs, SHL	Within existing resources	Improvements in homelessness prevention and more co-ordinated service for tenants	*New protocol agreed	May-09

Priority 2 - Tackling youth homelessness

Objective: to provide good quality specialist housing advice and homelessness services for young people

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
2.1	To link effectively with HYHG mediation and crashpad services	HYHG, SBC, NHDC, CSF	Supporting People, Crouchfield Trust, within current resources	More sustainable solutions for young people via efficient case management	*Monitor outcomes at HYHG steering group meetings	Ongoing from Jul 08
2.2	Review opportunities to improve awareness of housing options in Schools	HYHG, SBC, NHDC, HCC	Review opportunities/existing resources	Improve understanding of housing options	*New scheme launched	Apr-09
2.3	To monitor floating support schemes for young people	SP, RSLs, SHL	Within Supporting People funds	To increase the number of young people aged 16-25 who sustain their own tenancy for over six months to meet LAA1 target	*LAA1 target met	Apr-09
2.4	Improve assessment and referral processes to avoid complexities for young people	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	To increase the young people's levels of satisfaction with their transition into their own tenancy in line with LAA1 target	*Common referral and assessment process agreed *LAA1 target met	Apr-09
2.5	To monitor progress of young people in temporary accommodation and ensure that 'move on' is accompanied with support	HYHG, SP, SHL, NHH, NHDC, SBC, Aldwyck Housing Association, Nacro	Within existing resources	Reduce the number of young people aged 16-25 who leave supporting people funded accommodation schemes in an unplanned way, to meet LAA1 target	*LAA1 target met	Apr-09
2.6	Develop housing options toolkit for young people	CSF, HYHG, SBC, NHDC, Connexions	Within existing resources	Raise awareness of services available to young people	*Directory of services for young people *Publication of relevant literature	Apr-09

	Task	Lead team/Partnership		Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
2.7	To explore availability and access to counselling services for parents and young people	CSF, HYHG	Within existing resources	Increase parental awareness on impact of homelessness on young people	*Services availability publicised and utilised	Dec-08

Objective: to ensure the provision of effective advice and assistance for those who need support in identifying housing solutions

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
3.1	To review the SBC allocation scheme to reflect changes in referral criteria to the SBC Special Needs Panel.	SBC and SHL	Within existing resources	Ensure access to the Special Needs Panel for mental health clients	*Updated allocation scheme	Sep-08
3.2	To implement joint protocol to improve accommodation and housing advice services to ex-offenders	Probation, SBC, NHDC	Within existing resources	Co-ordinated multi-agency services for ex-offenders	*New protocol launched	Jun-08
3.3	To explore 'move on' options for the North Hertfordshire Sanctuary and Stevenage Haven	SP, North Hertfordshire Sanctuary, NHDC, NHH, Stevenage Haven, SBC, SHL	Within existing resources, SP	To assess the viability of second stage accommodation for shelter residents	*Options appraisal completed	Dec-08
3.4	Develop protocol with Lister hospital for discharge of homeless people	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Improved communication leading to more sustainable solutions	*New protocol agreed	Dec-08
3.5	Ensure adequate support is available so that clients are not disadvantaged by CBL	SHL, NHDC, SBC, NHH, HCHA	Within existing resources	Equal access to CBL scheme	*Vulnerability strategy introduced	Mar-09
3.6	To implement the accommodation provision for people with poor Mental Health in North Hertfordshire	SP, NHH, Aldwyck Housing Association, NHDC, HPT, Hightown Praetorian and Churches Housing Association	SP	Availability of cluster and satellite units	*Full launch of scheme	Apr-09
3.7	Explore viability of supported lodgings scheme with the private rented sector	Stevenage Haven and SBC	Within existing resources	Viability assessed	*Viability study completed	Dec-08
3.8	To explore a joint protocol with CDAT	NHDC, CDAT	Within existing resources	Improved information sharing between the agencies in line with regional objectives	*Protocol agreed/or deemed not viable with reasons cited from viability report	Apr-09

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
3.9	Co-ordinate support services for victims of domestic violence and support existing and new initiatives	North Quadrant Homelessness Form, DV Forum	Within existing resources	Co-ordinated multi-agency services for victims of domestic violence	*Services for victims of domestic violence are mapped out and publicised	Ongoing
3.10	Review effectiveness of Supporting People generic floating support service	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Assessment of success of service	*Quarterly reviews on progress from SP	Sep-08 and ongoing

Priority 4 - Reducing the use of temporary accommodation

Objective: To maximise the opportunity for homeless households to access settled accommodation

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
4.1	Monitor the effectiveness of allocation policies in relation to the proportion of lets to homeless households	SBC, NHDC, SHL	Within existing resources	Assessment of effectiveness of rehousing policies in relation to homeless households	*Assessment completed and presented to North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	Nov-08
4.2	Produce temporary accommodation strategy	NHDC, NHH, Aldwyck Housing Association, SP	Within existing resources	Agreed plan that ties together partner priorities	*Strategy signed off	Nov-08
4.3	Develop supply and demand model for temporary accommodation	SBC, NHDC	Within existing resources	Adoption of a tool to assess future requirement of units	*New model introduced	Dec-08
4.4	To improve 'move on' opportunities from temporary accommodation	NHDC, SBC, SP, RSLs, SHL	Within existing resources	More timely resettlement	*Reduced length of stay in temporary accommodation - NHDC 38 weeks, SBC 5 weeks * SP target (TBC)	Apr-09
4.5	Explore opportunities for development of new affordable housing	NHDC, SBC, RSLs	Housing Corporation, NHDC, SBC, Developer subsidy	Affordable homes delivered, or enabled	*SBC target 150 homes pa *NHDC target 120 homes pa	Apr-09
4.6	Review levels of under occupation in social housing and co-ordinate approach to findings	NHDC, SBC, RSLs, SHL	Within existing resources	Extent of under occupation assessed	*Report produced on levels of under occupation *Develop housing options and incentives package if appropriate	Apr-09
4.7	CBL and homelessness - review effectiveness for homeless households	SBC	Within existing resources	Equal opportunity for homeless households and engagement with process	*Annual monitoring reports to North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	Apr-09
4.8	Promote availability of Low Cost Home Ownership schemes	Aldwyck Housing Association, NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Increased awareness of schemes	*Marketing campaign agreed and launched	Sep-08

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
4.9	Reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation in line with NI156	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Continued reduction in the numbers of households in TA	*NHDC 2010 target 52 *SBC 2010 target 129	Apr-10

Priority 5 - Partnership working

Objective: The members of the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will seek to develop appropriate partnerships in order to deliver high quality services that offer value for money

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
5.1	To monitor the effectiveness of partnership working through North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Better understanding of each others roles. Forum members to agree Terms of Reference for Group	*Feedback from members *Case studies *Awareness of roles	On-going
5.2	Review RSL partnership agreement	NHDC, RSLs	Within existing resources	New document agreed	*Launch of new document	Jul-08
5.3	Develop joint training programme with Forum for all members	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	More opportunities for forum members to learn from each other and procure more cost effective training. Ensure services complement, not duplicate, or contradict one another	*Joint training needs identified, and programme produced	Aug-08
5.4	Forum membership to be reviewed with a view to increasing agency representation	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	More productive Forum, with agencies such as CSF, CMHT, Benefits representative, Shelter, RSL homelessness champions and DV forum attending regularly	*Enhanced forum membership *Seek feedback from members on how productive they feel forum is now compared to previous years	Sep-08
5.5	To link employment and housing/homelessness issues by including JobCentre Plus and Connexions as part of the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Enhanced attendance at forum meetings	*JobCentre Plus and Connexions representatives attending meetings	Sep-08

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
5.6	Develop an information sharing protocol	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	New protocol with common consent form	*New protocol agreed	Dec-08
5.7	Develop common Housing Allocation Policy	NHDC, NHH, HCHA, RSLs	Within existing resources	Standardised policy for service users	*Common policy adopted	Dec-08
5.8	Adopt standardised risk assessments and referral forms by agreement at the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Streamlined service	*Adoption of standardised documents	Apr-09
5.9	Develop communication system to identify housing issues or possible homelessness for service users at an early stage	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Advice and prevention services accessed at an earlier stage and better outcomes for service users	*New system agreed and launched	Sep-08
5.10	Contribute to review of joint housing protocol with CSF and HYHG	CSF, NHDC, SBC, HYHG	Within existing resources	New updated protocol	*Launch of new document	Apr-09

Priority 6 - Continuous improvement

Objective: The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum will monitor the performance of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan, identify areas for improvement and oversee the delivery of enhanced services

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
6.1	Benchmark performance of Housing Advice and Homelessness services against other Authorities in Hertfordshire	SBC, NHDC	Within existing resources	Identify best practice	*Updates at forum meetings	Nov-08
6.2	Invite service users to join forum	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Enhanced membership of forum	*New members join or participate in Service User focus group	Aug-08
6.3	Produce generic questionnaire to survey service users	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Feedback to improve services	*Launch of questionnaire	Sep-08
6.4	Improve awareness of services by promoting them more widely	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Improved public awareness and access to services	*Partners to jointly publicise services through own media	Sep-08
6.5	Introduce monitoring systems for disability, sexual orientation and religion/belief	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	To link customer circumstances to outcomes	*Update standard forms to include these criteria *Introduce monitoring form	Oct-08
6.6	Research why there were lower levels of homelessness preventions amongst clients aged 25-44 and 45-59	NHDC	Within existing resources	Identify reasons for disparity, if it exists	*Introduce monitoring for comparison *Analyse further for 2008/9	Apr-09
6.7	Research differences in outcomes for homelessness applications between female and male single applicants and lone parent applicants	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Identify reasons for disparity, if it exists	*Monitor throughout 2008/9 *Examine differences between priority need and reasons for homelessness for single men and women	Apr-09

	Task	Lead team/Partnership	Funding	Expected outcome	How success measured?	Target date
6.8	Further research into low numbers of approaches from BME communities for the homelessness prevention services	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Identify reasons for disparity, if it exists	*Attend and participate at North Hertfordshire Minority Ethnic Forum to promote services twice a year *Monitor throughout 2008/9 *Produce service leaflet and distribute to cultural centres	Apr-09
6.9	Review literature around housing advice and homelessness	NHDC, SBC	Within existing resources	Updated literature	*Suite of forms and leaflets updated	Apr-09
6.10	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum to conduct bi-monthly reviews of the action plan and publish updated versions on an annual basis	North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members	Within existing resources	Continuous review of action plan that is updated accordingly	*New action plan agreed	Jun-09

KEY

	NHDC	North Hertfordshire District Council		HPT	Herts Partnership Trust	
	SBC	Stevenage Borough Council		HCC	Herts County Council	
	HYHG	Herts Young Homeless Group		CSF	Children, Schools and Families	
	CLG	Department of Communities and Local Government		CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau	
	RSL(s)	Registered Social Landlord(s)		DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment	
	SP	Supporting People Team		CMHT	Community Mental Health Team	
	SHL	Stevenage Homes Limited		DV Forum	Domestic Violence Forum	
	NHH	North Hertfordshire Homes Limited		LAA	Local Area Agreement	
	HCHA	Howard Cottage Housing Association				

9. Performance framework

The performance framework and the action plan are the tools that will enable progress to be measured. The performance framework will be updated regularly and its current status will indicate whether progress is 'on target', ahead of schedule or behind schedule.

Performance Indicator Definition	Type of Indicator (NI, LPI, LAA, P1E, HIP)	LA	Target 2008-9	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Target 2009-10	Status
TA reduction	NI 156	SBC	130	130	130	130	130	117	
		NHDC	50	50	50	50	50	45	
Number of Affordable homes	NI LAA	SBC	150	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	150	
		NHDC	120	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	120	
Number of homeless preventions	Local PI/P1E	SBC	200	50	100	150	200	tbc	
		NHDC	150	37	75	112	150	tbc	
Young people sustaining tenancies	LAA	SBC and NHDC	tbc					tbc	
% of vulnerable people achieving independent living	NI141, KP2	SBC and NHDC	tbc					tbc	
Number of acceptances	P1E	SBC	60	15	15	15	15		
		NHDC	60	15	15	15	15		
Acceptances associated to BME	P1E	SBC	4	1	1	1	1		
		NHDC	7	2	2	2	1		
Average length of stay in TA (weeks)	Local PI	SBC	5	5	5	5	5	5	
		NHDC	38	38	38	38	38	tbc	
Number of LA evictions	HIP	SBC	15						
		NHDC	tbc						
Rough sleepers (annual desk survey)	P1E, HIP	SBC	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		NHDC	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Performance Indicator Definition	Type of Indicator (NI, LPI, LAA, P1E, HIP)	LA	Target 2008-9	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Target 2009-10	Status
Attendance at Forum meetings as a % of membership	Local PI	SBC NHDC	75%						
Number of Forum meetings held (bi-monthly)	Local PI	SBC NHDC	6						

10. Governance

The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and Performance Framework will be monitored by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum.

A new Action Plan will be published annually. Progress will be monitored regularly and reported to the Forum with updates published on the website. The Action Plan forms a vital part of monitoring the progress made against the strategic objectives of the Strategy. The tasks set out in the Action Plan have been agreed and formulated by the Forum using the results of the Homelessness Consultation Event. The Forum will nominate a lead person or agency to deliver the task who will report progress made bi monthly.

Monitoring of the Action Plan and the measurement of success will be reported within a performance framework. The performance framework comprises a set of national and local indicators that are relevant to the objectives of the Strategy.

North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Terms of Reference

Aim

The role of the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum is to take a proactive approach to tackling and preventing homelessness in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. The Forum will encompass local issues affecting homelessness, seek strategic resolutions and work on addressing equality and diversity enabling social inclusion and empowering individuals to make choices.

The Forum will manage risk by identifying threats at the earliest opportunity, for example the reduction of funding streams. Tasks will be incorporated into the Action Plan to minimise the effect to homelessness services.

Objectives

- To provide input at the Local Strategic Partnership on homelessness issues and the tasks delivered against the Local Area Agreement
- To implement and deliver the Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Homelessness Action Plan (2008)
- To monitor the progress of the Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Homelessness Action Plan (2008)
- To share good practice and learning by disseminating information through regional, sub-regional and local networks.
- To work in partnership in developing new services to prevent homelessness and assist homeless people in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire.

Meeting Arrangements

- The Forum will meet bi monthly and alternate between Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Office locations. Additional meetings may be arranged as needs arise.
- The Forum will be facilitated and administered by both Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils.
- North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Councils will share the responsibility of chairing the Forum

Decision Making Process

The Forum is made up of statutory and non statutory organisations. Each representative is involved in the decision making process. Decisions that are not reserved for the Forum are taken by the Council, for example matters relating to financial resources and statutory provisions.

The Forum will also monitor trends and patterns around:

- Reasons for homelessness
- Age profile of all approaches
- Number of homelessness presentations
- Reasons for loss of last settled home
- Priority need of acceptances
- County Court possession and re-possession cases

Where performance falls below target the Forum will develop joint Improvement Plans to meet targets.

North Quadrant Homelessness Forum Members

Organisation	Name	Title	Signature
Executive Member, SBC	Cllr Ann Webb	Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health	
Executive Member North Hertfordshire District Council	Cllr Bernard Lovewell	Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing & Environmental Health	
Department of Communities and Local Government	Tracey Brushett	Specialist Advisor	
Stevenage Borough Council	Sukhvinder Rai	Strategy Officer	
Stevenage Borough Council	Sukhdev Sidhu	Principal Advice & Homelessness Officer	
Federation of Stevenage Tenants Association	John Ginger	Tenant Representative	
North Hertfordshire District Council	Martin Lawrence	Housing Options Manager	
Stevenage Homes Limited	Celia Lord	Senior Housing Officer (Special Needs)	
Stevenage Homes Limited	Adele Miell	Temporary Accommodation Officer	
Aldwyck Housing Association	Amy Callaway	Deputy Link Manager- North Hertfordshire Schemes	
Aldwyck Housing Association	Paul Woolveridge	Link Manager – North Hertfordshire Schemes	
Aldwyck Housing Association	Angela Lawrence	Hutton House Scheme Manager	
Aldwyck Housing Association	Janet Manning	Lettings Manager	
Aldwyck Housing Association	Julie Piercey	Senior Lettings Officer	
North Hertfordshire Homes	Stephen Gage	Tenancy Sustainment Manager	
North Hertfordshire Homes	Andrew Buchan	Head of Care and Supported Housing	
North Hertfordshire Homes	David Beckett	Choices Manager	
Stevenage Haven	Barbara Howard	Project Director	
Stevenage Haven	Mike Nash	Service Development Manager	
Connexions	Bev Ankin		
Connexions/North Hertfordshire College	Chris Moss	PA – Welfare and Support	
Community Mental Health Services, Hertfordshire County Council	Brid Kelly		
Community Mental Health Services, Hertfordshire County Council	Sally Revels		
Community Mental Health Services, Hertfordshire County Council	Liz France	Team Leader	
Howard Cottage Housing Association	Brioney Standley		
Howard Cottage Housing Association	Jaz Cousins		
Probation Services	Heather Smith		
Probation Services	Clare Martindale		
Probation Services	Tom Downes	Probation Officer	
Letters Property Management	Dawn Dainty	Managing Director	
Hertfordshire Young Homeless Group	Kathryn Salmon	Crisis Intervention Manager	

Organisation	Name	Title	Signature
Herts Young Homeless Group	Sue Haynes	Homelessness Prevention Manager	
Herts Young Homeless Group	Debbie Lovelock	Health Development and Specialist Services Manager	
Relate	Jill Adams	Centre Manager	
Children Schools & Families, Herts County Council	Kath Gould		
Children Schools & Families, Herts County Council	Zoe Tubb		
Supporting People, Herts County Council	Laura Fortune	Programme Manager	
Supporting People, Herts County Council	Sarah Taylor	Strategic Development Officer	
Herts County Council	Lesley Carr		
Herts County Council	Liz France		
Stevenage CAB	Marian Hurle	Bureau Director	
NHDC CAB	Sally Salisbury	Bureau Manager	
NHDC CAB	Tina Fletcher	Court Desk Worker	
NHS Primary Care Trust	Michelle Harber		
NHS West Herts Primary Care Trust	Sue Hazelton		
Hertsreach Turning Point	Mick Tomazou	Housing Support Officer	
Nacro	Vernon Flood		
North Hertfordshire Sanctuary	Nicki Dawson	Deputy Manager	
North Hertfordshire Sanctuary	Judy Recontra	Manager	
Pohwer	R Muldoon		
Pohwer	Roma Mills		
William Sutton Trust	Sue Hopkins		
SBC Housing Benefits Service	Theresa Mortimer	Benefits Manager	
Stevenage Womens Refuge	Tina Vincent	Scheme Support Worker	
YMCA, Central Hertfordshire	Tim Fox		

Annexes

Annex A

North Quadrant Homelessness Strategy event – 1/11/07

LIST OF DELEGATES

Councillor Ann Webb	SBC Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health
Councillor Margaret Notley	SBC
Councillor Leonard Lambert	SBC
Councillor Lis Knight	SBC
Azma Ahmed	Hertsmere Borough Council
Martin Lawrence	North Hertfordshire District Council
Les Betts	Stevenage Haven
Sukhvinder Rai	Stevenage BC
Andrew Buchan	North Hertfordshire Homes
Amy Callaway	Aldwyck Housing Group
Dawn Dainty	Letters Property Management
Tom Downes	Stevenage Probation
Tina Fletcher	CAB, Letchworth
Vernon Flood	NACRO
Laura Fortune	Herts County Council - Adult Care Services
Stephen Gage	North Hertfordshire Homes
Tracey Brushett	DCLG
Laura Green	SBC Service User
Nana Gyebi	Dacorum Borough Council
Monique Haulett	Paddington Churches H.A.
Cynthia Hayford	Dacorum Borough Council
Mark James	Herts County Council – Supporting People
Brid Kelly	Community Mental Health Service
Angela Laurance	Paddington Churches H.A.
Hayley Lindsell	Service User, SBC
Fiona Macdonald	Herts Young Homeless Group
Janet Manning	Aldwyck Housing Group
Theresa Mortimer	SBC
Jenny Martin	Stevenage Womens Aid
Ken Moore	Longmeadow Evangelical Church
Chris Moss	North Hertfordshire College/Connexions
Tara O'Shaughnassy	Service User, SBC
Paul Packham	Herts County Council - Crime/Drugs Strategy Unit
Craig Retburg	Service User, Stevenage Haven
Sally Revels	Community Mental Health Service
Debbie Reynolds	CAB, Stevenage
Annie Robson	CAB, Stevenage
Reverend Michael Roden	St Mary's Church, Hitchin
Sally Salisbury	CAB, Letchworth
Kathryn Salmon	Herts Young Homeless Group
Sukhdev Sidhu	SBC
Ruth Edwards	SBC
Helena Hon	SBC
Aaron Hutber	SBC
Ann Upson	SBC
Alaine Edwards	SBC

Husnara Malik	SBC
Claire Staddon	Service User, Stevenage Haven
Danielle Straker	Service User, SBC
Mark Swan	Shelter
Sarah Taylor	Herts County Council - Supporting People
Stephen Tingley	Broxbourne Borough Council
Mick Tomazou	Turning Point
Andy Vincent	Stevenage Homes Ltd
Tina Vincent	North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Womens Aid
Karen Freimanis	North Hertfordshire District Council
Paul Woolveridge	Aldwyck Housing Group

Annex B

Consultation Event – Feedback from workshops

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION WORKSHOP

General comments on the workshop:

In workshops, name/organisation cards for attendees would be useful.

The provision of a glossary of terms would be useful for those who are unfamiliar with the housing environment.

General comments on homelessness:

Ignoring homelessness doesn't solve the problem.

Consideration should be given to the issues which cause relationship breakdowns.

Develop additional affordable housing.

People's expectations:

The Local Authority will always house the people of Stevenage, which is not possible.

The housing that is offered to homeless applicants will always be Council owned housing.

Local Authority duties:

Local authorities are under pressure to reduce homelessness and have a vested interest in not giving appropriate advice.

The Customer Service Centre, (CSC), is 'batting' people away from the Council without giving them the relevant information on homelessness.

The CSC is not telling people about tenancy deposits.

More information should be provided about tenancy deposits.

Average arrears are about £2,000, so the provision of £1,500 for a 'finders fee' could be seen as an affordable solution.

Concerns expressed over the effectiveness/value of providing tenancy deposits to people in high arrears.

Should all clients be offered advice on their options, e.g. Housing Benefit, (HB), for the private sector instead of 'homeless at home.'

Local authorities have a duty to provide the appropriate information.

The voluntary sector is not obliged to provide information free of charge and these organisations are not always funded to enable them to provide it.

Parental Exclusions:

There is a high correlation between school exclusions and home exclusions.

Educate parents that 'chuck out' is not an alternative to the waiting list. Their children will not be housed more quickly in these circumstances.

Invite parents to the interview in order to explain the situation and reality to them. Discuss issues like being able to join the waiting list at 16, other options, shared ownership and tenancy deposits etc....

Are people aware that 16 year olds can join the waiting list, or of the other options available, e.g. private rented accommodation, shared ownership, the long timescales involved.

Homelessness Officers to visit at home. In theory these should be carried out, however, in practice they aren't.

Mediation with parents may work, but this is not always the answer.

Young people don't choose to be homeless, therefore, it is pointless going into schools to 'educate' them about not wanting to stay at home. Young people want to be at home.

If consideration is given to visiting schools, to provide information about housing options, then visiting Youth Centres should also be considered. Young people are more likely to feel comfortable discussing personal issues there, rather than in school.

Mediation:

The use of mediation should be considered with private landlords, in order to overcome HB issues/problems.

Floating Support:

Consider using floating support, in order to help people living in privately rented properties.

Herts Young Homeless Group, (HYHG), will offer advice/support to 16 – 25 year olds. It is down to local authorities to tell people about this service.

Private Rented Sector:

Should public money be given to landlords who provide the properties that SBC require, in terms of a fee finder?

Prospective tenants of private landlords should be offered 12 month tenancies.

Concerns expressed about the level of standards within privately rented accommodation.

Assured Shorthold tenancies should be offered, in order to provide some protection to prospective tenants.

Would private landlords have to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check?

Potential problems with HB should be overcome, in order to encourage private landlords to offer accommodation to clients referred to them by SBC.

£1,500 is a 'cheap' way of providing homelessness prevention.

Use expertise to settle people into affordable housing, (private rent topped up by HB). This should result in less homelessness acceptances, which in turn will free up SBC staff time to spend on settling people in.

Query raised as to who would monitor the standard of private rented accommodation, e.g. Supporting People, (SP), framework.

Private Landlords:

Advertise in the local press, in order to encourage more private landlords to come forward and offer their accommodation for use by SBC clients.

Contact Letting Agents, in order to increase the supply of privately rented properties.

There is a need to emphasise the advantages available to private landlords who agree to work with SBC clients, some suggestions are:

Fast tracked HB.

Offer of a fee finder of £1,500 to landlords who provide two bedroom properties.

Working with the Housing Advice Team offers better value than Letting Agents.

Tenants are likely to remain with the same landlord for longer than 6 months.

Landlords have a guaranteed income.

The HB system is much improved.

Private landlords prefer not to offer accommodation to clients claiming HB as there is a stigma attached to these claimants.

Some landlords will not accept anyone who claims HB.

Concerns expressed about the entitlement of a landlord to increase the rent.

The Rent Officer will determine a Fair Rent.

Discretionary HB payments can be made to tenants where their HB entitlement doesn't meet the entire rent level.

The introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), caused some concerns with regard to the potential for landlords not being made aware of vulnerable tenants, which may result in the tenants' needs not being taken into account, particularly in respect of the payment of rent.

The potential for landlords to begin to act in an unwelcoming way to clients, when they find out that they are receiving HB, was highlighted as a potential issue.

The introduction of the LHA will give HB claimants absolute control over their future payment of rent.

Local authorities can make a decision to pay the landlord directly.

Previously, private landlords have ignored offering accommodation to HB claimants, as they have been able to let their properties due to the buoyancy of the market.

The benefits of a Landlords Forum were mentioned.

A Landlords Forum can be used to help agencies work together more effectively when dealing with private sector tenants.

Housing Benefit:

Blackpool – the HB figures went down following the introduction of the LHA.

Tenants can choose to have HB paid directly to their landlord.

Under 25s are not entitled to receive full HB. They are entitled to receive a shared allowance.

Benefit paid directly to the tenant (LHA). New claims not for the Council, Registered Social Landlords, (RSLs), tenants.

Concerns expressed about what happens if a claimant doesn't return HB claim form.

Benefit Officers will contact the claimant, in order to advise about the missing information. They will also liaise with RSLs, and other landlords, about any problems.

TACKLING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS WORKSHOP

Young people require:

Good advice

Supported accom to teach life skills & parental skills

Floating support

Support should be tailored to meet the young person's needs

Intensive support required at commencement of tenancy

Education on homelessness and housing options to be delivered in schools from 13+, more effective when approached from an early age

Encourage younger people to go into schools to deliver awareness training

Arrange trips around homeless hostels

Mediation service for parents and children to resolve relationship problems

Family counselling

specialist support required for drug and alcohol issues

more provisions to move in and out of areas to get away from bad influences/peers

more consistency in approach – one provider for accom and support

more partnership working

to share SBC's good practice partnership working with HYHG and CSF

to encourage joint housing protocol panels as they are effective

SBC special needs panel works well

more support provisions needed for parents

to help to relate to children better

making parents more responsible

manage parents' expectations re social housing

Mapping process required, support should not cease abruptly, support should be holistic and based on moral principles

A need for more affordable housing

16/17 year old no longer priority need?

SINGLE HOMELESSNESS INC VULNERABLE GROUPS

Causes of homelessness:

- Relationship breakdown
- Housing benefit
 - Delays in process
 - Complex process
 - single room rent rule unfair and disqualifying
 - rent officer determinations cause shortfalls in rent

- chaotic lifestyle
- drugs and alcohol misuse
- literacy issues
 - poor education
- lack of support for ex-offenders
 - help with tenancy sustainment
 - general day to day support
 - lack of advice on realistic housing options
 - problems with HB on custodial sentence

- Private rented sector landlords
 - Stigmatise housing benefit dependant tenants
 - Some are unprofessional and illegally evict

- Immigration
 - Not familiar with process
 - Language barriers

- Debt culture
 - Lack of understanding
 - Unable to differentiate between priority and non priority debts

- Council tax burden on young people
- Lack of provision in tenancy sustainment, suggested:
 - Foyer system
 - Halfway house
 - Use Ridgeway model

- Abandoned responsibility
- Pregnancy
- Domestic violence
- Unemployment
- Health to include mental health
- Natural disaster: fire, flood
- Learning difficulties

- Shortage of affordable housing
- Overcrowding
- Mortgage repossession
- Lack of security in the private sector

Homelessness affects whom?

- Everyone at some point in life
 - Unemployed/unemployable
- Relationship breakdown
 - Trying to support two homes
- Elderly people
- Mental health problems
- Members of armed forces
 - Post traumatic stress i.e. returning from service in Iraq

List of Partners/agencies working with homeless persons

- Nightshelters inc the Haven
- Wellfield Court
- Hostels
- CSF/ACS
- Connexions
- Aldwyck
- Nacro
- HYHG
- NH Sanctuary
- Womens Refuge
- YMCA
- Salvation Army
- Foyer with Aldwyck/Broxbourne
- Voluntary Sector
- Information and Advice
- Probation
- Medical Services
- Drugs Centre/Drugs line
- Living Room
- CAB
- Hospital
- GP Surgery
- LA Housing Service
- RSLs
- Extended family/friends

- Counselling
- Schools
- Churches
- Better partnership working of existing services aided by HML Forum
- Recognition/Diagnosis is important for people who need support e.g. tenancy sustainment
- Accessibility
- Expansion criteria e.g. when reaches certain age problem does not go away
- Young offenders require higher support facilities
- Free phone advice line i.e. Shelter should be better advertised
- Information sheet/database of services needed
- Effective prevention/strategy/sufficient housing
- Service users should be involved in service delivery

Solutions

- schools play an important role
 - teaching key life skills
 - financial management
 - awareness of homelessness
 - managing expectations
- more single person accommodation
- more affordable housing
- more social rented accom
- allocation scheme criteria too rigid e.g. cannot bid for two bed as qualifies for three bed
- short term safety net
- common assessment framework with partners to ensure joined up working
- abolish RTB to make better use of existing stock
- tackle under occupation
- review Hill's report
- establish link between employment and housing
- partnership counselling service
 - more effective mediation
- realistic funding & resources
 - back up strategy
 - tenancy sustainment v cost of possession action and void periods
- Social L/L needs accurate info re tenant to ensure appropriate support
- Housing benefit triggers problems
 - Lack of tenancy support from Housing Officers
- more people living with family and friends
 - hidden homelessness
- government criteria misleading and unrealistic
- system exploited by some

Role of local authorities in tackling homelessness

- Better joined up working
- More constructive partnership working
- Raise profile of social housing
 - Education
 - Not homes for everyone
- Manage perception inc high income groups
 - Of lone parents
 - Housing of eastern Europeans
- Improve relationships with the PRS and private landlords
- Improve wider community understanding of homelessness
- Improve relationships with financial services

REDUCING THE USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION WORKSHOP

Explore Incentives

- Use Private Rented Sector (PRS) for more homes
 - Increase use of PRS
 - Forge relationships with Letting Agents and help overcome stigma attached to HB tenants and people with poor credit history
 - Use only private sector L/Ls with good standard accom should match actual rents in PRS
 - Tenancy sustainment support should also be available in PRS
 - Increasing the use of PRS and better routes via allocations scheme will discourage HML presentations
 - Rent Officer Determinations
- Adjust the Allocations Scheme to award priority to 'homeless at home households'.
- Better use of Rent Deposit Schemes
- Educate and raise awareness of homelessness in schools
 - Award more priority to young people living at home
 - Award more priority to young people in education or training programmes to encourage an active community role and to take responsibility

Review Current Policy

- Reduce priority for those households in adequate temporary accommodation (TA)
- Once duty accepted place directly into permanent housing
- Review family composition only every ten years to discourage expanding families

Maximise Current Use of TA

- Make use of Alms housing
- Monitor void turnaround and recycle properties more efficiently
- Use all void properties as TA

Increase provisions for specific housing advice

- More true prevention work needed not gate keeping
- More resources required to carry out genuine prevention
- Lack of specialist housing law advice
- Councils to fund focussed and in depth training for Housing Advice Champions
- 'Out of hours' provisions for advice should be made
- Information on availability of stock should be accessible on internet to manage expectations and give realistic prospects.

Annex C

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Service Reviews

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have conducted separate homelessness and housing advice service reviews in order to meet new challenges, as outlined in this strategy document.

Stevenage Borough Council

The objectives of the SBC Homelessness and Housing Advice Service is to provide a service within the legal framework and in line with the Council's corporate values:

- Putting People First
- Delivering Value for Money
- Working Together

The Service comprises of two sections: Homelessness and Housing Advice, each with a separate function. Each Section is resourced by three full time Officers and overall has one full time assistant. The Housing Advice Service is unique in its delivery providing an impartial service with compliance to confidentiality. The Housing Advice Service has been accredited with the Community Legal Services Quality Mark. The Service, in addition to the standard corporate requirements also complies with the requirements under Community Legal Services. The two roles are distinguished by the level of casework undertaken to prevent homelessness. Housing Advice Officers deliver prevention advice and undertake casework prior to a threat of homelessness, this approach gives optimum opportunities to sustain accommodation. Homelessness Officers undertake further prevention work where homelessness is imminent and in some cases where an alternative housing option is not available, will proceed with a homelessness presentation and associated investigations.

The Homelessness Services was inspected by the internal Audit Assurance in 2004/05. The outcome of the inspection indicated 37 recommendations, following a recent review 22 of these recommendations have been implemented. The 15 recommendations outstanding are of a low significance and will be incorporated into the Service improvement plan with some actions forming part of the Homelessness Action Plan under Priority six, Continuous Improvement.

The Housing Advice Service was inspected by the internal Audit Assurance more recently (2007/08). Detailed testing was carried out on the systems of control and the management of risk within the area. The outcome of the inspection was that the quality of housing advice provided is satisfactory, although there is more scope to improve this through more effective training for staff. Recommendations have been made to improve the level of monitoring and verification of cases, which may impede upon the reporting of performance indicators. The associated tasks will be incorporated in the Service Plan with some actions forming part of the Homelessness Action Plan under Priority six, Continuous improvement. Overall, the Internal Audit has assigned **substantial assurance** to the systems and procedures; definition:

“basically a sound system but there are weaknesses which put some of control objectives at risk.....Substantial assurance will be attributed to a system where in the auditor’s judgement the recommendations relate to actions that are considered necessary to avoid exposure to significant risks”

A further internal evaluation of the Homelessness and Housing Advice Services has been carried out by the management as part of the drive for continuous improvement. The evaluation is with reference to the Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE):

- Access to Customer Care and User Focus
- Diversity
- Housing Advice, homelessness preventions and options services
- Homelessness Strategy, services and applications
- Temporary Accommodation for statutory homeless households
- Value for money

Conclusions drawn from this evaluation are as follows:

Strengths

- A customer focussed service with officers committed to meeting customers needs
- Regular training is undertaken
- Service demonstrates a commitment to equality and diversity issues
- Provides comprehensive and recognised quality housing advice with some specialisation
- Is well resourced and understands its strategic role
- Has an established homelessness forum to enable multi-agency working
- Has effective protocols to avoid 16 and 17 year olds in bed and breakfast
- Has the facility to monitor outcomes of homeless prevention to show reduced cost to homelessness service
- Is making good progress to reduce temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010

Weaknesses

- Insufficient publicity and awareness of services
- More robust procedures required to collate BME data
- Policies and procedures require updating
- Performance to be measured to recognise achievements
- Insufficient service user involvement to improve services
- Repeat homelessness not adequately monitored
- Currently no model to predict the future supply and demand of temporary accommodation.

Opportunities

- The private rented sector could prove to be a valuable resource as a prevention option
- Marketing and publicity to raise awareness of quality services available
- Make use of the expertise of partner agencies to share good practice

- Maximise use of media publications
- Increase profile of homelessness within local political system
- Make best use of Housing Benefit services to support prevention initiatives

Threats

- Infrequent supervision and verification of casework could lead to external challenges
- Inconsistent reporting of data by the Council and external agencies could lead to inaccuracies in data collation and thus a negative impact on future service planning
- A limited training budget could lead to staff delivering out of date/inaccurate advice
- A lack of policies and procedures could lead to inconsistent service delivery and poor performance assessment

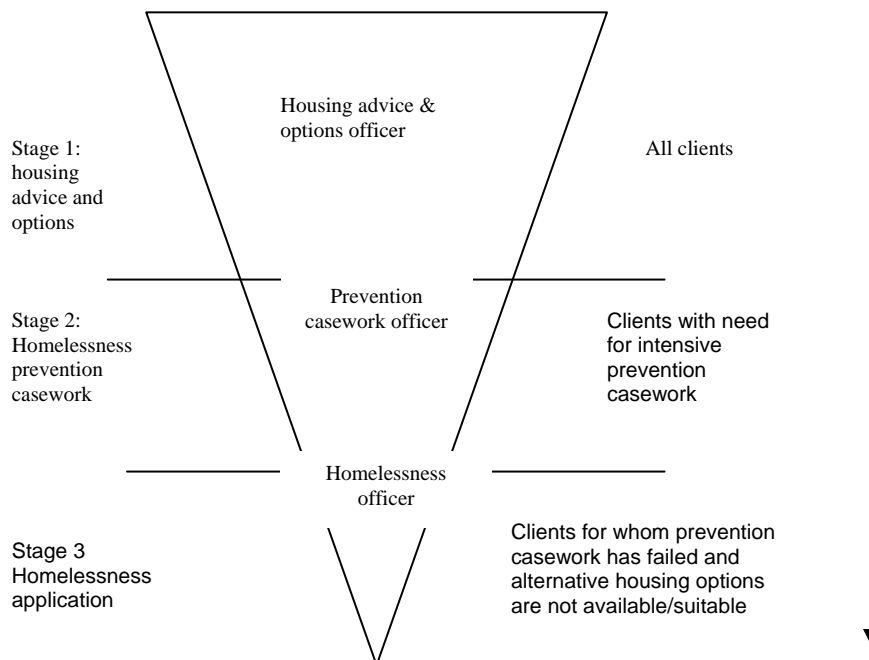
North Hertfordshire District Council

Prior to 2006 NHDC delivered a homelessness and housing advice service that focused on exploring whether the council has a statutory duty to provide a client with temporary accommodation. The authority had a large amount of hostel accommodation available to meet the duty to accommodate homeless households. Consequently, it had not been necessary to explore and pursue alternative forms of accommodation.

The increasing emphasis within homelessness legislation and guidance on housing authorities obligations to prevent homelessness and offer alternatives to temporary accommodation, presented the authority with a considerable challenge. This entailed a shift away from crisis management towards a strategic response based on early intervention, increased housing options and support for clients. As a result officers roles have been redefined and new prevention tools have been introduced.

Old generic working practices have been replaced with a structure in which applicants pass through a system in which officers are dedicated to fulfilling the statutory duties owed to the client.

Figure 5:
The new housing advice and homelessness approach for North Hertfordshire



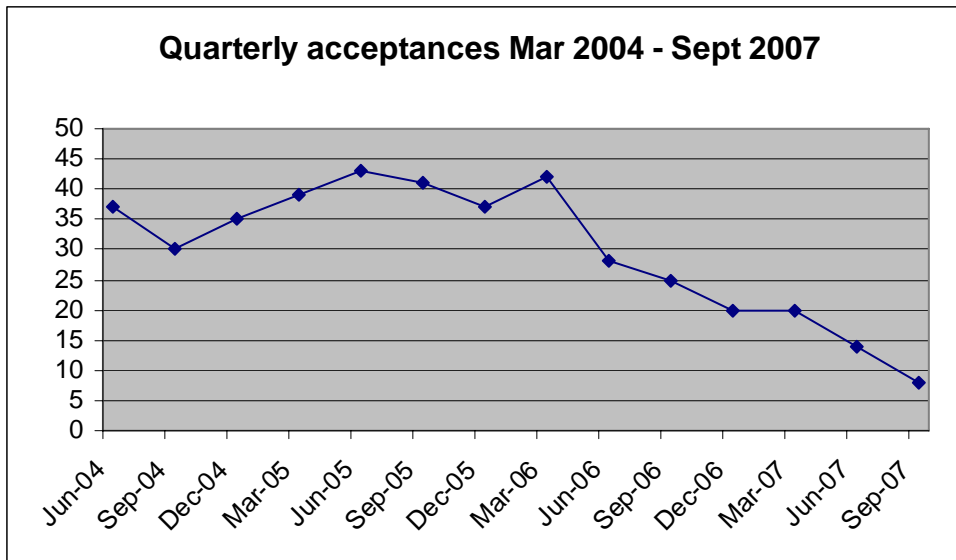
The new model altered the focus to one of preventing the homelessness, with temporary accommodation used only as a last resort in cases where the full housing duty is owed.

In introducing this model North Hertfordshire District Council has;

- Increased the number of staff delivering the service;
- Implemented a comprehensive training programme for staff;
- Facilitated joint training with other agencies;
- Introduced new prevention measures; and
- Improved corporate working between Housing Options, Housing Benefit and Private Sector Renewals.

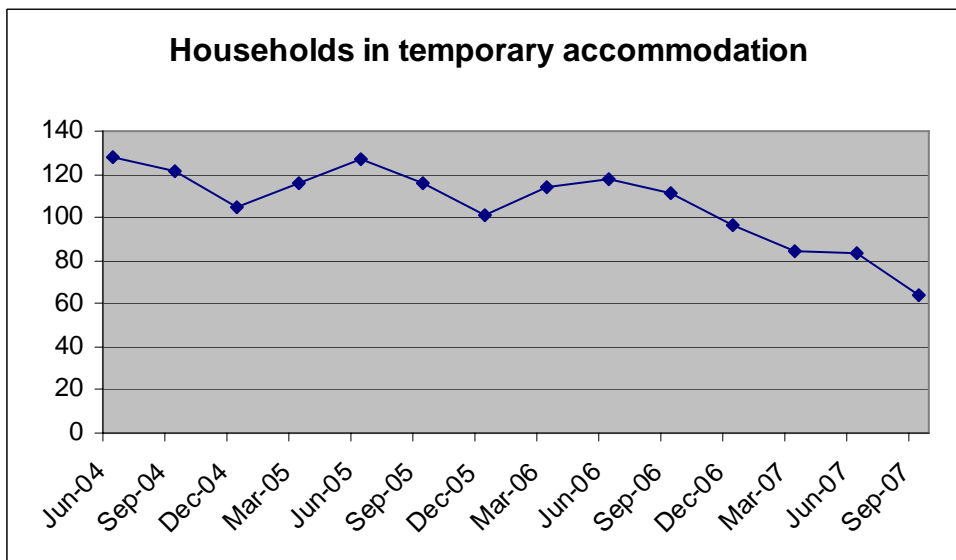
The prevention approach has been successful in reducing the number of households for which the full housing duty has been accepted (See table 4).

Figure 6:
The number of homelessness acceptances by North Hertfordshire



It has also contributed towards a steep reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation (See table 5)

Figure 7:
The number of households in temporary accommodation in North Hertfordshire



NHDC is keen to build on this success through enhancing the tools available for homelessness prevention and improving partnership working.

Annex D

North Hertfordshire District Council – Equality Impact Assessment – May 2008

Service Area: Housing and Environmental Health	Department Section: Housing Options Team	Person responsible for the assessment: Martin Lawrence, Housing Options Manager	Date of assessment: 23 rd May 2008
Name of Policy to be assessed: Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013		Existing or new policy?	New

1. Brief description of the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy	The Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's priorities for tackling homelessness in the district over the period 2008 – 2013 and includes an action plan for achieving them.
2. Are there any associated objectives of the policy?	The strategy has six priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of Homelessness; • Tackling Youth Homelessness; • Single People and Vulnerable Groups; • Reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation; • Partnership Working; and • Continuous Improvement.
3. Who is intended to benefit from the policy and in what way?	Once adopted, the Strategy will be used by officers and partners as a plan for delivering the Council's priorities to tackle homelessness and provide high quality services for local people.
4. What outcomes are wanted from this policy?	To ensure that there is a co-ordinated, consistent and planned approach to delivering housing advice and homelessness services.
5. What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes?	Contribute: Partnership working with statutory, voluntary and private agencies. Detract: Availability of funding. Changes in the housing market.
6. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to this policy?	The Council, Stevenage Borough Council, The North Quadrant Homelessness Forum, Registered Social Landlords, London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, Supporting People Team, Service Users, Herts Young Homeless Group, Children, Schools and Families, the CAB, and North Herts Homes.
7. Who implements the policy and who is responsible for the policy?	The Council through partnership working with North Quadrant Homelessness Forum.

8. Could the policy have a positive/negative impact on minority ethnic groups?	Positive: the strategy identifies specific tasks concerning minority ethnic groups to ensure that they experience equal access to services.
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy identifies enhanced monitoring across the service, improved access to information on the homelessness service of the Council and targeted housing advice services. The strategy will be made available in other languages if requested.
9. Will the policy have a positive/negative impact due to gender?	Positive
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy identifies actions to support victims of domestic violence (the majority of which are women). Further analysis of homelessness applications has also been identified in order to understand the differences in outcomes for male or female single and lone parent applicants.
10. Could the policy have a positive/negative impact due to disability?	Positive:
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy highlights the need to introduce monitoring of disability.
11. Could the policy have a positive/negative impact due to sexual orientation?	Positive
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy highlights the need to introduce monitoring of sexual orientation.
12. Could the policy have a positive/negative impact due to age?	Positive
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy has highlighted the need for research into lower levels of the prevention of homelessness for the 25-44 and 45-59 age groups. It also proposes research on the level of RSL tenants that are under-occupying (most often elderly) and to develop a housing options and incentives package if appropriate.
13. Could the policy have a positive/negative impact on people due to their religious beliefs?	Positive
What evidence is available to support this?	The strategy highlights the need to introduce monitoring of religion/belief.

14. Could the positive/negative impact identified in 8 – 13 amount to there being potential for adverse impact in this policy?	No
15. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or any other reason?	N/A
16. Is it necessary to perform a more in-depth impact assessment?	No
17. In-depth impact assessment to be completed by (date)	

Signed (Completing Officer) _____

Signed (Service Manager) _____

Stevenage Borough Council – Equality Impact Assessment – May 2008

Service Area: Strategic Housing	Department Section: Housing Strategy and Development	Person responsible for the assessment: Rosey Notley, Policy Officer	Date of assessment: 23 rd May 2008
Name of Policy to be assessed: Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013		Existing or new policy?	New

<p>What are the main aims and objectives or purpose of the strategy?</p>
<p>Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils have developed this strategy in partnership. Local Authorities are statutorily required to have a homelessness strategy. The strategy sets out the strategic priorities for tackling homelessness and includes an action plan for achieving them.</p>
<p>What outcomes do you want to achieve and for whom?</p>
<p>The strategy has 6 key strategic priorities: Prevention of Homelessness Tackling Youth Homelessness Single People and Vulnerable Groups Reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation Partnership Working Continuous Improvement</p> <p>Anyone who approaches the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service who is homeless or threatened with homelessness will benefit from advice and assistance. Services focus on homelessness prevention and working in partnership with other agencies to provide high quality services and improve outcomes.</p>
<p>Who is affected by this policy, service or function or by the way it is carried out? i.e. who are the internal and external customers, groups, communities or any other stakeholders?</p>
<p>A range of agencies will be involved with Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils in delivering this strategy. These include, among others, North Quadrant Homelessness Forum, Stevenage Homes, North Hertfordshire Homes, Supporting People, Social Services, Hertfordshire Young Homeless Group.</p>
<p>Who implements, carries out or delivers the policy, practice, service or function? Please state where more than one person, team, department or body?</p>

Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils have the strategic responsibility to deliver homelessness services. The North Quadrant Homeless Forum will be responsible for ensuring that the Homelessness Strategy is implemented, through continuous monitoring and reviewing of the delivery of the Action Plan.
Is the policy, practice, service or function affected by external drivers for change? e.g. new legislation, national policy, external inspections etc.
Yes, including legislation, case law, government guidance, best practice and performance management.
How is information about the strategy publicised?
The strategy will be published on the Council's website and through North Quadrant Homelessness Forum meetings
Is the strategy up-to-date? State when last reviewed
The strategy has been completely revised for 2008 – 2013. The last Homelessness Strategy was produced in 2003 to cover the period 2003 – 2008.
How was it drawn up? Who was consulted?
A consultation event was held in October 2007 that was attended by all the key stakeholders and partners of both Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils, together with service users. Feedback from this event was used to determine the six key priorities of the strategy.
How was it communicated?
The completed strategy has been circulated to all key stakeholders and partners for comment and has also been published on the Council's website.
How have managers and staff been made aware of their rights and responsibilities?
Staff are made aware of their rights and responsibilities through the PDM process, team meetings, written policies and procedures. Development opportunities that are identified will be considered to ensure a fair and equitable service. All complaints will be investigated and the service will continually strive to improve.
What are the key performance indicators? These may be national and/or local?

Reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by half by 2010 – Government target
Numbers of households living in temporary accommodation – National Indicator 156
Number of rough sleepers in the area on a given night – Housing Investment Programme
Homelessness prevented through housing advice intervention – P1E
Average length of stay in hostel accommodation – local indicator

What links are there between this strategy and other corporate objectives?

The strategy works towards achieving the Council's ambition of Good Housing for All. It is synonymous with the principles of the Local Strategic Partnership and links with the Council's Housing and Community Safety Strategies and with Hertfordshire County Council's Supporting People Strategy

What steps have you taken to ensure that your procurement procedures address equality issues, if the policy, practice, function or service is provided by another organisation or agency on behalf of the Council?

Services incorporated within the protocol will be delivered by partner agencies and Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Councils and delivery will be monitored by the North Quadrant Homelessness Forum. Service delivery will be equitable with those organisation's Equal Opportunities Policies

What information do you have from recent consultation that may help with the assessment? Have you have specific arrangements for consulting 'hard to reach' groups? Do you have an ongoing dialogue with certain groups?

The consultation event held in October was attended by service users from Stevenage Haven, an emergency hostel for single homeless people. This group are hard to reach as they are often roofless and transient. Other service users who attended the event were young single mothers living in supported accommodation with 24 hour support.

Race:

This question not only looks broadly at adverse impacts/barriers in terms of race, but also considers impacts/barriers which may be particular to people from one ethnic group.

Identify an adverse impacts/barriers of the policy of procedure on people who may be disadvantaged because of their race

Positive impact: The strategy identifies specific tasks concerning minority ethnic groups to ensure they experience equal access to services, including enhanced monitoring, improved access to information and targeted housing advice services.

Gender:

It is worthwhile remembering that women and men have different priorities in relation to what services they want and different needs for how these are provided.

Identify and adverse impact/barriers of policy, practise, service or function on people who may be disadvantaged because of their gender.

Women

Positive impact: The strategy identifies actions to support victims of domestic violence (the majority of which are women). Further analysis of homelessness applications has also been identified in order to understand the differences in outcomes for male or female single and lone parent applicants.

Where do you think improvements could be made for people experiencing disadvantage because of their gender?

The gender of all housing applicants is held on the applications database. There is no evidence that gender influences how an application for housing is assessed.

Disability:

All service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, including physical features of premises, so it is advisable to anticipate any adjustments that may be required. Consider the barriers faced by different groups of people with disabilities as listed in the boxes below. Note also that changes to legislation mean that conditions such as MS, HIV and cancer are now included under the DDA from the time of diagnosis.

Identify any adverse impact/barriers of policy, practise, service on people who may be disadvantaged because of their disability.

Positive impact: People with disabilities are more likely to be classed as in priority need when homeless as a result of their disability. The homelessness legislation classifies disability as one of the “vulnerable” groups to whom priority for re-housing should be given.

Where do you think improvements could be made for people experiencing disadvantage because of their disability?

The strategy highlights the need to introduce monitoring of disability

Age:

When answering the following questions consider the needs of the wider age range of the Borough.

Identify any adverse impact/barriers of policy, practice, service or function on people who may be disadvantaged because of their age.

Positive impact: Homelessness legislation defines all 16/17 year olds as being in priority need and the over 60's are given increased weighting when considering vulnerability.

Where do you think improvements could be made for people experiencing disadvantage because of their age?

The strategy has highlighted the need for research into lower levels of the prevention of homelessness for the 25-44 and 45-59 age groups. It also proposes research on the level of RSL tenants that are under-occupying (most often elderly) and to develop a housing options and incentives package if appropriate

Religion and Belief

Identify any adverse impact/barriers of policy, practice, service or function on people who may be disadvantaged because of their religion or belief.

None identified

Where do you think improvements can be made for people experiencing disadvantage because of their religion or belief?

Sexuality

Identify any adverse impact/barriers of policy, practice, service or function on people who may be disadvantaged because of their sexuality.

None identified

Where do you think improvements could be made for people experiencing disadvantage because of their sexuality?

The strategy highlights the need to introduce monitoring of sexual orientation