



NORTHAMPTON  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Northamptonshire  
County Council

**Review homelessness as a whole system, including the interactions between and the pressure on both Councils to improve the quality of life for people vulnerable to becoming homeless and to reduce the overall level of homelessness**

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Homelessness Task and Finish Group

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## FOREWORD

Following a referral from Northampton Borough Council, our Overview & Scrutiny Committee was asked to review the homeless service both in Northampton and in the county as a whole. This Scrutiny Task & Finish Group is the first one to be conducted jointly with Northamptonshire County Council and is an excellent example of working in partnership with our neighbours.

The Task & Finish Group was charged with reviewing homelessness as a whole system, including the interactions between and the processes on both councils to improve the quality of life and advice for people vulnerable to being homeless and to reduce the overall level of homelessness.

Northampton Borough Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee set up a Task & Finish Group consisting of Councillor Lee Mason, Councillor Margaret Pritchard and Councillor Marion Allen. We invited Councillor Mark Bullock and Councillor Maureen Hill from Northamptonshire County Council to join us.

We heard evidence from a wide range of representatives and observed operations at Fish Street Housing & Money Advice Centre.

We started in late November 2005 and concluded in March 2006.

We would like to thank all those involved in preparing this report Fran Rodgers, Madeline Spencer, Linda Brede, Tracy Tiff, Geoff Stokes and Nigel Stock.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lee Mason".

Councillor Lee Mason



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marion Allen".

Councillor Marion Allen



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M.E. Pritchard." with a horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Margaret Pritchard



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Bullock".

Councillor Mark Bullock

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following a referral from Northampton Borough Council, our Overview & Scrutiny Committee was asked to review the homeless service both in Northampton and in the county as a whole. This Scrutiny Task & Finish Group is the first one to be conducted jointly with Northamptonshire County Council and is an excellent example of working in partnership with our neighbours.

Most homelessness is preventative but it requires:-

- Services being tailored so that there can be a joined up approach towards homelessness
- Investment in prevention, not in responding to the crisis
- Understanding the needs of vulnerable people

There is a big issue around affordable housing, and the need to ensure that all available housing is made best use of, particularly private sector housing. As Councils, we have the ability to help people through the process, including private landlords. We have through early intervention ensured the health and well being of our citizens.

Significant progress has been made in terms of homeless services since the Task & Finish Group was set up. There are, however, further improvements to be made and this Overview & Scrutiny Task Group has made a number of recommendations around homeless prevention, partnership working, internal processes, vulnerable people, rough sleeping and temporary accommodation.

A significant amount of evidence was heard and this report includes these as appendices to the report.

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF THE HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**1. Purpose**

To review homelessness in Northamptonshire as a whole system, including the interactions between and the pressures on both councils to improve the quality of life and advice for people vulnerable to becoming homeless and to reduce the overall level of homelessness.

**2. Context**

This is the first example of joint scrutiny working between the borough and the county. Homelessness is high on the national agenda and has been identified as a service pressure at both Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. Of particular concern has been:

- The high numbers of homeless applications
- Lack of alternative housing options
- Lack of a multi-agency approach
- Failure to address the needs of vulnerable groups
- The high cost of temporary accommodation.
- The previous poor relationship between the county and the borough

**3. Evidence**

During the six half day meetings the Committee heard evidence from:

Fran Rodgers, Corporate Manager, NBC, - Homeless Baseline information and case studies

Mohammed Sabeel, Homeless Link, – Homeless Forum and the role of the voluntary sector

Councillors Pritchard and Allen - visit to the Housing Advice Service at Fish Street

Lisa Barker, Operations Manager - Homelessness Directorate, ODPM - the national perspective

Nigel Stock, Northamptonshire County Council – Services for Young People- case studies.

Brian Binley, MP, - case studies particularly concerning joint custody awards.

Ann McGrail - Learning disability issues

Jon Olsen, Community Service manager, Northamptonshire Healthcare Trust.

#### **4. Conclusions**

It is clear that significant improvements have been made within the homeless service in the last few months since the Task & Finish group has met.

For example, homeless applications have been reduced by two-thirds since October 2005.

Both the number of applications and the number of admissions to temporary accommodation have reduced by 50% in the last 5 months.

Numbers in temporary accommodation are down from 198 at the end of September 2005 to 104 at the end of February 2006 and specifically from 53 in bed and breakfast to only 4 in the same period.

There is still much to do to ensure that prevention initiatives are embedded and that service level agreements and working arrangements are robust and effective.

Prevention is the key for the future and features prominently in the draft service improvement plan for homelessness.

#### **5. Recommendations**

The following series of recommendations are grouped in specific categories:

##### **1. Homeless Prevention:**

- Dedicate sufficient resources to homeless prevention
- Develop quality front-line services which meet the needs of all customers
- Establish a housing options toolkit including a long term rent deposit scheme
- Investigate options for and realistically cost a sanctuary scheme for people suffering domestic abuse
- Develop a spend to save strategy with a realistic budget allocation and robust criteria for expenditure

##### **2. Partnership Working**

- By Sept 2006 introduce robust protocols particularly with Northamptonshire County Council for:
  - (a) Looked after children aged 16 and over, particularly children leaving care, and teenagers aged 16/17.

- (b) Intentional homeless families
  - (c) Youth offenders
  - (d) Prison leavers
  - (e) Ex-army personnel
  - (f) Adults with Learning disabilities
  - (g) Adults with Mental Health issues
- Ensure voluntary sector support and 'buy-in' to the principles of homeless prevention through regular liaison and performance monitoring
  - Work with other social housing partners to develop a purpose built hostel for single homeless people (and their dogs!)
  - Engage Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the homeless prevention agenda, particularly to provide specialist support to vulnerable groups
  - Northampton Borough Council/Northamptonshire County Council should lead on the development of the Homeless Forum and the homeless thematic partnership for all agencies in the county
  - Develop the regional homeless strategy in partnership with all Councils in the county and within the East Midlands region.
  - Work with other key partners including the Police and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to reduce homelessness.

### **3. Internal Processes & Procedures**

- Ensure internal Council procedures are joined up and effective, for example, sign up to a Corporate Debt Policy
- Improve the accuracy of statistical recording through investment in IT.
- Sign off decisions on evictions.
- Temporary accommodation admissions - sign off procedures

### **4. Vulnerable People**

- Develop a strategy for managing the housing needs of people with learning disabilities
- Ensure floating support services are targeted at the most vulnerable groups
- Consult with users to better understand their needs and meet their aspirations
- Provide tenancy support for young people to help sustain their tenancies
- Customers to be kept informed of the progress of their application and what to expect at each stage.
- Ensure a joined up approach with multi agency involvement. A lead agency to be appointed to take overall responsibility.

- Develop awareness training for all staff involved in homeless issues including joint training sessions for NBC and NCC staff.
- Better access to the service for minority groups.

## **5. Rough Sleeping**

- Develop a multi-agency approach to dealing with rough sleeping with particular emphasis on:
  - (a) Work with mental health trusts
  - (b) Services for people leaving the armed forces
  - (c) The role of the DAT teams

## **6. Temporary Accommodation**

- Provide high quality 'value for money' services through robust budget management and accessing available funding streams
- Develop a robust temporary accommodation strategy that provides quality accommodation at competitive prices
- Keep use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum other than in an emergency.
- Make links with other relevant agencies e.g. local colleges regarding accommodation.

## **7. Financial implications**

- NBC has committed £100,000 in 2006/7 for homeless prevention initiatives.
- Further funding of £90,000 has been made available by ODPM for specific projects such as work on Rough sleeping.
- It is anticipated that the majority of actions identified in this report will be contained within existing budgets unless otherwise specified.
- Agreement in principle to work towards a joint NCC/NBC solution for intentional homeless families.
- Agreement in principle to the recycling of savings from homeless initiatives back into homeless prevention.
- The Group recognises the disproportionate impact of cuts in funding in this area and supports the "invest to save" approach to homelessness.

## **8. Review timescale**

- It is proposed that we review progress in 6 months

## HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN

<b>HOMELESS PREVENTION</b>		<b>When</b>	<b>Endline</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Cost</b>
	1. Review Housing Advice resources	May 2006	Appx B	Fran Rodgers	Within existing budgets
	2. Reshape Housing Advice Service delivery to meet the needs of all customers	June 2006	Appx H	Fran Rodgers	Within existing budgets
	3. Establish Rent Deposit Scheme and housing options toolkit	April 2006 onwards	Appx J	Madeline Spencer	£100,000
	4. Investigate options for a Sanctuary Scheme	Sept 2006	Appx E	Madeline Spencer	No information available
	5. Introduce a Spend to Save Strategy	May 2006	Appx D	Fran Rodgers	Nil
<b>PARTNERSHIP WORKING</b>					
	1. Introduce robust partnerships between Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council	By Sept 2006	Appx I	Madeline Spencer/Nigel Stock	Nil
	2. Introduce effective voluntary sector liaison including the Homeless Forum	April 2006	Appx F	Fran Rodgers	Nil
	3. Develop a purpose built homeless hostel	March 2007	Appx G	Fran Rodgers	To be advised
	4. Improved engagement with RSLs to assist in housing vulnerable people	May 2006 onwards	Appx A	Fran Rodgers	Nil

	5. Develop the regional Homeless Strategy	Dec 2006	Appx B	Fran Rodgers	Officer time
<b>INTERNAL PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES</b>					
	1. Introduce a Corporate Debt Policy	June 2006	Appx  B	Fran Rodgers	Nil
	2. Introduce new housing IT system	2007	Appx C	Fran Rodgers	Within existing budgets
	3. Introduce sign-off procedure for evictions	May 2006	Appx D	Madeline Spencer	Nil
	4. Sign-off procedures for TA	May 2006	Appx D	Madeline Spencer	Nil
	5. Review all internal processes and procedures to ensure SMART working	By Jan 2007	Appx C	Fran Rodgers	To be advised
<b>TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION</b>					
	1. Value for money and high quality accommodation provision	By Sept 2006	Appx A	Madeline Spencer	£500,000 within existing budgets
	2. Temporary Accommodation Strategy	June 2006	Appx D	Madeline Spencer	Nil
<b>VULNERABLE PEOPLE</b>					
	1. Learning Disability Strategy	Oct 2006	Appx 1	Madeline Spencer	Nil
	2. User Consultation Strategy	June 2006	Appx C	Fran Rodgers	To be advised
	3. Homeless awareness training for staff	Ongoing	Appx A	Madeline Spencer	Within existing budgets
	4. Develop a Rough Sleeping Strategy and responsive service	June 2006	Appx B	Fran Rodgers	£90,000 ODPM funding

## **Appendices**

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Homelessness Task and Finish Group

Wednesday, 16 November 2005

#### Present:

Councillor Lee Mason, NBC (Chair)  
Councillor Margaret Pritchard, NBC  
Councillor Marion Allen, NBC  
Councillor Mark Bullock, NCC

#### Also in attendance

Councillor Brendan Glynane, NBC Chair of Overview & Scrutiny  
Committee  
Margaret Martin Consortium  
Fran Rodgers Corporate Manager, NBC  
Geoff Stokes Head of Democratic Services, NCC

#### 1 Election of Chair

Moved and seconded that Councillor Lee Mason be elected Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group.

#### 2 Introductions and Protocol for the meeting

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had decided to investigate homelessness as it was concerned about the increased number of households in temporary accommodation. The Chair suggested that the Group look at how the Temporary Accommodation Reduction – Action Plan 2005/06 was operating and the process for homelessness applicants. Implementation of the Action Plan had commenced. Targets were in place. Over a four-week period, the number in temporary accommodation had reduced by 10%. 35 were currently in bed and breakfast accommodation, 30 units of NBC stock was dedicated to homeless households as was 70 units of private sector housing stock.

Fran Rodgers, Corporate Manager, added that the number of residents in temporary accommodation and the high cost to the Authority was a matter of concern. Homelessness would be a focussed upon by the Audit Commission in its next assessment. In accordance with NBC's Recovery Plan 2005, the Authority was trying to achieve the prevention of homelessness.

The Task and Finish Group was asked to consider whether the review should be carried out solely by NBC or jointly with NCC.

Councillor Bullock advised that the County Council has homelessness programmed into its Scrutiny work plan. The Authority was considerably overspending on its homelessness budget. If families with children became homeless, they were the responsibility of NCC rather than the Borough Council.

Councillors agreed that the purpose of NCC's review aligned with NBC's Homelessness Strategy – to significantly reduce the number of homeless households by 2010.

**Agreed:** That the review be carried out jointly by NBC and NCC.

### **3 Current Positions**

The Group commented that homelessness: -

- Involved all Statutory Bodies. There should therefore be a multi agency approach.
- There was a need to look how the service operated when a someone presented themselves as homeless.
- Created increased pressure on affordable and social housing.
- Sally Keeble, MP, received a lot of information regarding homelessness and it would be beneficial to interview the two MPs for Northampton.

The Group then suggested that it would be beneficial: -

- To 'track' a homelessness applicant through the process.
- To receive some baseline information in order to understand the extent of the problem.
- To look at real case studies (approximately six) regarding identifying blockages and problems in the system.
- To concentrate on specific areas of the Key Lines of Enquiry Document for Homelessness and use the CPA report as baseline information.
- To investigate the cost effectiveness of the services provided to homeless households and individuals.
- To accept the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)'s offer of advice regarding homelessness and invite representatives to attend a future meeting.
- Investigate the cost effectiveness of the services provided for homeless people.

Publicity of the review was discussed and it was agreed to include the involvement of the press, but at a future meeting.

Potential witnesses would be contacted and invited to either attend a future meeting or forward written evidence.

#### **4 Scoping Exercise**

Councillor Bullock circulated NCC's scoping document for the Review of Homelessness and its associated costs – The Task and Finish Group broadly accepted the document, making some amendments as attached at annex I to the minutes.

**Agreed:** That the scoping document as attached at Annex I

#### **5 Date of Next Meetings**

Friday 9 December

Friday 6 January 2006

Friday 27 January

All meetings would commence at 10am to 1pm and be held in the Jeffery Room, Guildhall.

The meeting concluded at 16.30 hours.

## HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday 9 December 2005

PRESENT: Councillor Lee Mason - NBC (Chair)  
Councillor Margaret Pritchard - NBC  
Councillor Marion Allen - NBC

Also In Attendance:

Councillor Brendan Glynane - NBC  
Margaret Martin - Consortium  
Fran Rodger - Corporate Manager – NBC  
Madeline Spencer - NBC  
Nigel Stock - NCC  
Bob Lane - NCC

### 1. APOLOGIES.

None.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2005.

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING.

#### (A) PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE. APPENDIX TO THE MINUTES.

The Chair referred to the Appendix to the minutes and advised that it had been agreed that the Thematic Case Studies would be considered at meeting 3 and not meeting 2 as indicated.

#### (B) ADVICE FROM THE ODPM.

It was noted that a representative from the ODPM had been invited to attend the meeting on 17 February 2006. A report in relation to tackling homelessness had been produced and it was agreed that it be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting.

### 4. PRESENT BASELINE DATA.

#### (a) ANALYSIS OF DATA.

#### (b) ISSUES ARISING.

Nigel Stock advised that NCC had agreed protocols in relation to Housing and Vulnerable People with all of the other Districts/Borough in the County but not Northampton itself. Although the arrangements in place were working well the protocol had never been signed off. It was agreed that work continue in the future to words agreeing a protocol.

Fran Rodgers gave a presentation in relation to the NBC Homelessness Service.

### HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS:-

It was noted that:-

- Over the last 5 years the number of applications received by the Homelessness Section had remained fairly static at approximately 1000 per year. Further investigation was required as to why this number was not reducing.

- Also it was unclear why the number had dropped significantly in 2002.
- Since April 2006 NBC had recorded those who had applied but had been told they were not technically homeless.
- The Housing Register statistics included those in priority need that do not go through the homelessness route.
- There had been a significant drop in applications in October 2006 to 27 from 86 in September 2006.
- The projected figure for the current year had been revised to 800, a 20% reduction.
- The recent significant drop in applications was due to a different approach whereby people were not automatically given a homeless application form on request as had been happening but every effort was made to mediate with families, friends etc or to resolve the route of the problem i.e. Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Another contributory factor was the implementation of a Rent Deposit Scheme which had proved very popular. This assisted in getting people into private accommodation.
- Mediation was being undertaken as a pilot and it enabled a person to plan to leave within a realistic timescale.
- The aim was to build up a housing options toolkit.
- Applicants leaving prison were dealt with under a Probation Contract.

The Group then asked Questions and made comments:-

- A Rent Deposit Scheme had been tried previously how was it different this time? It was noted that the scheme was being used proactively and was targeted.
- Did NBC work with the Police in cases of domestic violence? NBC worked closely with the Police in such cases and there were two refuges available for emergencies. However a more sophisticated approach was needed so options could be offered.
- Did the figure include those that had applied and been found to be intentionally homeless. It was noted that the figures include all applications regardless of the outcome.
- Particularly in cases of domestic violence were measures taken to ensure a victim was not allocated a property close to the perpetrator. Fran Rodger confirmed that this was the case and advised that more action would be taken in the future in relation to Contract contravention.
- In cases involving 16/17 year olds and those involving domestic violence the response NCC received from NBC was good.

## HOMELESSNESS ACCEPTANCE.

It was noted that:-

- The ODPM target for the acceptance of application was 1.7 per 1,000 households so as NBC accepted 5.5 per 1,000 households they were accepting too many.
- The reason that the acceptance rate was so high was because applications were taken on face value and there was insufficient investigation.

The Group commented that:-

- It would be useful to look at the acceptance rates of similar Councils.
- The figures up to the end of December 2005 should be considered at the next meeting.

## WHY ARE HOUSEHOLDS BECOMING HOMELESS IN NORTHAMPTON:-

It was noted that:-

- The category "Parents no longer willing to accommodate" included applicants of all ages as people were staying with parents longer due to the lack of affordable housing.
- At Christmas the number of homeless due to parents/friends always dropped but increased again after the holiday.

The Group asked Questions and made comments:-

- The "other" category was too large suggesting that cases needed more investigations.
- A breakdown of the "Parents no longer willing to accommodate" category into under and over 18's would be useful.
- Were those leaving care given priority and support? Those leaving care were considered priority need and NCC were responsible for finding and funding accommodation for 16/17 year olds.
- Were those leaving care given support to sustain a tenancy? Social Services helped set up the accommodation.
- Young People could apply in their own right at 18 but could not actually start the application process until they were actually 18.
- The concerns of Social Services related to those who were 16/17 who were homeless but not leaving care, those over 18 that they were still responsible for and homeless families.
- Application could be made 28 days before a person was homeless which the Group felt was too late.

- The Housing Services needed to get to the position whereby they were not “fire-fighting” but could take a strategic approach and work on more preventative measures.

## EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

It was noted:-

- 157 were in temporary accommodation at the end of November 2006.
- As at 9 December only 13 were in bed and breakfast and it was hoped no one would be by Christmas.

The Group commented that:-

- Acorn House (previous nightshelter) at one time had emergency family accommodation. It was agreed Madeline Spencer investigate this further.
- Anyone made homeless during office hours should report to the HMAAC.
- There was a need to ensure that all agencies including the Police knew where to send people reporting homeless.
- CAN should be identifying and working with rough sleepers. It was important to help them as early as possible, before other problems developed, i.e. ill health.
- There was a need to accept that some people chose this lifestyle.

## TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION COSTS.

It was noted that:-

- Temporary Accommodation was a significant cost to NBC particularly as there was no budget for bed and breakfast which had cost £505,958.16 up to 31 November 2005. This had a detrimental effect on other services.
- In relation to the “end of assured shorthold tenancies” a significant factor was the lack of confidence in the Housing Benefit system by private landlords. However the situation was improving and a new system was being introduced on 19 December 2006.
- Was support given to those who rented privately to maintain their tenancies? The capacity to do this was not available at present but it may be possible to extend the Tenancy Support Scheme in the future.
- Previously NBC contacted Social Services when a young person was having problems maintaining their tenancy (ie rubbish, anti-social behaviour) but this had stopped recently. It would be good for this practice to be reinstated.

## THE LEGAL DUTIES

It was noted that:-

- The consideration by definition to be priority need were 16-17 year olds and households with children or pregnant women.
- Those considered vulnerable were not necessarily in priority need.
- Once “homelessness and priority need had been established” intentionality was considered. This included outstanding rent arrears and ASBOs.
- Emergency Accommodation was also a significant cost to Social Services.
- In 2005/2006 the ODPM contributed funding of £90,000 and the Probation Service contributed £25,000 – both amounts to fund specific projects.
- There was a need for discussions with CAN in relation to the future funding of the work with rough sleepers.
- There was a bid for £50,000 outstanding for work with BME homeless clients. However there was a need to understand the requirements of these clients and what housing was appropriate.

The group commented that:-

- It would be useful to have a breakdown of the statistics relating to BME Clients.
- The fact that CAN undertook the work with rough sleepers could give the public the impression they only dealt with clients with drug problems.
- It may be worth exploring a joint arrangement between NCC/NBC from translation services.

\* The final report should identify that there must be clear links between all of the agencies who potentially dealt with the homeless.\*

## OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED IN HOMELESS IN THE TOWN.

The group commented that:

- It was important to clarify what other services the other agencies offered so the services could be used to their full potential.
- It would be useful to follow an individual through the process from the time they report as homeless.
- More information about the work of Homeless Link would be useful.

Nigel Stock explained the role of Social Services in homelessness, particularly in relation to young people.

It was noted that:-

- They were required to support young people leaving care. This part of the service was working effectively.
- There were fewer children in care and those that were tended to have the more difficult behavioural problems.
- The recent Housing Act strengthened Social Services involvement and the support they were required to provide to 16/17 year olds.
- There was a whole team at Social Services dedicated to the support of 16/17 year olds.
- The spending on homelessness was a huge expense to Social Services, the budgets for which were hugely overspent.
- From 18 September 2005 to 30 November 2005 10 young people 16/17 years old, who had not previously been in care, had presented as homeless. Six had been placed in short term bed and breakfast and four had been placed in Social Services accommodation.
- The Community Support Team supported 60-70 young people in their accommodation at any one time, most of who were claiming full Housing Benefit.
- Social Services currently financially supported 16 families in Bed and Breakfast. Ten of those had been found to be intentionally homeless which Social Services felt was not appropriate.
- Some of those provided with accommodation were of uncertain asylum status.
- In relation to intentional homelessness of 16/17 year olds the threshold was low and this was an area where joint working could be improved.
- It was of significant concern at NCC of the level of expenditure particularly as homelessness was not an NCC responsibility. Fran Rodgers advised that NBC faces the same problem and therefore it was important for NCC and NBC to work towards streamlining the process and to avoid duplication.

Nigel Stokes circulated the list of the cost of the temporary accommodation used by Social Services.

#### 4 (c) FURTHER DATA REQUIRED.

- The figures in relation to the numbers of people who made a homeless application but were told that they were not actually homeless.
- The figures in relation to the numbers on the Housing Register over the same five year period (2000/1 to 2004/5) so a comparison could be made with the number of homeless applications.

- The homeless application acceptance figures from comparable Local Authorities to compare the figure of 5.5 per 1000 households. Also comparable data from the highest performing authorities.
- A breakdown of the “parents no longer willing to accommodate” figure into those under and those over 18. Also the cases where those reporting as homeless had a child.
- A breakdown of those from BEM communities who were homeless.
- Information on the related services provided by the other agencies involved in homelessness work.
- The links between the other agencies and NBC.
- More information on the work of Homeless Link.
- The number of people kept in hospital because, due to mental or physical illness, they could not return to their homes.
- Evidence from voluntary agencies including CAB and Welfare Rights as to the number of cases they dealt with in relation to homelessness.
- Case study evidence from the two MPs.

#### 5. OUTCOMES TO TAKE FORWARD.

It was agreed that at the next meeting on 6 January 2006 the group:-

- Receive the above information.
- Decide which case studies to consider at Meeting 3.
- Receive a presentation from Homeless Link with a view to learning about their work and the related services offered by the other agencies.

#### 6. TO NOTE THE SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS.

It was noted that the next meeting would be on 6 January 2006.

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### HOMELESSESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 6 January 2006

#### PRESENT:

Councillor Lee Mason	-	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Marion Allen	-	NBC
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	-	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	-	NCC

#### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Brendan Glynane	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, NBC
Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
Madeline Spencer	NBC
Linda Brede	NBC
Geoff Stokes	NCC

#### 1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maureen Hill (NCC), Nigel Stock (NCC) and Bob Lane (NCC).

#### 2 Declarations of Interest

None.

#### 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2005

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed.

#### 4 Matters Arising

In response to Councillor Pritchard's request for an update on agreed protocols in relation to Housing and Vulnerable People with of the other Districts/Boroughs in the County, M Spencer advised that she would be meeting later today with N Stock, NCC, to discuss the ongoing issue further.

Regarding emergency accommodation and Acorn House, the Task and Finish Group heard that discussions were taking place with Mohameed Sabeel and the work was still ongoing.

#### 4 Further Information regarding Homelessness

Linda Brede, Allocations Team Leader, was introduced to the Group. Linda was working with the teams based at Fish Street.

Fran Rodgers circulated the most up to date (July to September) statistics regarding the homelessness provision that the Authority has to return to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on a quarterly basis. It was noted that NBC did have its figures up to December 2005. Reporting was done on a rolling basis.

Northampton had 1.4 households per 1,000 as accepted as being homeless and in priority need compared to 1.2 per 1,000 in the whole of England. Fran commented that Leicester City Council, a Beacon Authority, had .5 households per 1,000 as accepted as being homeless and in priority need. Leicester CC had embedded the homelessness prevention approach agenda. Milton Keynes took a similar approach to Leicester and had .9 households per 1,000.

Fran explained the statistics – supplementary table: Local Authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts: Third Quarter 2005 (July to September):-

Eligible homeless and in priority need, but intentionally:-

- Robust investigation and decision making – preventing homelessness so that individuals don't make applications and it was also about dealing with applications

Eligible homelessness but not homeless:-

- Quite a high figure for Northampton (52)
- Category includes people with short hold tenancies who have received notice to leave – NBC might be able to negotiate with the landlord.
- Often individuals do not get to the stage of being included in the statistics – negotiations are reached prior to this. For example, mediation service is offered to the pregnant teenager who has been asked to leave home by her parents
- Wellingborough is high in this category. All other Councils in the County appear to be better. Fran undertook to bring this up at the forthcoming Chief Housing Officers Group.

There were issues about rural homelessness.

Fran then referred to the Households accommodated by the authority at the end of September 2005 data:-

- Just over 101,000 households in temporary accommodation in England
- Approximately 3,000 in Northamptonshire

- 198 households living in temporary accommodation in Northampton town, a considerable improvement.
- Leicester had just 63 households in temporary accommodation – addressing the homelessness prevention approach agenda.
- Milton Keynes had 847, which appeared it was putting homeless households into temporary Local Authority stock – to change to a permanent tenancy would clear this figure.

The Group asked questions regarding the Homeless at Home awaiting accommodation category:-

- If individuals/households can stay in their present accommodation they are categorised as homeless at home. The Authority does not wait until the crisis point but does not act too early either; negotiations can often be carried out with the landlord.
- Alternatives could be explored such as alternatives in the private sector – rent assistance scheme
- Councillors referred to cases in the county regarding individuals with mental and physical disabilities who had been told nothing could be done until they were evicted.
- Northampton was unique by having its Housing and Money Advice Service. It also had a mediation service, which often produced successful outcomes.

Fran Rodgers confirmed that an analysis of how long households had been in temporary accommodation could be provided. The majority however, stayed for no longer than three months.

The Group then asked questions and made comments: -

- Whether a group of young people was Local Authority temporary accommodation. Discussions were due to take place with NCC to establish a pathways protocol in this respect. Young people should not have to go through the homeless application process.
- As young people become ready and independent NBC has re housed them and has some good success stories. **Report back to future meeting.**
- People with learning difficulties are often not on the homeless at home list, for example, their carer dies and they become homeless. It would be beneficial to have a similar process for vulnerable people.
- Requested details of the number of young disabled people and other vulnerable groups across the country.
- There was an over supply of sheltered accommodation (flatted) that could be adapted.
- Bed Block had been identified with NCC – individuals coming out of hospital, mental hospital etc., who had been institutionalised for a long time and needed a safe place to reside
- Individuals leaving St Crispin's Hospital would be helped through supporting housing and would not be classed as homeless

- Five individuals were living at Princess Marina hospital, which was due to close shortly, and they needed support. Negotiations were ongoing and were almost resolved.
- There were a number of available bungalows around the county run by the Health Authority but the Group felt that these should come under the ownership of Social Services.
- The monitoring of the data needs to improve, for example Indian Pakistani and Bangladeshi were reported as zero when we know that applications come from these groups.
- Corporate discussion to be held regarding the use of data, e.g., the census or NBC's own collected data.
- The Group requested a breakdown of homeless households accommodated by NBC, breakdown of families, young children, age etc.

Fran Rodgers reported that since the Authority had introduced the prevention of homelessness approach, the figures had improved. She gave her assurance that it was not about putting barriers in place, but providing alternative housing solutions.

The Group then discussed the number of acceptances of homelessness applications. It was noted that if you receive less applications, acceptances would be lower. For the third quarter (October, November and December), for Northampton only, NBC has looked at prevention initiatives and looked more closely at applications. The acceptance rate was approximately 50%.

Regarding allocation/nominations for October/November/December 2005, approximately 1000 council properties per annum were nominated, 300 to RSLs and homelessness acceptances was 500. Homelessness applications created a huge pressure on allocations. For example, when Beaumont/Claremont Court was refurbished, 140 individuals had to be rehoused.

Madeline Spencer advised that it would not be beneficial to include category Other into the data report as it had been identified that the Authority had problems with its accuracy of reporting which needed to be addressed.

Madeline was pleased to report that total in temporary accommodation as at 30 September 2005 had fallen from 198 to 133 and the number in bed and breakfast as at the same date had fallen from 52 to 6.

The Group was informed that Fran Rodgers had put a request in to SMT for a homelessness prevention budget, without which, it would be difficult to move forward. The Authority had given the ODPM its assurances that it would re-invest its savings into homelessness.

The Group then discussed the comparison of homelessness applications to the number on the housing register. In 2001/02 a Government Initiative – Rent Assistance Scheme was introduced (number on the housing register was at 4356); SRB funding was also available in that year, as was affordable

housing, such as Simpson Barrack. There was a big increase on the housing register from 2002/03 (5042) to 2003/04 (7055), but the increase in housing prices could have been an influencing factor.

The Group asked questions and made comment:

- If an individual had been on the housing register for some time? They were issued with an automated letter on the anniversary of their application asking if they wished to remain on the register, continuous annual letters were issued.
- 6681 individuals were currently on the register. 1300 allocations each year, leaving the majority with no offer. Discussions need to be held with people on the register regarding realistic aspirations, using the rent assistance scheme etc., to help take people off the list.
- The Housing Needs Survey was carried out in 2002. There are continual links in with the Housing Strategy. Housing Strategy should address demand, what is affordable etc., should be fed in to give a figure how much affordable housing the Authority needs.
- Housing must be appealing as well as affordable. Schemes such as Homebuy are being developed for those who cannot afford to buy outright.
- Growth Agenda is the biggest opportunity to get this right, support network etc. The bigger picture often more than just bricks and mortar.
- There was a need to recognise children's homes in respect of the Growth Agenda.
- An understanding of demographics was needed to show the importance of fine tuned housing needs.

Councillor Glynane suggested that the Portfolio Holder be requested to drive forward the importance of fine tuned housing needs and ask that it be high on WNDC's Growth Agenda.

**AGREED:** That the Portfolio Holder be requested to drive forward importance of fine tuned housing needs and ask that it be high on WNDC's Growth Agenda.

## **5 Outcomes to take forward**

### **Case Studies**

Fran Rodgers circulated a draft letter to all Councillors (including local MPs) asking for submission of case scenarios which they felt the Task and Finish Group would benefit in receiving.

The next meeting would discuss case studies. It was noted that case studies would be anonymous and would be referred to as Mr or Mrs X.

The Group suggested that an individual who had been through the Homelessness process be invited to attend the next meeting to explain the process from the customer's point of view. Madeline Spencer would select an

individual who would be willing to attend and whom the process would not intimidate.

The Group suggested examples of case scenarios that it would be interested in receiving, commenting: -

- Councillors could present cases on behalf of applicants
- Beneficial to observe a Housing Officer dealing with homelessness
- Need to look for emerging patterns in the homelessness process, track some real cases through the system
- Need to make it real – receive fundamental people's experiences
- The letter inviting case scenarios should also be sent to the Sunflower Centre (example domestic violence), LGB Alliance, MIND, NCC – Nigel Parkes (example individuals with special needs evicted from private housing). Acorn Housing and CAN (example ex-rough sleeper, someone coming out of prison/probation) SAFRA (example individual leaving service), Gharana Housing (now Presentation Housing) (example of language barriers for Ethnic Minorities), Welfare Rights (example Asylum Seekers and Refugees)
- Case studies regarding young people leaving care would be useful
- As would, cases in respect of 20 and 21 year olds
- Case scenario of a relationship breakdown
- Case scenario of someone who has been in temporary accommodation for a long time. For example Brer Court
- Case study of young pregnant teenager – homeless at home category
- Case Study from the local MPs
- There was a need for delicate reporting of the case studies received

The above suggested case scenarios would be included in the letter to Councillors, Local MPs and organisations as detailed above. Councillor Mason and Fran Rodgers would then identify six case studies for the next meeting.

Councillors Allen and Pritchard volunteered to observe a Housing Officer (shadowing) in accordance with the homelessness process and report back their findings to the next meeting.

- AGREED:**
- (1) That Councillor Mason and Fran Rodgers identify six case studies for the next meeting.
  - (2) That Councillors Allen and Pritchard observe a Housing Officer in accordance with the homelessness process and report back their findings to the next meeting.
  - (3) That the letter to Councillors, Local MPs and organisations would ask for two case studies per organisation.

Mohammed Sabeel, East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink, would attend the next meeting.

## **6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Friday 27 January commencing at 10.00 am in the Jeffery Room at the Guildhall.

The agenda would comprise:

- 1 Discussion with Mohammed Sabeel, East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink.
- 2 Pathways Protocol –Update
- 3 Housing Officer Shadowing – Report Back
- 4 Case Studies

The meeting concluded at 12:05pm

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 27 January 2006 commencing at 10:00am

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillor Lee Mason	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	NCC

#### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Mohammed Sabeel	East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink, (Item 5)
Ann McGail	Team Manager (Community Support) Learning Disabilities Unit (Item 8)
Councillor Yousuf Miah	Residential Operations Portfolio Holder, NBC
Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
Madeline Spencer	NBC
Linda Brede	NBC
Geoff Stokes	NCC
N Stock	NCC

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Marion Allen and Councillor Brendan Glynane (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

The Chair welcomed Mohammed Sabeel, East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink, to the meeting.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 JANUARY 2006**

The minutes of the above meeting were agreed.

#### **4 MATTERS ARISING**

The Group heard that the average length of time people were housed in temporary accommodation was approximately 22 weeks. 25 households (from a total of 120) have been in temporary accommodation for longer than 22 weeks. There was a shortage of 2-bedded accommodation, which was the type of property that was most in demand. Although larger families were living in temporary accommodation, the trend was towards smaller families. Exit

plans are being produced for all those residing in temporary accommodation; looking at need against aspiration. The Authority resists using one-bedded flats.

The Chair welcomed looking at exit plans and emphasised the demand for two-bedded properties.

## **5 DISCUSSION WITH MOHAMMED SABEEL, EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL MANAGER, HOMELESSLINK**

Mohammed Sabeel advised the Group of his role. He is the Regional Manager for the East Midlands region, covering Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Rutland and Northamptonshire. There were nine regional managers across the country and their role was to support the Voluntary Sector. They were able to respond to both regional and local priorities. One of their roles was mediation. Homelesslink identified opportunities and sources of funding and disseminated good practice. Regional Managers were funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). He referred to the Government's Strategy - 'Change Up', regarding supporting the Voluntary Sector. There was a concern whether smaller organisations providing a front line were sustainable. Therefore, funding of £90 million from April 2005, for three years, had been granted by the ODPM and HDIP. In turn, it generates funding from the Housing Corporation. SRB funding and European Social funding can also be matched. Most of the £90 million funding has been committed.

Homelesslink was looking at hostels and night shelters. Revamping them, all with en suite rooms and taking out the letter 's' in order that they looked more like hotels. 90% of individuals residing in hostels were unemployed. M Sabeel was looking at the Strategy for hostel provision and the need for 'joined up' provision. There was a need for a strategic overview through a Providers' Forum, to continuously improve and review.

Homelesslink has knowledge of good information and provides a lot of support. Leicester City Council (Beacon status), Nottingham City and Nottingham County Council were members.

It was commented that the County's Homeless Strategic Partnership should work with the Rough Sleepers Forum.

M Sabeel first visited Northampton in August 2005 and advised that he is very aware of the vast difference since his first visit. He commended NBC. He did add that NBC needed to realise that it could not tackle everything itself; there are other providers who can assist. M Sabeel supported NBC's Rent Assistance Scheme and suggested that the Authority consider introducing a Rent Deposit Scheme.

M Sabeel acknowledged that NBC has a strong homelessness agenda. He advised that Leicester City Council and East Lindsey District Council have been recognised as best practice. He suggested that David Pressey, East Lindsey District Council, be contacted for advice. East Lindsey had a good

Rent Deposit Scheme. Front Line staff had the authorisation to approve rent deposits and maintenance work up to the value of £300. For example, a tenant was being threatened with eviction due to the state of the garden, front line officers authorised the garden clearance at a cost of £140; the tenancy was safeguarded.

Northampton's Maple Health Practice was unique, the only one of its kind in the country. The holistic service is committed to providing service to all disadvantaged groups. It is being investigated to promote this as good practice across the country.

M Sabeel has been working with the YMCA and NBC regarding funding opportunities. £140,000 had been approved, for refurbishment of Derngate premises

In response to Councillor Bullock's request of issues to bring to the attention of the ODPM representative at the next meeting, M Sabeel advised that the ODPM representative was committed to Authorities that needed advice and funding. It was the wide view that NBC was improving its service. He suggested that the Group inform the ODPM representative what it is doing in respect of the homelessness agenda and temporary accommodation. He felt that the Authority was already doing a lot in these areas.

In answer to Councillor Pritchard's query whether the Rough Sleepers Forum was the same as the Homeless Forum, M Sabeel advised that it was perceived that the Rough Sleepers Forum concentrated on rough sleepers only and not the wider agenda of homelessness. RSLs were invited to be part of the Homeless Forum. The Forum was run by Voluntary Providers and supported by agencies.

F Rodgers commented that the first step was to ensure everyone was on board and then to decide on the priorities; but rough sleepers must not be forgotten. If the Authority is to continue with its Rough Sleepers' Forum it needs to be re-launched.

Regarding rough sleepers, M Sabeel commented that there would always be individuals that preferred to live 'on the streets', but many do not and there were resources available to help them. Providers are very keen to work together with NBC. F Rodgers added that the Authority had signed up to a common agenda and had set some standards; there was a need to ensure that performance standards were reached.

Councillor Pritchard brought to the Group's attention a rough sleeper, with a dog, in the Hazelwood Road area and that hostels did not generally take individuals with dogs. M Sabeel advised that some hostels did take dogs but this was an important issue that the Forum should investigate.

Councillor Bullock commented that there were some vulnerable children, under the age of 16, living on the streets.

In response to the Chair's request for details of what happens if an individual/family becomes homeless, M Spencer reported that after they had called the out of hours number, the homeless officer would go out and house them into emergency accommodation until the morning when an interview would then take place.

The Chair referred to the Torch Forum commenting that it had a lot of funding available, which must be wisely spent. The agencies that were members of Torch included the YMCA, CAN, Soup Kitchen, Mayday Trust, Acorn House, NBC, NCC, PCT, Supporting People, Northants Police. N Stock added that this Forum should be a countywide forum of providers and suggested that it would be beneficial if M Sabeel could be involved. It was envisaged that Torch would be re-launched in February/March.

M Sabeel was asked to give examples of the types of services carried out by 'good' Councils:

- East Lindsey has a Homeless Prevention Scheme and Rent Deposit Scheme (for individuals with a bad rent payment record)
- Moving individuals on from hostels quickly, offering training on basic life skills.
- The ODPM is keen on temporary accommodation and homelessness prevention agendas, rent deposit schemes and mediation services

The Chair thanked Mr Sabeel for his interesting and informative address.

## **6 PATHWAYS PROTOCOL - UPDATE**

M Spencer advised that she had liaised with N Stock, NCC, and a positive outcome had been achieved. They had concentrated on 16/17 year olds. NBC had agreed to sign up to the Protocol that was in existence for the rest of the county. A meeting would then be held with the Team Leaders. NBC's Homelessness Section would take the lead and there would be joint working in all areas. N Stock added that a range of meetings had been set up in relation to children and young people issues. Joint training across the teams was being investigated. The two Local Authorities were looking at the commonality of the customer. There was a need for an updated Protocol and this would be developed with input from all Authorities.

M Spencer advised that a County Housing Homeless Officers Forum would be set up shortly, comprising housing officers across the county.

The Group welcomed the Protocol but suggested that there was a need for discussions to take place about sharing budgets. Either or both Authorities might have to put in more resources. Both Authorities committed a lot of resources to homelessness.

Regarding the LAA and how funding was monitored, F Rodgers advised that the principles were about pooling budgets and working to a set standard of principles. A board would be set up to cover this area. Performance

management was key too. The Chair suggested that any further developments needed to be referred to in the recommendations of the Group's final report.

## **7 HOUSING OFFICER SHADOWING – REPORT BACK**

Councillor Allen had taken part in the Housing Officer's Shadowing exercise and sent her thanks to the whole team. She would welcome work with the homeless team regarding mental health discharge.

Councillor Pritchard circulated her report on the visit to the Homelessness Unit on 16 January 2006. She had observed:-

### **Homeless Exit Interview**

A young single male foreign student. He had previously been in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for a week and was offered a one-bedded furnished flat. The door to the airing cupboard had been damaged and the sink and washbasin were blocked but the officer promised these would be repaired. He accepted the tenancy. However, since 16 January it had been ascertained that the student would not be able to take on the tenancy permanently. The flats had been furnished and the cost of the furniture would be 'clawed' back over a four-year period. Therefore, in this case, he could not be given a permanent tenancy for that flat. He is still residing in the flat and would be allocated another property in due course.

L Brede advised that the Management Agency, responsible for the management of the flats, should have a more vigorous checking policy and there was a need for this to be tightened up. She added that this Agency was being paid a lot less than the Management Company responsible for managing the Authority's private accommodation leases.

### **Front desk of Housing and Money Advice**

The desk was very busy, two employees manning the desk. Constant queues.

Councillor Pritchard was concerned about the lack of privacy at this first point of contact. Barriers were in situ where people waited but conversations could easily be overheard. F Rodgers agreed with the lack of privacy comments, adding that a lot of Councillor Pritchard's comments had already been fed back to the team. There was a need to find some quick fixes, privacy was an issue.

### **Housing Options Interview**

The interview room contained Christmas decorations. Councillor Pritchard felt that they were slightly inappropriate and maybe some toys would have been better to entertain the children. She was also concerned that the room was very small.

## **Rent Assisted Scheme**

Details of the scheme were explained. Clients could find accommodation where they chose to live, but rent had to be within the Housing Benefits that they could claim.

## **Interview with Debt Counsellor**

Councillor Pritchard gave details of a young disabled woman who had asked for advice on her debts including tax, water arrears, catalogue bills and money owing to a finance company.

## **Temporary Accommodation meeting**

Details of the current availability of different types of accommodation were given. The section was not computerised; therefore working practices were difficult and time consuming. Further concerns were relayed about Brer Court. The budget of £2,500 had been spent and there were no available resources for window locks, replacement furniture and repainting, which had been promised previously.

Councillor Pritchard suggested that the following improvements be made:

- Privacy for the front desk
- Improvements to the Interview Rooms
- Computer data base for temporary accommodation
- Re-allocation of finance to improve the living conditions in Brer Court and especially the security of the houses.

L Brede advised that a disabled access interview room was available. IT officers were today investigated how the system could be used for temporary accommodation. She further commented that she had visited Brer Court recently to discuss maintenance issues. A copy of Councillor Pritchard's visit summary would be circulated to all Housing Staff.

F Rodgers advised that there was lots of potential to develop accommodation with private landlords on a five-year lease basis rather than short term. NBC was looking at procuring with one organisation that would then sublet to others. Councillor Bullock advised that NCC had a large procurement team and would ask the manager to contact F Rodgers.

Councillor Pritchard conveyed her thanks to the Homeless Unit Team.

## **8 CASE STUDIES**

Ann McGail, Team Manager (Community Support), Learning Disabilities Unit, advised the Group of case studies that she had been involved in.

She commented that there were a number issues in respect of individuals with learning disabilities. Often they did not reach the statistics stage, for example,

if they had an elderly parent (their carer) who died suddenly, they would be taken into emergency respite. Some were often there for over a year. Some needed residential care and others would be able to look after themselves. She felt that younger people with milder learning disabilities were vulnerable, for example, a young man had been asked to leave home, and had been offered a flat in Spring Boroughs, close to a flat that had been closed down as it had been operating as a 'Crack House.' The young man is now housed in a sheltered flat in Northampton and was doing extremely well. The Unit still supported him but on a lesser scale. It can be difficult for similar individuals to make a homeless application.

The Learning Disabilities Unit had good links with Marion Marriott, Housing Needs Assessor, NBC and advance liaisons take place, often enabling the situation to be pre-empted.

The Group heard of a young couple, with learning disabilities, living in a caravan waiting for accommodation. They had a poor history due to their behaviour. Their learning disabilities had not been taken into account previously. The Unit did try to direct people away from the homelessness route. There was a need for links in. The Unit needed to liaise with Supporting People regarding individuals with mild learning disabilities. The Unit dealt with people in Northampton but also received referrals from Daventry and Towcester, as these towns did not have a team. For practical reasons the Unit was unable to travel out of Northampton but did go as far as Brayfield.

A lot of the Unit's time was taken moving individuals from areas. A small amount of funding was received from Supporting People. The Team understood that it fitted in with Supporting People's Strategy.

Individuals were assessed by Social Services and Health Teams. If they had an IQ below 70 they were categorised as having learning disabilities. A lot of people will fall just outside that figure. The Unit had grave concerns regarding the individuals that fell just outside that grouping and could be classed as 'hidden homeless'. Cases were screened over the telephone by the Adult Care Squad. If not categorised as critical they would be signposted to another Agency, for example, housing. This Group of people above the threshold would often appear on housing lists and as rough sleepers.

A Forum was set up last year, but due to huge changes in the Learning Disabilities Services, A McGail was unsure of its future.

M Spencer advised that Stonham catered for individuals with learning disabilities, but she was not aware of any RSLs in Northampton that did. Muir Housing however, was looking to test out how individuals with mental health and learning disabilities coming out of care could live in society before moving them on. There was a huge potential for the Authority to work with housing associations on themed issues.

F Rodgers agreed that there were issues regarding communication and links. She acknowledged that pre-empting homelessness was vital. A good example could be how NBC could adapt its sheltered accommodation, with the right support package – working within the Supporting People Strategy.

M Bullock suggested that individuals with learning disabilities be encouraged to register. There was a need to produce a countywide register, otherwise it would be an increasing problem, for example, there could be many young people being referred who were currently being looked after by their parents. They needed an advocate to help them to deal with Agencies. He added that at the next meeting, when the ODPM representative would be present, he would refer to a pilot regarding finding out whom, numbers of etc. individuals with learning disabilities and producing a register.

The Chair thanked A McGail for her address adding that the Group would highlight this as an area that needs investigation and further work.

The Group then looked at case studies that had been submitted to the Group for consideration.

### **CAB**

The case study that had been submitted from the CAB was in respect of its Service Level Agreement (SLA) Appraisal 2005/06. F Rodgers commented that it was an example of a daily occurrence at Fish Street.

The young couple referred to in the case study - young pregnant girl living with her mother who was going to be evicted had asked for accommodation for both herself and her boyfriend. She was informed that accommodation would not be provided for both of them, as they did not currently reside together. F Rodgers advised that the Authority would need to see evidence that people were living together as a couple, the Authority can be seen as being obstructive but it is actually doing something beneficial in the long term.

In response to Councillor Bullock's question when Section 17 came into force, the Group heard that this was at birth. A baby did not count until it was born. As soon as a homeless application is submitted, the Authority has additional powers, it can ask difficult questions and look back at other records.

If an individual presents himself or herself as homeless to NBC, the first question that is asked is whether they have anywhere to stay that night. If so, an interview is arranged for the next day. The duty officer will carry out the interview. Often parents will keep them for an extra night and the next day at the interview the Officer might persuade them to keep their son/daughter for a longer period. If not, temporary accommodation is found. People are not turned away at the counter; they are either offered a booked appointment or a duty officer appointment. Individuals do tend to find somewhere to stay for one or two more nights. Quite often people think that the only way to be offered a house is to present themselves as homeless. The officers on the front desk will pre-scan the applicant. They are very knowledgeable and skilled. Pre-scanning is a filter. The interview is then held in private.

F Rodgers advised that it was vital to make it clear what happened at the first stage of an individual presenting himself or herself as homeless. She added that the Authority should provide CAB with more details of its service. The case study that CAB had submitted contained details of the legislative process; there was a need to work with other Agencies regarding preventative work.

The Chair commented that CAB had pointed out that there was a huge housing waiting list. CAB is not always aware of what is available.

### **Brian Binley, MP**

A case study was issued from Brian Binley, MP, which gave details of joint custody orders. Both parents would share looking after the child and therefore would need two houses. He felt that this issue would create a lot of legal arguments. There were issues regarding access to both parents, human rights etc. In cases of joint custody, agreement has been made to joint residency and both parents would receive child benefit. Joint custody was generally new; mostly custody was awarded to one parent.

Councillor Bullock suggested that the size of the problem needed to be ascertained and he suggested speaking to the ODPM representative at the next meeting and that this Group offer to carry out research in this area.

The second case referred to in the MP's letter involved a family break up with children. The break up occurred in another area and the child remained there with the mother. There seemed a period of time when neither NBC or NCC could state which one had duty of care for the gentleman. Once NBC agreed that it had duty of care a home was found. The MP felt there was a genuine need for Councils to correspond with each other quickly to establish responsibilities. Councillor Bullock suggested that NBC and NCC could devise a Protocol in respect of such cases. M Spencer advised that liaisons were currently taking place between the two Authorities in respect of joint needs and support plan.

F Rodgers undertook to draft a response to Brian Binley, MP.

Other case studies were then discussed such as a 16 year old not reported directly as homeless; they were sped through the system and were not supported and housed in unsuitable areas. The tenancy then broke down and they were back in the system. The Group emphasised that bricks and mortar was important to young people but support was absolutely vital. N Stock advised that NCC had a clear responsibility for 16/17 year olds but he felt that this should be widened to include 18 year olds. The Authority had a clear obligation to those in care for longer than 13 weeks and by their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. NCC does offer support post 18, but this is not a legal requirement. There is a need to ensure that staff has the correct support to make confident decisions.

L Brede advised of a case of a pregnant lady, speaking no English, who presented herself as homeless at the Housing and Money Advice Centre. An

interpreter was found and an interview took place later in the day. She was homeless and was living with friends. She informed officers that she had left her husband, as it was financially better; there had been no violence in the marriage. Her husband was a tenant in a Council property. The Officer interviewing the applicant could foresee no reason why she could not return to her husband. She then returned to the Centre claiming domestic violence and was housed in temporary accommodation. Her husband was then interviewed and he stated that there had been no violence and that his wife had left of her own free will, they wanted a larger house for the baby. The applicant was advised of the rent assistance scheme and Stonham support, which she refused. Officers will interview her friend too. L Brede emphasised that the investigatory process must be carried out correctly and thoroughly and assumptions must not be made. Usually, in cases of reported domestic violence, Officers would ask for medical advice and refer the applicant to the Sunflower Centre and ask if they had contacted the Police, doctor, hospital etc. CALs provides interpreters for NBC, usually female interpreters are used for female applicants.

In response to Councillor Bullock's comment that CALs did not have the provision of signers, L Brede advised that NBC had Officers trained in signing. The Group felt that language was a Council issue and therefore a side issue to homelessness. L Brede would report back to the next meeting regarding language group.

F Rodgers emphasised the importance of better links to Agencies in respect of domestic violence. L Brede was liaising with Women's Aid. Staff working in homelessness needed to understand cultural issues. Links needed to be built with groups such as the Somalian Representation Community Group.

N Stock then circulated copies of his case studies (copies would also be forwarded to Councillors Allen and Glynane). The Group decided that discussion of Mr Stock's cases would take place at the next meeting. Case studies from Sally Keeble, MP, were also expected and these too would be discussed at the next meeting.

## **9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Friday 17 February at 10am in the Jeffery Room, the agenda would include:-

- Discussion with the ODPM Representative
- Case Studies:-
  - (a) N Stock
  - (b) Sally Keeble, MP
- New EU regulations
- Chair's Interim Report

The meeting closed at 12:55 pm

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 17 February 2006 commencing at 10.00 am

#### PRESENT:

Councillor Lee Mason	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Marion Allen	NBC
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	NCC

#### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mohammed Sabeel	East Midlands Regional Manager, HomelessLink
Lisa Barker	Homelessness and Housing Support, ODPM
Linda McGowan	Homelessness and Housing Support, ODPM
Margaret Martin	Consortium
Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
N Stock	NCC

#### 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from G Stokes (NCC), M Spencer (NBC), B Lane (NCC) and L Brede (NBC).

The Chair welcomed M Sabeel, L Barker and L McGowan to the meeting.

#### 2 MINUTES

Subject to the addition of appendix A, Councillor Pritchard's report, the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2006 were agreed.

Councillor Bullock advised that Corby BC currently had the use of a signer, who was on loan from another district. Corby also had difficulties finding interpreters for Somalians and Polish. This was a generic problem, not specific to homelessness.

#### 3 DISCUSSION WITH THE ODPM

L Barker, ODPM, thanked the Task and Finish Group for inviting her and L McGowan to the meeting.

She then gave the Group a comprehensive presentation on Tackling Homelessness (a copy of which is attached to the minutes). She emphasised

that young people, money issues and rough sleepers were big issues for Homelessness and Housing Support at the ODPM.

In comparison to national statistics the Group heard that Northampton compared as follows:

### **Reasons for loss of last settled home in England, 2004/05**

44% (38% nationally) exclusion by parent/other  
6% equated to non-violent breakdowns, 4% to violent breakdowns (19% nationally, which included domestic violence)  
21% loss of tenancy (19% nationally)  
25% mortgage/rent arrears (2% nationally)

It was useful to compare national with Northampton statistics. L Barker commented that 'good' Authorities looked at over represented groups and looked at what other Councils had done and implemented, creating a positive effect. She suggested that Northampton look at the exclusion by parent/other category. M Bullock commented that Northamptonshire statistics should be similar to national data.

Asylum seekers were categorised in the group 'other'.

Rough sleepers in Northampton was at its lowest ever recorded level. Eight were noted at the last count. The rough sleepers count had been outsourced to CAN. M Bullock advised that Daventry DC carried out its rough sleeper count on a Wednesday afternoon and regularly reported zero figures. L Barker reported that grants were provided on a performance basis. Massaging figures was not viewed lightly. Rough sleeper counts should be carried out at specified times in accordance with ODPM guidance. Councillor Pritchard did not feel that the rough sleepers count was as accurate as it should be. There were lots of known places where rough sleepers slept. She felt that the counters were unaware of these locations. In response, F Rodgers advised that the weekly figure for rough sleepers was around eight. The counting team would know all people and sleeping places and would take part in the annual count.

Councillor Pritchard reminded the Group of a rough sleeper and his dog. L Barker advised that Leicester City Council had night shelters with kennel facilities. The PDSA and RSPCA would also carry out health checks on the dogs at reduced rates. GPs could help rough sleepers. The Group emphasised the need for joined up working.

SSAFA offered help to ex army rough sleepers. The ODPM worked with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) too. There were a number of schemes in operation. The MOD had changed its discharge procedures; it was now planned more clearly. There are some situations where ex-army individuals required further support - this was provided at special units at Aldershot and Catterick. Ex army rough sleepers were a big problem in Corby. The Mental Health Trust had a lot of ex army referrals. L Barker added that the ODPM

had taken on two health advisors in respect of homelessness. She offered to ask the GP to contact the Task and Finish Group regarding the services that was offered. Leicester City Council defined common mental health problems at 80% (which included anxiety and depression). Rough sleepers were more likely to have mental health and substance and alcohol abuse. There was a need to work with Health Authorities.

In response to L Barker's query if a member of the public could contact CAN to notify it of a rough sleeper, (she felt this would be beneficial), F Rodgers advised that this was not presently the case.

The Chair advised that as rough sleepers was such a large area there was the need for a separate Task and Finish Group to investigate this issue in depth.

It was a key Government target to reduce and maintain levels of rough sleeping.

L Barker advised that the number of people residing in bed and breakfast accommodation was at its lowest level nationally. F Rodgers reported that six were residing in bed and breakfast accommodation in Northampton. This was on a short-term basis. L Barker commended the Authority, adding that it was clear that Northampton had made substantial progress in this area, it was very good news. The Chair stressed that the housing benefits situation had also improved dramatically.

In response to N Stock's comment that Social Services currently housed ten families in bed and breakfast accommodation, L Barker advised that the ODPM counted the submissions of statutory homeless people that Local Authorities provided on a quarterly basis.

L Barker advised that homelessness was always meant to be a safety net. Local Authorities often saw it as an administration process and part of the legislation and would start to process the forms. Good Councils have stopped doing this and used preventative measures. Fewer people were coming through as presented as homeless. The more homeless individuals/families Local Authorities accepted, the greater use of temporary accommodation. A guide to the prevention of homelessness would be produced in the summer. The LGA has also produced such a document – LGA Prevention Works.

Many good Local Authorities were providing mediation, counselling, home visits etc. Councils need to determine if an individual was homeless, officers will often visit or ring the parents. Sometimes parents used homelessness as a route for acquiring an independent home for their sons/daughters. Some Councils worked with Centre Point and the YMCA. M Bullock advised that violent relationships were a particular issue in Corby. A remedy for violent relationship breakdown was the Sanctuary Scheme, which had reduced homelessness by 50%.

The Sanctuary Scheme was very cost effective. It cost in the region of £200 per house to make the property safe. Changing the locks alone would not suffice. Sanctuary Schemes had to be client driven.

In 1986, the Audit Commission calculated the cost of homelessness to be £2,100 this is currently £2,500. However, some organisations put this cost at £6,000.

L Barker advised that historically Local Authorities had enough stock to allocate housing to homeless applicants. Since the Stock Options Appraisal there has been a greater reliance on RSLs for social housing. F Rodgers advised that there were 13 active RSLs in Northampton, it was difficult to establish relationships with all of them, but there was a need to establish partnership working. F Rodgers had asked for regular lists detailing the RSLs voids. L Barker referred to North Tyneside BC, which had a strict regime with its RSLs – if they did not comply, there would be no new builds. Walsall BC had taken a softer approach, middle managers liaised with the RSLs explaining the problem and an agreement was reached to share information on a weekly basis – joined up working.

M Bullock informed of NCC's Guaranteed Rent Scheme for young people up to the age of 25 - 30. NCC had come across the situation where the parent dies leaving their son/daughter with learning difficulties/special needs and effectively homeless. He added that people with learning difficulties had specific needs and the Supporting People link was missing. L Barker advised that if a parent died and left a son/daughter, technically they were not homeless, the issue was around support services. The Northamptonshire Commissioning Group determined how the budget was allocated in respect of Supporting People. Supporting People helped with support and did not pay for housing or care. Supporting People's consultation process was currently running comments could be made until June 2006.

M Bullock stressed that there was a need for all people with learning disabilities to register. L Barker offered to consult with her RSP colleagues to find boroughs that had addressed learning disabilities and housing issues. She would forward the names of the boroughs to F Rodgers.

F Rodgers reported that Northampton's Spend to Save Scheme had been agreed at SMT and was in the budget for 2005/2006. Rochdale BC had an example of a good Spend to Save Scheme. The Council had rehoused a partially deaf rough sleeper in flat. He continued to visit the pub on a daily basis and would come home put the television on very loud and fall asleep. This annoyed the neighbours who made regular reports to the Council and neighbourhood nuisance action began. The Authority asked Shelter to liaise with the individual and they purchased a timer plug for his television. An example of Harrow's scheme was that an Officer visited a family (owner/occupiers) who had had a mortgage redemption notice served from their building society. The husband worked in a factory and had been put on short time. The family was not aware of working tax credits. The Officer made a payment to the building society and by the time the working tax

credits had been sorted out, the family was back on track and arrears had been paid. L Barker emphasised the need for Spend to Save to be delegated to the front line. There was a need for proactive work before it became a problem.

L Barker gave an example of an authority that had decreased the number in temporary accommodation. Broxtowe had a lot of people in social housing but did not want to award them homeless, therefore they were housing in temporary accommodation. However, they had to live there for two years before they acquired points. Now the authority allocated them a permanent tenancy almost immediately and the number in temporary accommodation had decreased dramatically.

F Rodgers advised that Northampton now had 104 individuals in temporary accommodation. L Barker commended this reduction of 80 in four months.

F Rodgers reported that work with NCC was ongoing regarding integrated housing issues. The Authority's Corporate Debt Policy would go through the Council's procedures. For example, people with rent arrears to sustain their tenancy, keep them in their existing homes. The Policy was about prevention.

In response to L Barker's query if rent arrears were a major cause of intentionality, F Rodgers advised that there had been poor performance in relation to housing benefits and the lack of joined up working. Fran now managed these services and assured that there would be joined up working.

L Barker highlighted the need to understand the causes of homelessness and understand where the front line of homelessness was. There was a need to have the right people in the right place at the right time.

L Barker referred to DHP, advising if the Authority spent it they received more funding the following year, if not they got less.

L Barker emphasised that home visits were important. NBC carried out minimal home visits at present due to the restructure but the intention was for them to increase.

The Chair commented that people visited the CAB in cases of relationship breakdown and often had a lack of understanding in relation to budgets. L Barker advised that Bournemouth had a good scheme. The manager, Peter Hoyle, was very proactive. The authority worked with private landlords and held discussions in relation to homeless applications. The reasons for the landlords not wanting to house them was discussed. Mr Hoyle put a gold star on the housing benefit form, which meant it was treated as priority; therefore the benefits were fast tracked. The landlord was given a month's rent in advance and the Council would clear all back housing benefit. The landlord was also given £200 for AST (A year's secured tenancy). The Council took photos of the condition of the property when the tenant moved in and guaranteed to put right any damage. The Council credit referenced the tenant

and put insurance in place. F Rodgers confirmed that NBC used Experion for credit checking at a cost of £2 per individual.

F Rodgers advised that staffing in the homelessness unit was being redesigned and staff would be merged.

The Chair thanked L Barker and L McGowan for their fascinating and very useful presentation. It was good to hear that schemes were used elsewhere. L Barker confirmed that she was keen to continue to work with F Rodgers.

#### **4 CASE STUDIES**

The Group heard of Councillor Allen's visit to the Housing Advice Centre Team. She had observed Customer/Team member interactions. A copy of Councillor Allen's report is attached to the minutes.

It was agreed that N Stock's case studies be deferred to the next meeting.

#### **5 CHAIR'S INTERIM REPORT**

The Chair referred to her interim report that would be presented to NBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 February. She confirmed that details of the Spend to Save Scheme would be included in the final report.

Councillor Allen reported that Councillor Glynane, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, had commented how well the Task and Finish Groups were working.

#### **6 NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Friday 10 March commencing at 2pm in the Jeffery Room.

Councillor Allen then offered to carry out some work in relation to preventing homelessness for Mental Health Services. Details of which would be given to the next meeting.

M Bullock offered to report details of the number of ex-servicemen who were now rough sleepers to the next meeting. He suggested that a telephone number be published for people to report rough sleepers. He would liaise with F Rodgers regarding a 'quick fix.'

The agenda for the next meeting would include:

- Case Studies - N Stock, NCC
- Preventing homelessness for Mental Health Services - Councillor Allen
- Chair's Report – draft recommendations

The meeting closed at 12.10 pm

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Friday, 10 March 2006

#### PRESENT:

Councillor Lee Mason	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Marion Allen	NBC
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	NCC

#### ALSO PRESENT

Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
Linda Brede	NBC
Margaret Martin	Consortium

#### 1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from M Spencer (NBC) and N Stock and G Stokes (NCC).

#### 2 Minutes

Subject to the following amendments:

Councillor Bullock **believed** that Daventry DC carried out its rough sleepers count .....

... there were **more** ex army rough sleepers in Corby. ***This was an area of focus required in the county.***

Councillor M Bullock informed of NCC's **proposed** Guaranteed Rent Scheme for young people .....

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2006 were agreed.

#### 3 Case Studies

The Task and Finish Group discussed Case Studies provided by N Stock, NCC. A copy of the case studies is attached to the minutes.

In discussing the case `Temi`, the Group made comments and asked questions:

- ILR stood for indefinite leave to remain in the country.
- CST stood for Community Support Team.
- Temi was in NCC accommodation, rather than NBC accommodation. If a child was under a certain age, NCC had parental duty; the Community Support Team would assess and determine whether accommodation was appropriate. NBC was in the process of agreeing a protocol with NCC so that there was closer working with the teams regarding children leaving care. This was a `grey area` where NCC did not have a statutory responsibility, and NBC would determine whether they were deemed as being in priority need.
- Part of the decision-making regarding priority need was whether the individual had a home to go to. In this case there was a home in Nigeria. Alternative preventative measures such as the Rent Assistance Scheme would be investigated.
- The 15 year old was clearly the responsibility of NCC, the 18 and 19 year olds were not but the 17 year old fell into the `grey area` category, both NCC and NBC had responsibility to help this individual.
- The Chair commented that this case study highlighted the need for the Protocol that NBC was currently devising with NCC.

Regarding the case study `Joanne`, the Group heard: -

- This case study reflected a common situation, where an individual did not want to stay at home and the question arose whether they were technically homeless. The Housing Options interview would look particularly around preventative measures, such as rent deposit scheme.
- Homeless applicants would be interviewed by the Housing Options Officer at the Housing, Money Advice Centre.
- In answer to a query regarding domestic violence and S17 (NCC having responsibility for the baby), L Brede advised that employees in her team were becoming champions in particular areas:
  - Rhiannon Kilbourn Domestic Abuse Champion
  - Guy Watts Learning Disabilities (particularly 16-17 year old Champion
  - Bahvna Karia Asylum Seekers/Immigration Issues Champion
- It was often difficult for Ward Councillors to receive feedback on cases. There was a need for feedback and the need to keep Councillors posted.
- There were now four permanent administrators in the Housing Needs Team. There were lots of different areas of expertise in the team. The employee handling the case was responsible for co-ordinating the response.

- There was a need for one of the Authorities to take a lead in cases such as this. In this case, as the applicant had a baby, it was felt that NCC should take the lead. F Rodgers confirmed that there was a need for more effective monitoring systems to be in place.

In discussing `Matthew`, the Group asked questions and made comments: -

- There was a need to respond promptly to emails.
- A letter was sent out with the application form for a tenancy describing the types of properties that the Authority had, the number of properties that had been allocated over the year and details of the points system. With young applicants there was often the need to go over the information with them. There was a need for staff to be more proactive and a need for awareness sessions to be held for staff dealing with young people.
- Housing Options Interviews were very useful.

Regarding the case study `Sam`, the Group commented: -

- This case highlighted the usual misconception that if you are pregnant you will be able to acquire a Council flat.
- More support was required for young people. It was important that young people were looked after.

Regarding the case study `Daniel`, the Group commented that there was a need for closer working with Northampton College and that college staff needed to be aware of homeless issues and who to direct them to. M Spencer was liaising with NCC regarding a Protocol for 16-18 year olds.

The Task and Finish Group felt that the case `Brodie` was a good example of an issue that L Barker, Homelessness and Housing Support, ODPM, had referred to at an earlier meeting. A discussion should be held with the landlord to ascertain why he wanted the applicant to leave.

The Group then discussed the `Housing Scenario – Broken Relationships.` L Brede confirmed that staff helped all applicants complete application forms, including those who were intentionally homeless. The applicant needed to visit the Housing, Money Advice Centre. The Housing Options Interview looked at homeless preventative measures. F Rodgers confirmed that there was a need for the Authority to extend its prevention agenda. The Chair commented that when individuals had previously been in employment they were often unaware how to claim housing benefits. Individuals often did not understand the homeless legislation; there was a need for clear monitoring systems. The law was very clear regarding intentionally homeless. The couple referred to in the scenario could potentially qualify for the Rent Assistance Scheme. In response to a query whether N Stock, NCC, could be contacted to inform him of this Scheme, L Brede confirmed that this could be done, but she was confident that such issues would have already been discussed in meetings between N Stock and M Spencer, NBC.

F Rodgers referred to the scenario, commenting that had this been one of NBC's tenants she would not have signed the eviction order unless all preventative measures had been carried out, such as mediation. She added that processes could be improved. The application form is submitted to the One Stop Shop, which should be checked that it is signed, filled out correctly and had the supporting papers included. There was an issue about application forms being accepted that the Authority could not process. This was an area that required tightening up. The Authority's 'Comino' system could log and monitor application forms. The FISH (Fully Integrated System for Housing) would be implemented in the next 12 months.

In response to a query whether homelessness decisions should be made at Corporate Manager level, the Group heard that the Homelessness Officer made the decision regarding homelessness but often discussed the case first with their Team Leader. F Rodgers confirmed that in the short term a sign off procedure could be introduced.

In answer to a question about the legal position if a tenant on an Introductory Tenancy fell behind with the rent and could not pay the arrears immediately, F Rodgers advised that Introductory Tenancies should not be used as a tool for the Authority to evict a tenant.

The Chair commented that the case studies had been extremely useful and conveyed the Task and Finish Group's thanks to N Stock, NCC.

#### **4 Preventing Homelessness for Mental Health Services**

Councillor Allen advised that she still had work to carry out to complete her report. She had contacted the directors of three PCTs: -

- Daventry and South Northants
- Northampton
- Kettering

**Daventry** - had not got a problem with homeless in the community but where there was a problem was with 'in patients.'

**Kettering** - the Community Health Team had their contacts set up. They had an 'in patient' situation. Patients had been moved from Kettering General Hospital to a new build.

**Northampton** - the Project Worker had raised the need for the whole of the county to consider where people coming into hospital would go after they had been discharged. More information would be available and Councillor Allen confirmed that she wished to follow this through.

L Brede advised that Guy Watts, Homelessness Officer, was looking to be a champion for individuals with learning difficulties and mental health problems and suggested that he be asked to contact Councillor Allen.

Councillor Bullock envisaged that due to NCC's budget proposals, that in the future there could be an increase of people with learning disabilities becoming homeless. The second long term medical condition was depression and mental health issues. L Brede confirmed that she had asked her Team to monitor the position.

Councillor Allen advised that it was often a common occurrence whereby a person was admitted into care and when they were discharged, their family or partner refused to take them back into the family home.

It was suggested that the Chair's final report could include reference to the need for investment in the preventative agenda. Services cut elsewhere could create the need for resources somewhere else.

Councillor Allen was thanked for her report.

## **5 Chair's Report – Draft Recommendations**

The Task and Finish Group discussed the Chair's draft report making suggestions for inclusion in the final report including: -

- Particular concern should include previous poor NBC/NCC joint working and the relationship of NCC/NBC.
- That the work of this Task and Finish Group had been carried out jointly by NBC and NCC. This was the first example of a joint Scrutiny.
- The appendices to the evidence section of the report needed to include two to three important pieces of supporting evidence.
- Evidence from Brian Binley, MP, and Ann McGail, Learning Disabilities Unit should be included in the report, as should N Stock, NCC's case studies.
- The report needed to emphasise that this Group did not look at housing benefits.
- The Task and Finish Group agreed that there was a need for a service based around preventative rather than processing homelessness applications. Supporting evidence (appendices) would be included in the report.
- The Group's 'top recommendation' was in respect of homelessness prevention.
- The recommendations needed to reflect that employees were moving to the preventative role rather than the processing role.
- Recommendation headings would be listed in the following order: -
  - Homelessness Prevention
  - Partnership Working
  - Internal Processes and Procedures
  - Vulnerable People
  - Temporary Accommodation
  - Rough Sleepers

- Regarding Partnership Working, - introduce robust Protocols, particularly with NCC by **September 2006**
- The Police needed to be included in the Partnership Working recommendations.
- Regarding Rough Sleepers, an additional recommendation needed to be added. ***This was an area for further work.***
- Some of the recommendations should be forwarded to other District Councils in the county.

Councillor Bullock conveyed his concerns that the recommendation did not contain costings, commenting that where there were cost implications, information should be given as to the estimated costs. He confirmed that NCC's Cabinet would not accept an Overview and Scrutiny report without such information. Clarity would be sought whether the recommendations should contain estimated costings.

It was confirmed that the Chair's report would be presented to both NBC's and NCC's Cabinets. NBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive the report at its meeting on 6 April 2006.

The Task and Finish Group suggested that a further meeting was required to finalise the amendments made to the report, as detailed above, and the inclusion of financial costings.

## **6 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group would be held on Wednesday 29 March 2006 commencing at 3pm in the Council Chamber, at the Guildhall.

The meeting concluded at 4:10pm

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL/ NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### HOMELESSNESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

29 MARCH 2006

#### PRESENT:

Councillor Lee Mason	NBC (Chair)
Councillor Marion Allen	NBC
Councillor Margaret Pritchard	NBC
Councillor Mark Bullock	NCC

Fran Rodgers	Corporate Manager, NBC
Madeline Spencer	Housing Services Manager, NBC
Geoff Stokes	NCC
Nigel Stock	NCC

#### 1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Margaret Martin (Consortium) and Linda Brede (NBC).

#### 2 Minutes

Councillor Allen clarified that *it sometimes occurred* when a person was admitted into care and when they were discharged, their family or partner refused to take them back into the family home.

Subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2006 were agreed.

At this point the Chair re-ordered the agenda.

#### 3 Preventing Homelessness for Mental Health Services – Further Update

Councillor Allen circulated a report compiled by – Jon Olsen (Community Service Manager) and Philip Crooke (Principal Social Worker) on 9 March 2006. (Copy attached to the minutes). She emphasised that of the 24 of homeless service users across all teams, 21 were from Northampton. Of the 21, 9 were from the Duston area, a female was living in the community, two were in-patients and the others were in specialist units. It was highlighted that some might not be easy to re-home. In response to a query, out of the 21, the eldest individual was aged 48.

M Spencer had liaised with Jon Olsen. He was undertaking an audit focussing on NBC's usage of mental health users. A questionnaire had been

produced, which was very focussed. M Spencer would be meeting with Mr Olsen on 10 April to ascertain what information he required for his audit. Various ad-hoc protocols had been produced, and it was envisaged that they could be brought into a structured approach. Councillor Allen would attend meetings with M Spencer and J Olsen.

Councillor Allen advised that she would liaise with the PCTs and Mental Health Service to ascertain how they dealt with service users. She would also contact the Police to find a way forward.

The Chair suggested that information relating to homelessness for Mental Health Services should be included in the report. There was a considerable need for this area. Information provided by J Olsen would be included in the evidence section of the report.

Councillor Bullock advised that NCC's Health Scrutiny Committee could write to the PCT requesting it to put an item on the agenda of a forthcoming meeting. He suggested that issues relating to homelessness for Mental Health Services could be requested to be an agenda item. Councillor Allen added that there was a need to concentrate on the borough figures; there was a need to encourage Mental Health Trusts towards prevention.

- Agreed:**
- (1) That Councillor Allen attends meetings with J Olsen and M Spencer.
  - (2) That information relating to homelessness for Mental Health Services should be included in the report. There was a considerable need for this area. Information provided by J Olsen would be included in the evidence section of the report.

#### **4 Chair's Report**

Copies of the draft report, foreword and executive summary were circulated. F Rodgers advised that this version of the report took into consideration comments and suggestions made at the last meeting.

Regarding financial implications, advice had been sought and details included. G Stokes emphasised that the fundamental issue was whether the £100,000 that NBC had committed for homeless prevention initiatives would cover all the recommendations or whether there was a need for funding. F Rodgers commented that it was anticipated that the £100,000 would cover the recommendations, with the exception of the Sanctuary Scheme, for which separate funding would be required. This would be stated in the report. In terms of the recommendations regarding changing internal processing and inter-working it was envisaged that huge costs would not be involved. It would however be useful to highlight areas that could incur a cost.

F Rodgers would produce an action plan, appended to the report with key objectives and detailing how the £100,000 could be allocated. There was a

need to state in the action plan the significant risks to meeting targets due to cuts in other services.

The need for NCC funding for some of the recommendations was highlighted. N Stock confirmed that he was unable to agree NCC funding but he would investigate it in principle. He would provide wording for the report regarding joint working and funding. A protocol was being devised for looked after children. F Rodgers added that a specific project plan for reducing families in temporary accommodation was being put together, which could lead to a recycling of financial savings.

There was a need for the recommendations to link to targets, such as BVPIs, NBC's Recovery Plan and to also link to evidence that the Group had received. Recommendations should be written in a way that could be measured. Recommendations should inter-connect with the Conclusion, explaining that after hearing the evidence why the Group had come to its conclusion. For each recommendation there was a clear need for a link to evidence received.

The Group suggested that there was a need to include additional groups to Section 2 of the recommendations – Partnership Working:

- Mental Health and learning disabilities
- Potential homelessness in adults

Councillor Bullock referred to the ODPM's document *Survey of English Local Authorities About Homelessness – December 2005*, page 37 – Approaches to achieving Efficiency Savings in 2005/06, commenting that the headings used in this graph could be detailed in the report, possibly using them to head up the recommendations.

Councillor Bullock suggested that it would be useful to demonstrate in the report two to three initiatives that the Group would be continuing on an individual basis, such as Mental Health issues and signposting other issues, rough sleepers and ex-army rough sleepers.

In discussing the Foreword and Executive Summary, the Group agreed that the Foreword should be written in the third person signed by all the Homelessness Task and Finish Group Councillors. The Foreword would also contain a sentence detailing that NCC's Overview and Scrutiny had already programmed homelessness into its work plan.

Regarding the Executive Summary, the Group agreed that there was a need to ensure that it contained the key messages, such as preventative work and joint working. These would be expanded upon, together with the progress and examples.

F Rodgers undertook to amend the report and email out to the Group for comment.

The report would be presented to NBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2006 and would then be submitted to NBC's Cabinet at its meeting on either 8 May 2006 or 3 July 2006. The Group would be notified of the date of the Cabinet meeting that would be receiving its report. The Group would then monitor implementation of its recommendations six months after the report had been submitted to Cabinet. (December/January 2007).

A meeting would be arranged with the other district councils in the county on how the report would be presented to the 'wider public'.

F Rodgers advised that the ODPM had produced a DVD 'Tackling Homelessness' and confirmed that she would order copies for the Task and Finish Group.

M Spencer would liaise with Councillor Pritchard regarding her attendance at the Good practice seminar - *Homelessness: how does your council measure up? in May*.

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister  

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Creating sustainable communities

Appendix H

# Tackling Homelessness

**Lisa Barker**  
**Homelessness and Housing Support**  
**ODPM**

homelessness  
& housing support  
directorates

local and regional government • housing • planning • fire • regeneration • social exclusion • neighbourhood renewal



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister

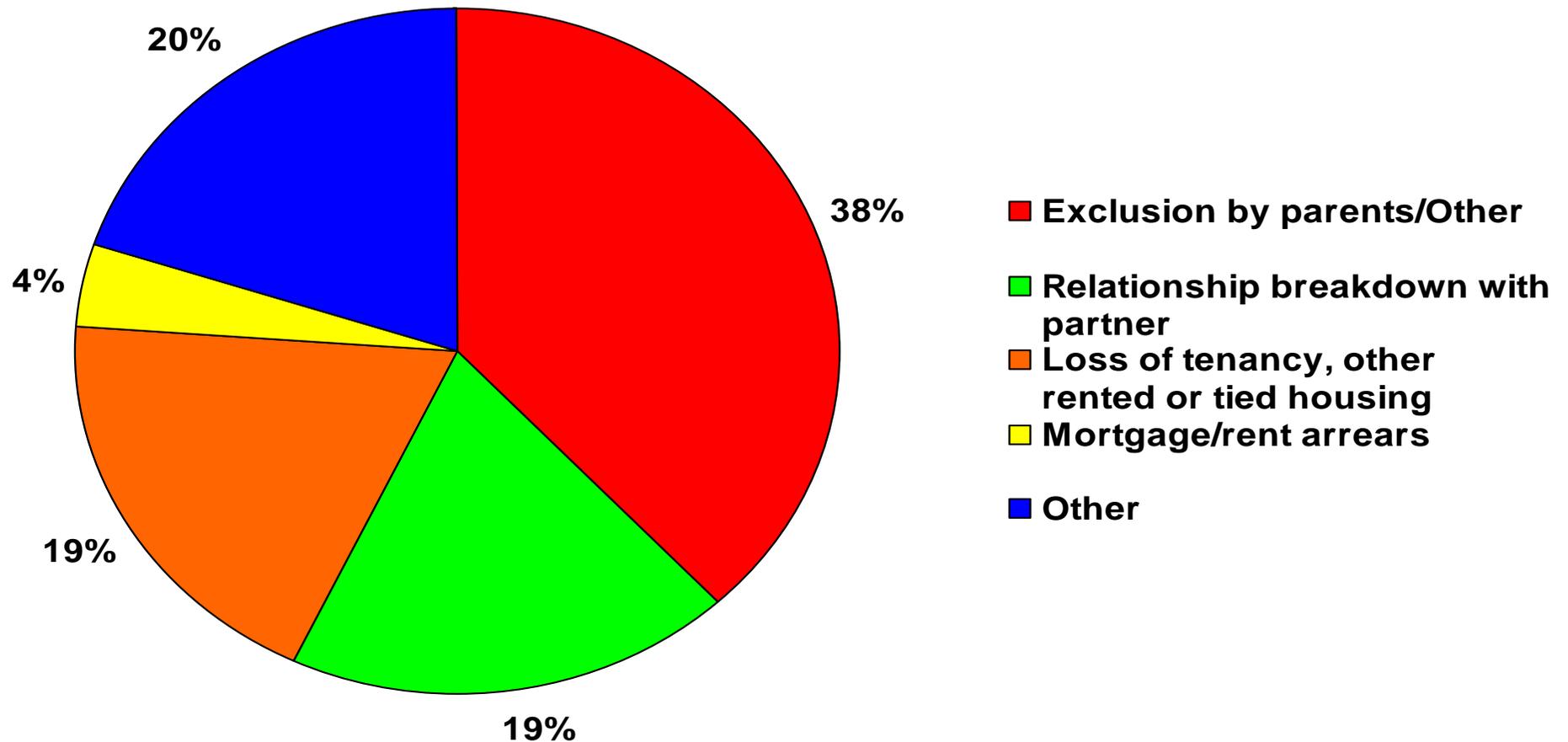
Creating sustainable communities

homelessness  
& housing support  
directorate

local and regional government • housing • planning • fire • regeneration • social exclusion • neighbourhood renewal

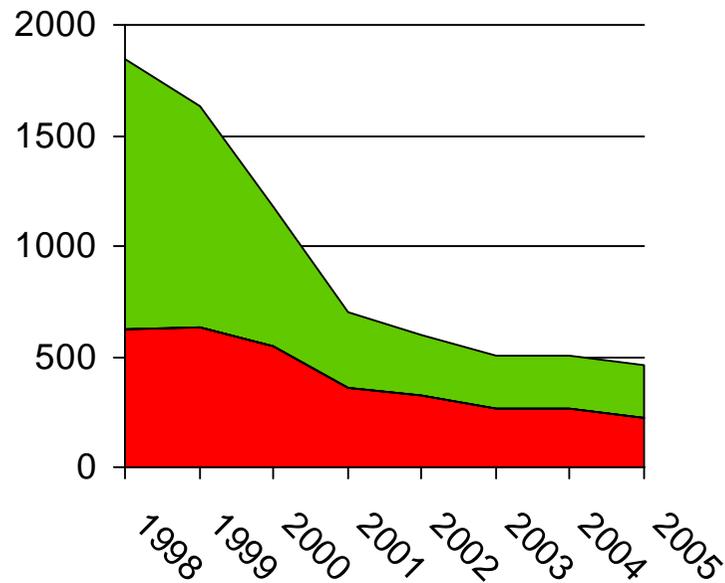


## Reasons for loss of last settled home in England, 2004/05

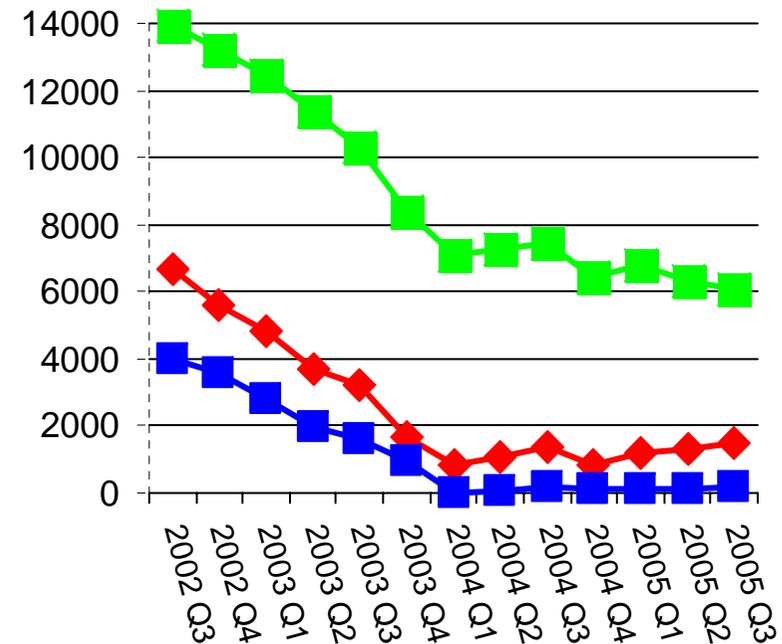




# Success in reducing most severe problems



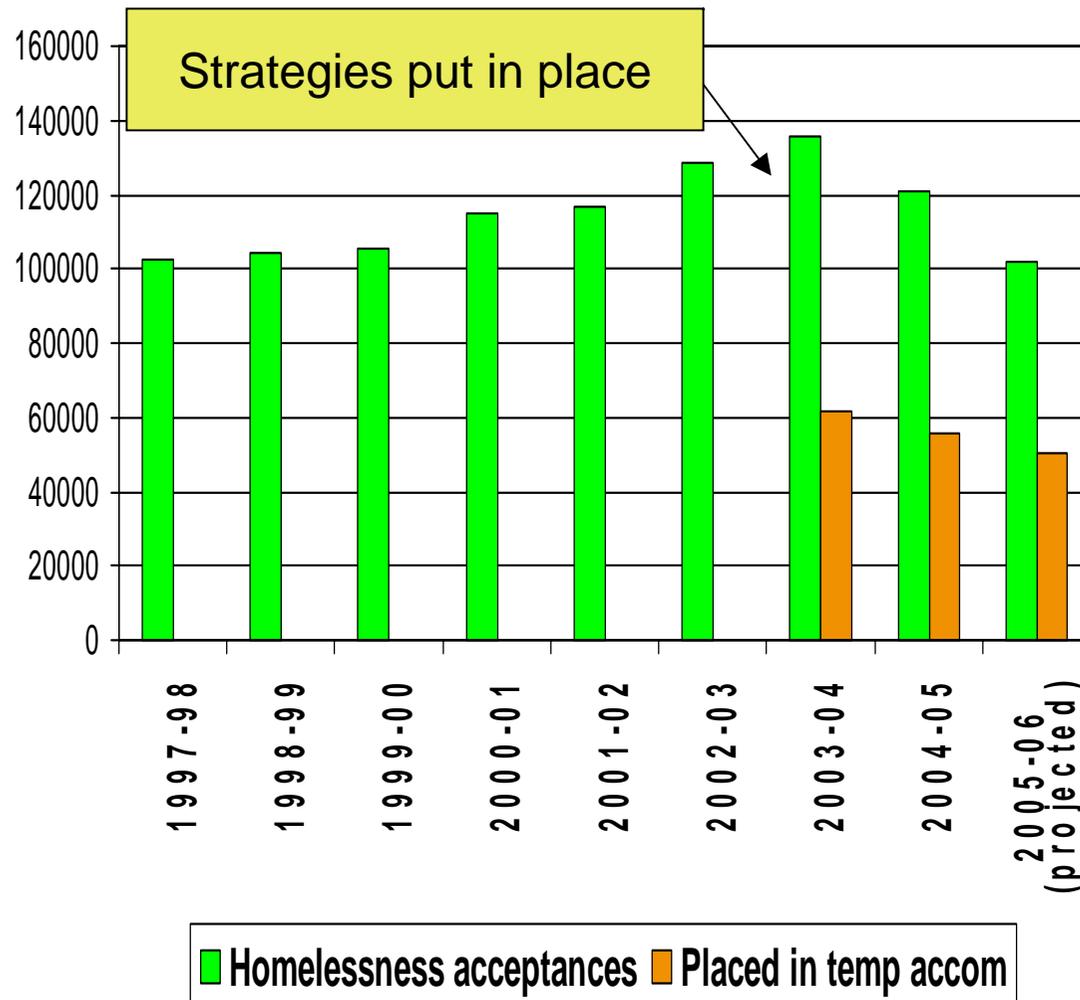
■ Rough sleeping, rest of England  
■ Rough sleeping, London



■ All use of B&B  
◆ Families in B&B  
■ Families in B&B over 6 wks



# We're starting to see results from your strategies and prevention work



Prevention is the key.

New local authority strategies and prevention approaches started in 2002

Homelessness falling since end of 2003

Increasing investment in prevention up to 2007-08 and expect further reductions in homelessness

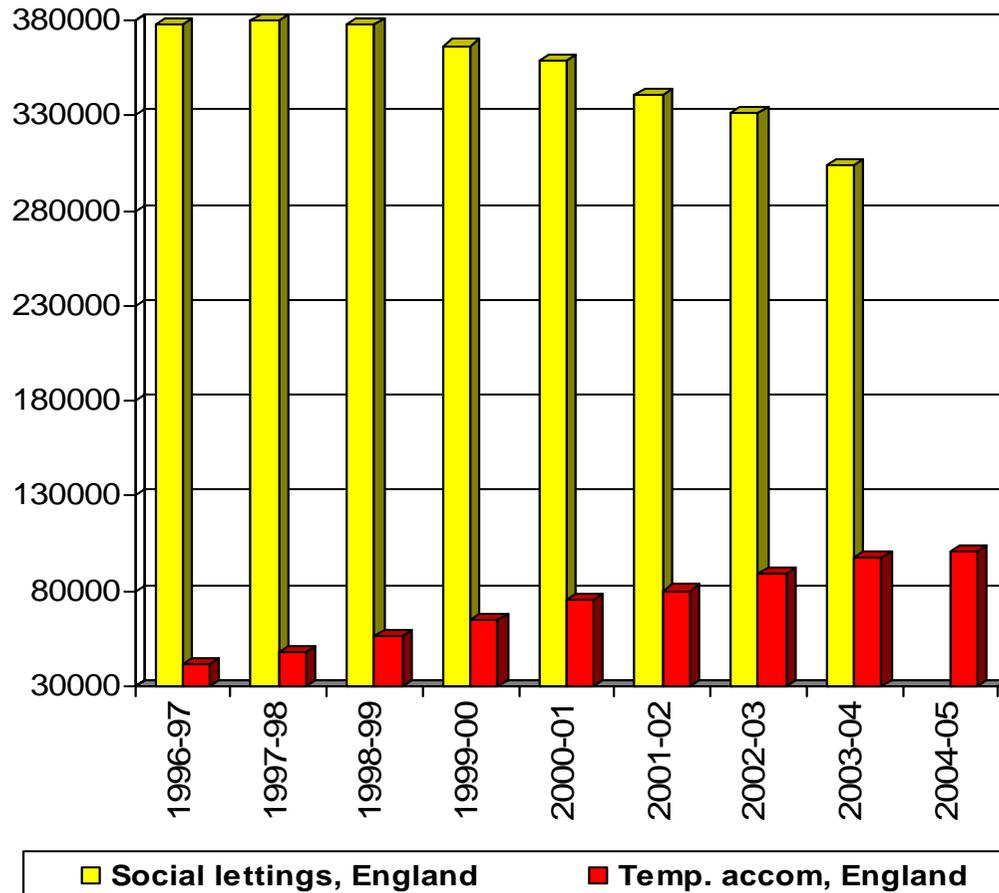


## How is homelessness being prevented?

Cause	Action
Parents, relatives or friends exclusions, relationship breakdown (38%)	Mediation/counselling, home visits
Violent relationship breakdown (13%)	Sanctuary schemes
End of assured shorthold tenancy (13%)	Advice, landlord mediation/ negotiation, rent deposit/bond
Mortgage or rent arrears (4%)	Debt counselling, advocacy in court, resolving HB problems
Person poorly-equipped to sustain tenancy (??)	Advice and support (Supporting People), life skills, budgeting
Lack of information (??)	Early, proactive intervention, advice and good range of options



## But here's the challenge



As social housing availability has declined,

number of households in temporary accommodation has more than doubled

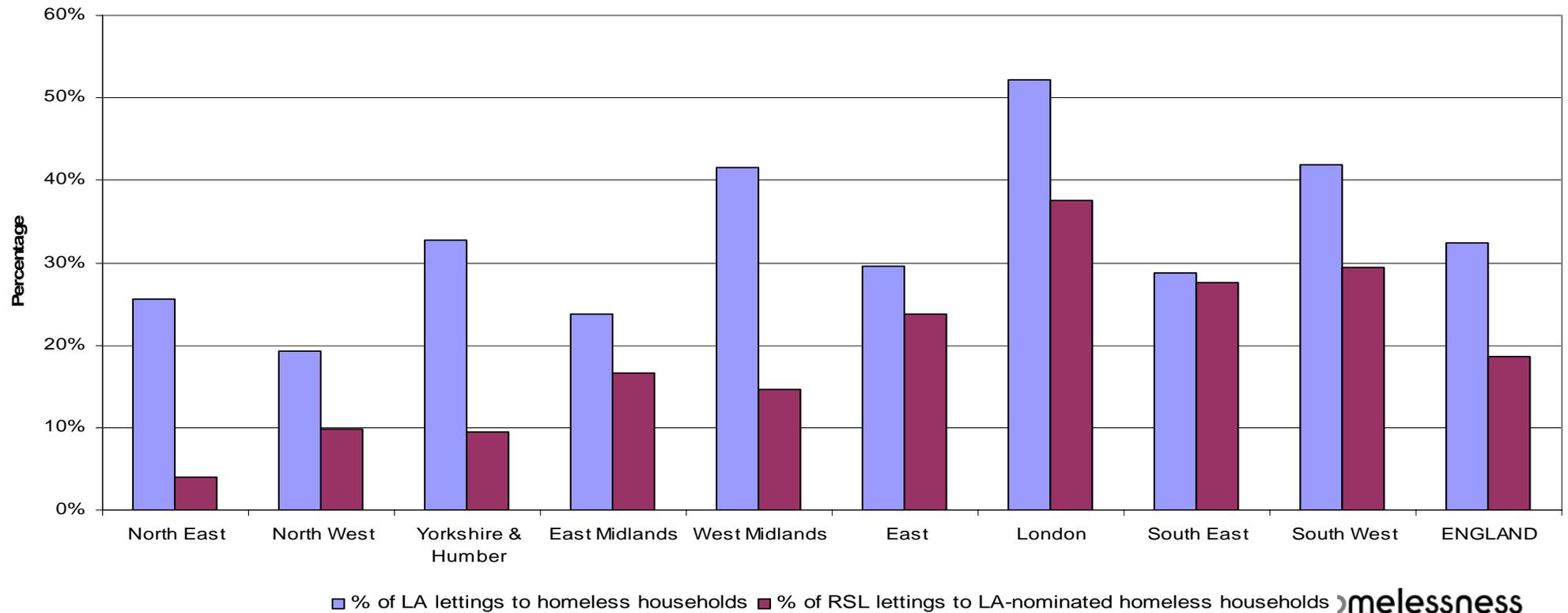
Reached an all-time high of 100,000 in 2004, but steady since then

Target is to halve number by 2010.

homelessness & housing support  
directorates

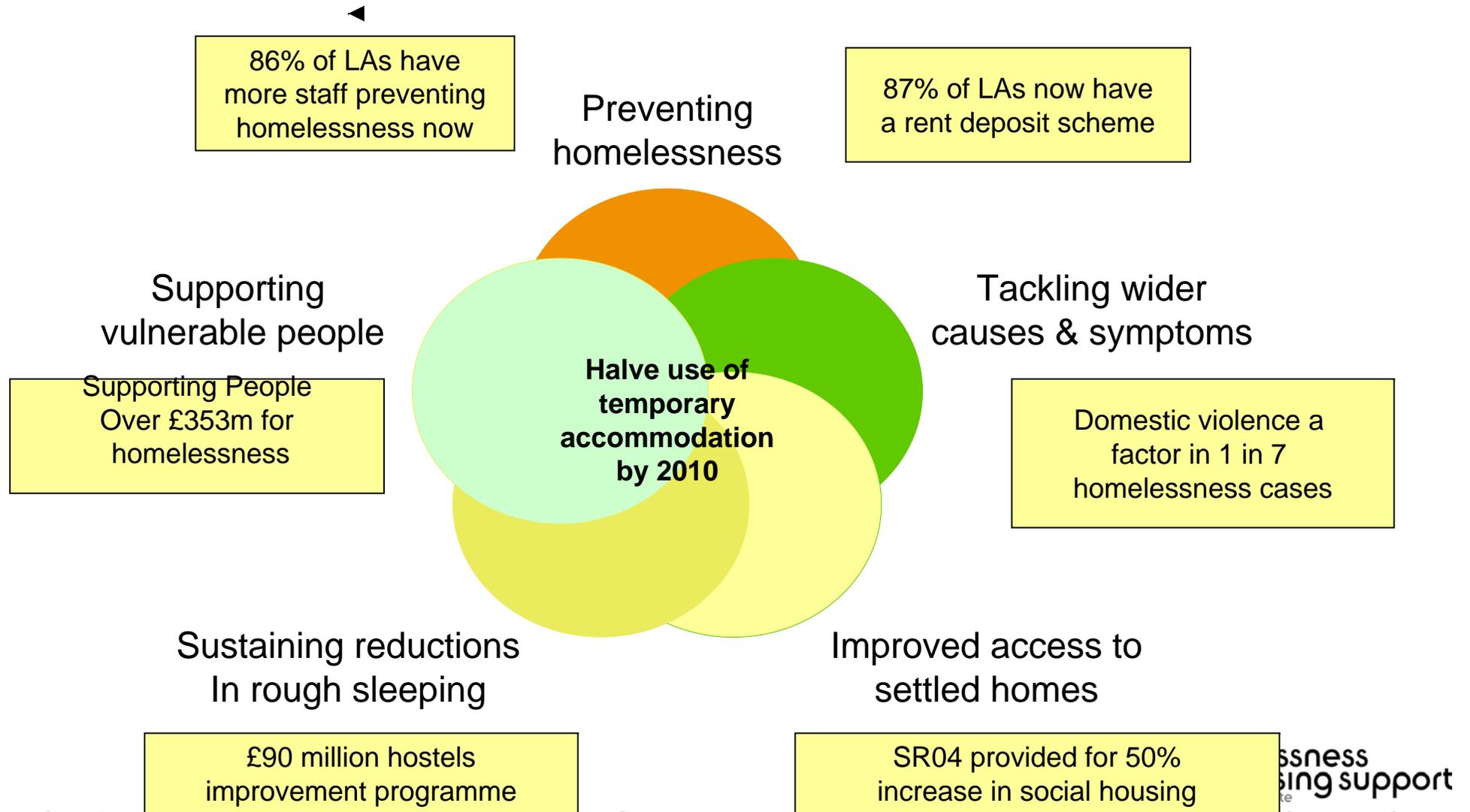


## LAs make greater use of their own stock to house homeless households, RSL stock is used less (2003-04)



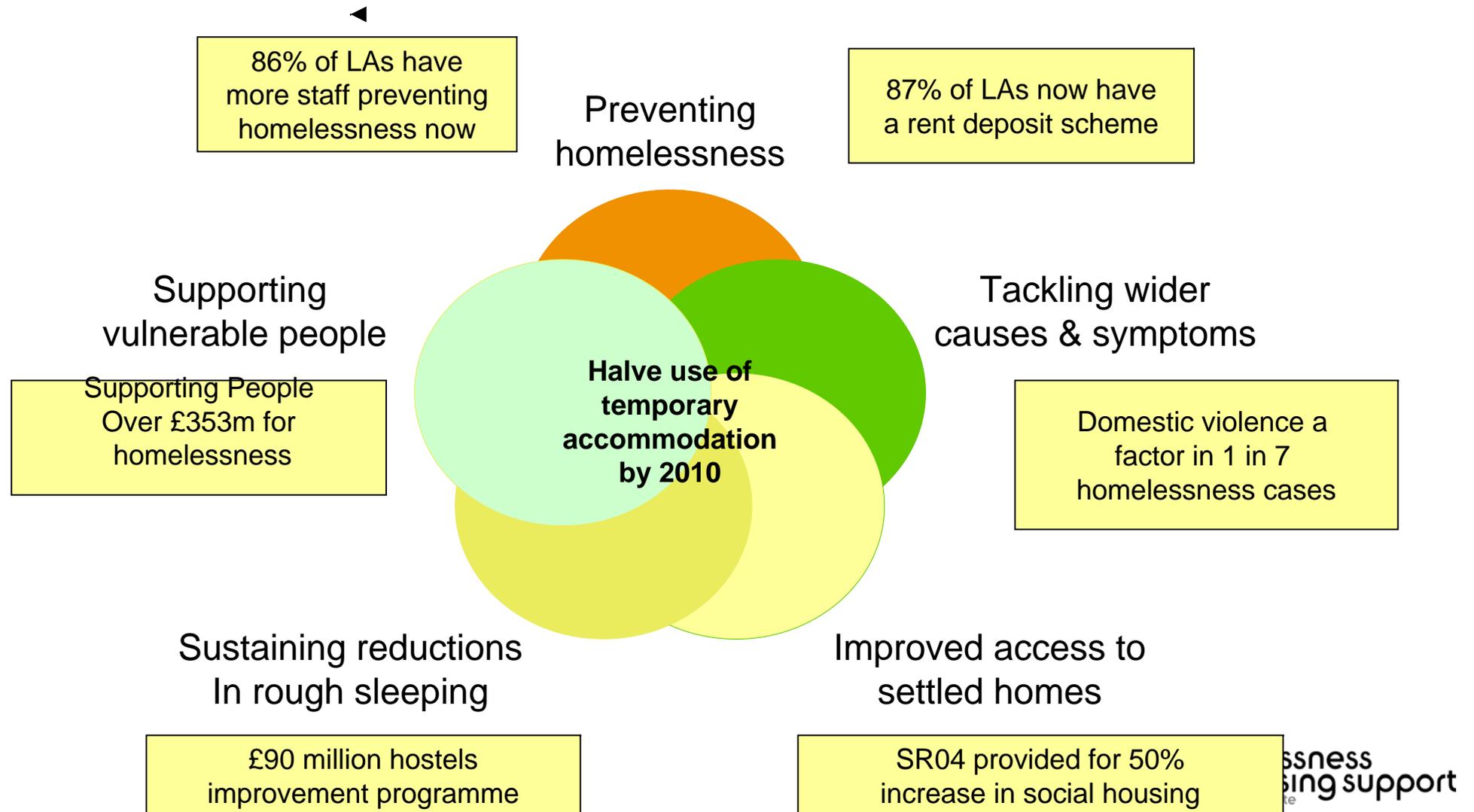


# 5 Year Strategy to Reduce Homelessness





# 5 Year Strategy to Reduce Homelessness





# Prevention

- 289 have more prevention staff than in 2002
- 202 operate a spend to save policy
- 249 LA's have rent deposit/bond schemes
- 165LA's have or plan Sanctuary schemes
- 18,471 H/holds prevented Apr/Jun 05
- £21.202m efficiency savings nationally



## Prevention – East Midlands



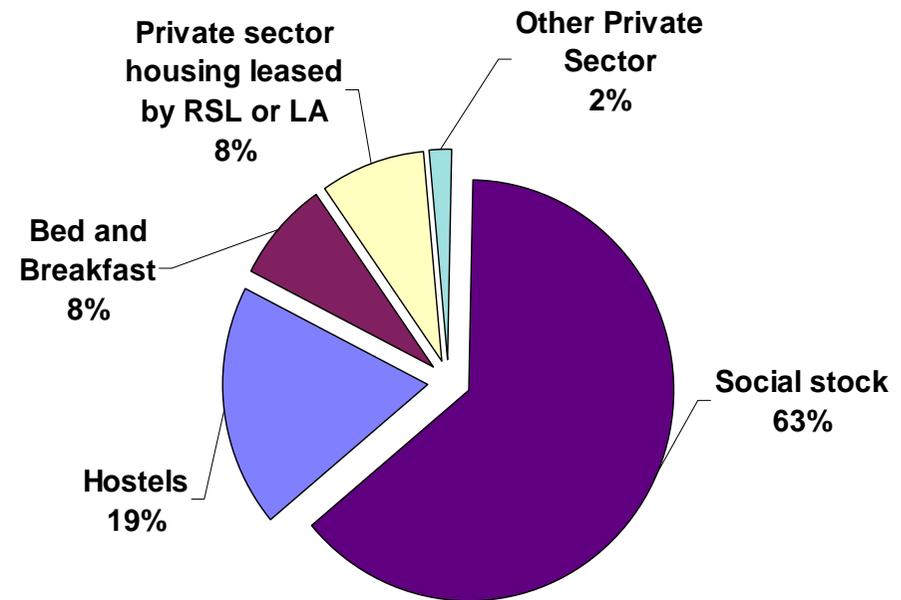
- 31% of East Midland Boroughs have a spend to save policy in place
- 27% of East Midland Boroughs have ten or more homeless prevention schemes
- Almost a quarter of East Midland Boroughs said that there were still more people employed in processing homeless applications than preventing homelessness.
- Still potential to increase prevention



# Tackle the Backlog in Temporary Accommodation

- 63% in Social Housing
- 8% in Private Sector Housing leased by RSL or LA
- Why do these properties have to be “temporary”?
- How could you make more of them settled solutions?

Households in Temporary Accommodation arranged by authorities in East Midlands as at 30 September 2005





# Providing more settled homes.... And better use of existing stock

- Improving housing supply and home ownership
- Increasing new social rented homes by 50%
- Making greater use of private rented homes
- Temporary accommodation as settled homes
- Maximising use of existing social housing



## What are ODPM doing?

- Met 150 Boroughs to agree TA action plans and consider future funding
- Supporting development of temporary to settled schemes
- Working with DWP on the HB block grant approach
- Funding will increase from £60m in 05/06 to £74m in 07/08



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# Boroughs Where TA has reduced in the last 12 months

- Broxtowe
- Gedling
- Mansfield
- Newham & Sherwood

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local and regional government • housing • planning • fire • regeneration • social exclusion • neighbourhood renewal



## Good News – Well Done East Midlands

- 24% drop in acceptances in East Midlands over the last year
- Lowest recorded number of people sleeping rough on the streets
- Invested over £2m in East Midlands this year to tackle homelessness
- Regional Homelessness Forum
- Important that good work carries through into reductions in the TA target



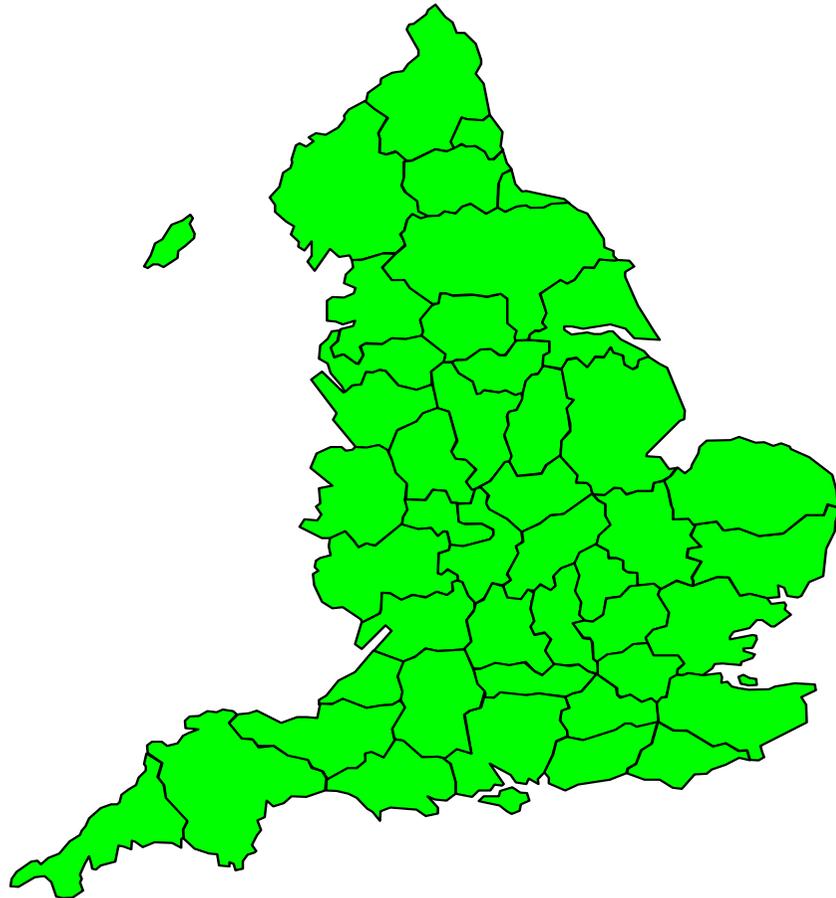
- TA increase from Dec 04 baseline of 183 to 198 (Sept 05)
- Acceptances have increases from 81 in Q3 2004 to 126 in Q3 2005 (up by 56%)
- 80% of acceptances are households with children
- 52 households in B&B (40%FWC); 61 in own stock and 73 in RSL stock
- Last rough sleeper figures from January 2005 count 8



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# Key Messages from English Boroughs



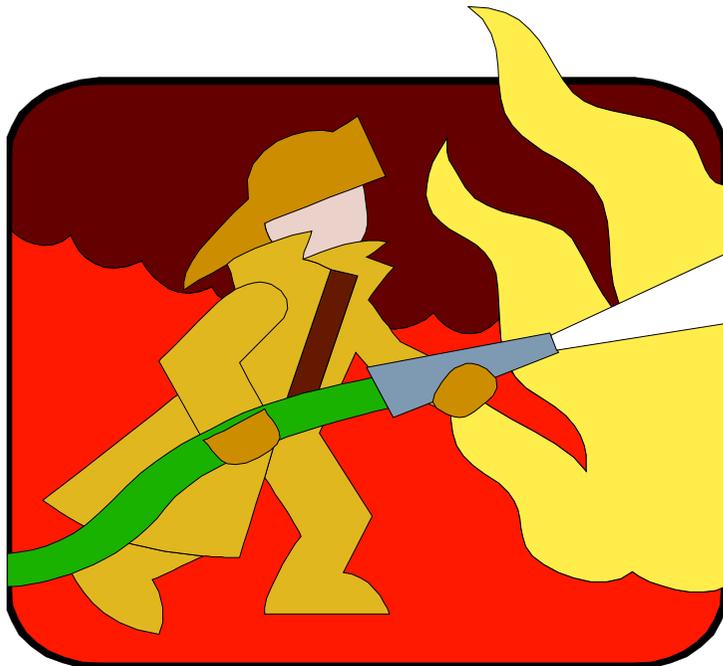
- Change Culture
- Prevent Homelessness
- Spend to Save
- Maximise Supply
- Use HB Better

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## Administer Homelessness Differently...stop firefighting



- Understand causes of local homelessness
- Understand where the front line in prevention really is
- **Have the right people in the right place doing the right things at the right time**

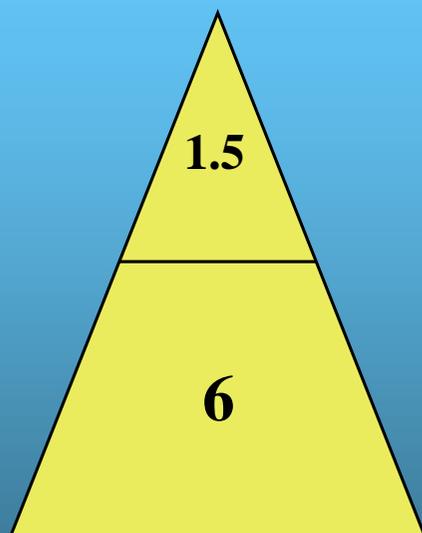


# Staffing Triangles

## Staffing Levels.....and responsibilities



Office of the Deputy Prime Minister



Reception, Advice, Rent Deposits, Prevention, Landlord Liaison Housing Options

Homelessness Investigation Acceptance and Placement

**Borough A - regular user of B&B**



# STAFFING TRIANGLES

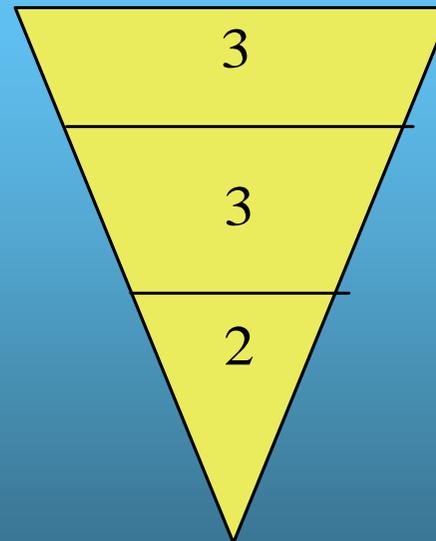
## Responsibilities.....and staffing levels



Reception, Advice,  
Deposits, Landlord Liaison

Prevention, Home Visits,  
Homeless Prevention Fund

Homelessness Investigation  
and Assessment



**Borough B - not a user of B&B**



# Get in Early





## Treat all potential Homelessness as Preventable

**Well actually, I don't really want to sell...**



- I want to put the rent up
- I want him out
- I don't want to manage the property any more
- I am fed up with his rent being late
- My lender has told me to stop letting



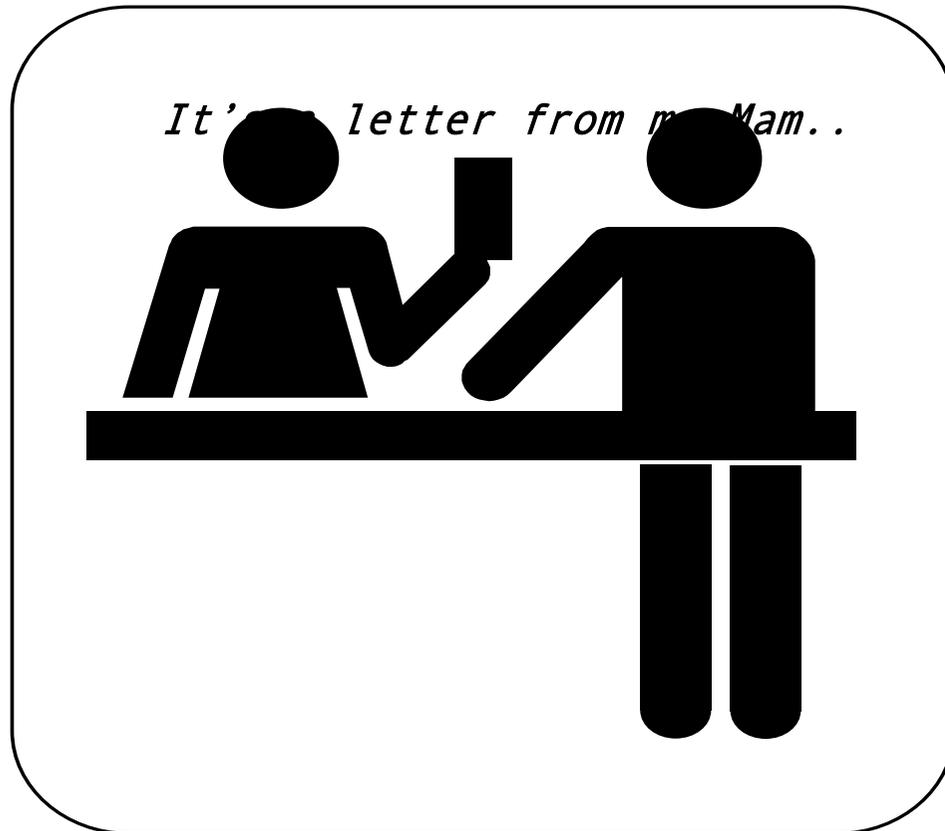
## Signs that Council Officers can see



- Applicants are asked to sit and wait until their number is called
- No interviews will be available between 1.00pm and 2.00pm



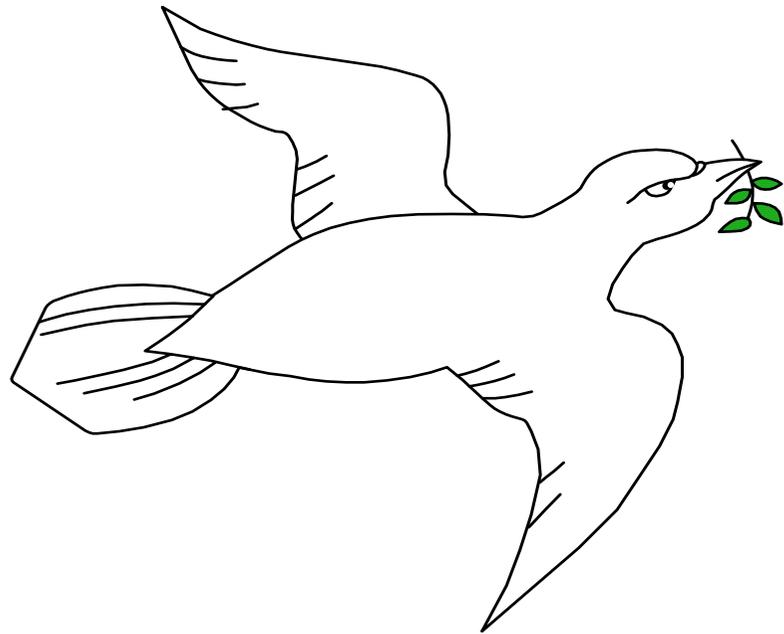
# Signs that Council Officers **can't** see



- **Don't worry! You can tell the Council anything. No-one ever visits to check**
- **Just take a letter in from your mum, that's all you need. Trust me! No-one ever visits to check**



## Family Friend Exclusion Professional Mediation or Home Visits?



- **Harrow employ professional Mediators (Relate, Family Mediation Service) 151/36**

**Success Rate 76%**

- **Sutton employ their own Visiting Officers**

**Success? “the change has been startling”**



## What's the Endgame??

- More households appropriately housed with access to services
- More households offered options to prevent homelessness
- But not a zero target
- Settled homes:changing lives



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

**BRIAN BINLEY MP**

(NORTHAMPTON SOUTH)

20 JAN 2006

Fran Rodgers  
Corporate Manager  
Housing Services  
The Guildhall  
St Giles Square  
Northampton  
NN1 1DE

16<sup>th</sup> January 2006

Dear Fran

**Our ref: BB/AJ/G 130 NBC**

**Your ref: Homelessness Task and Finish Group 27/01/2006**

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer my thoughts on the Homelessness Task and Finish Group.

You asked that I might provide one or two case scenarios and I am happy to do so.

I do have one constituent who shares custody of his children. The case is still not resolved so I will stray away from giving specifics. Primarily the problem occurred following the break-up of the partnership, from which there were two children. Whilst the mother was housed immediately, the father is yet to be housed, despite providing proof that he cared for the children for a higher number of days than the mother. In this instance I understand that a single man does not take priority need over single woman. However, given there were two children involved, for which he had primary care, the time factor in making a decision upon the case seemed unmerited. This delay might impact upon the court order granting the father joint care, for he would have been unable to fulfill the obligations of the order.

A second example again involves a break up and again involves children. In this instance, the break up occurred in another area and the child remained there with the mother. There seemed to be a period of time when neither Northampton Borough Council nor the Council there could categorically state which one had the duty of care for the gentleman. On this occasion, once Northampton Borough Council agreed that they had duty of care a home was found reasonably quickly. There is a genuine need for councils to correspond with each other quickly to establish responsibilities.

I hope the above is of help. If you require further examples or more details for those examples provided, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would add that I am aware that problems are primarily caused by the shortage of housing in Northampton but also

**Please reply to constituency address**

*Constituency Office: White Lodge, 42 Billing Road, Northampton, NN1 5DA  
Tel: 01604 250252 Fax: 01604 250252 email: jackmana@parliament.uk*

that when dealing with the Homelessness Department of the Borough Council I have found that most cases are resolved quite quickly.

Le me finally add that I am grateful my views are considered.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Brian Binley', written in a cursive style.

Brian Binley MP  
Northampton South Constituency

**Please reply to constituency address**

*Constituency Office: White Lodge, 42 Billing Road, Northampton, NN1 5DA  
Tel: 01604 250252 Fax: 01604 250252 email: [jackmana@parliament.uk](mailto:jackmana@parliament.uk)*

**2005-2006 Service Level Agreement (SLA) Appraisal  
Case Study**

**Name of Organisation:**

C A B

This is an extract of the documentation of an enquiry made of the Bureau recently. The customer comments relating to it were that although the bureau was unable to 'find' accommodation and no immediate solution was available that the adviser had explained matters 'very clearly'. The client has consented to speak directly to officers of the authority as it relates to the assessment of Bureau services. Contact details are available on request. Please note that the following represents the documentation required of membership of our National Association and is a good representation of documentation standards currently produced. The interview lasted around 45 minutes with 15/20 minutes devoted to documentation.

**Details**

Client presented as an emergency – Housing and Money Advice unable to see any more clients. Client is homeless and is living with mum of girlfriend. Mum is evicting. She is pregnant. previously living with dad - can't get on with him either - also been in prison for last couple of years. Has presented to the LA as homeless (initially just partner did) and she was told that she wouldn't get accommodation for the both of them as he wasn't living with her or claiming benefits for her. This they did and applied again was told no - not clear why - no written decision. Most recently (that afternoon) had been back to Housing and Money advice which I understand to be the body which the LA gives responsibility to interviewing/assessing obligations. There were 15 people presenting evidentially and they were told that they would have to go back to mums house - this was kind of agreed by mum - they will be interviewed tomorrow

**Advice**

Whether client qualifies as a homeless person is defined by law. The Housing Act 1996 (Part VII) and subsequent legislation sets out the legal duties of local councils towards people who are homeless or about to be made homeless. The council does not have to provide permanent housing to all homeless people.

Basically the council must check out certain things before it can help

- Eligible for assistance
- Legally homeless
- 'In priority need'
- Not intentionally homeless
- Have you a local connection

It must also be considered that the application made by one person should include another only if it is reasonable to do so. She has priority need.

The decision should be confirmed in writing.

Section 184 letter

21 days to appeal

**2005-2006 Service Level Agreement (SLA) Appraisal  
Case Study**

**Name of Organisation:**

**Further Action**

Client to attend appt - return if decision unfavourable - warned investigations could take days although looks pretty straightforward in their case. Failure to make decision (as often happens) requires specialist advice (threat of judicial review /complaint etc) otherwise full decision appealable within 21 days. Other housing options may be available depending on duty of LA.

## Homelessness Task and Finish Group

**Temi** (12/09/88) Referred to C.S.T. by Homeless Team on 27/10/05.

Temi was born in Nigeria, lived there with her dad until 2004, when dad sent her and her brother and sister to England to live with her mum, whom she'd never had a relationship with before. At the end of October 05, mum kicked all three children out. Eldest one went to friends, she is 19, younger child, age 15, was seen by referral team.

Rhiannon Kilborn, from homeless team saw Temi, she contacted Temi's mum, who said she didn't want the children back, but she was willing to pay for their tickets back to Nigeria. Because of this, homeless said they had a home to go to in Nigeria and would not assist them. Temi does have I.L.R. status and is attending Northampton College Full time. She had settled in Northampton and did not want to return to Nigeria. C.S.T. placed her in our accommodation at Elfield Court, she is still there at this time.

Graham Pinder (Principle social worker. Community Support)

**Joanne** (11/11/89) Referred by Connexions on 11/01/06.

Joanne had left home in December 05, because of witnessing domestic violence between her mum and stepdad. Joanne's sisters also lived at home along with Joanne and her baby who was born on 23/11/05. Joanne felt her there was not enough room for herself and her baby at mums and she did not want to bring her baby up in an atmosphere of violence and aggression. Joanne, her baby and her partner are currently living with his aunt in a 1 bedroom flat.

Contacted Homeless team, they wouldn't assist but told Joanne to go to Housing, Money and Advice Centre. Joanne went there, they took her details, placed her name on the housing register and asked her for a letter from partner's aunt stating when she wants them out of her property. Joanne has taken a letter back to them, has not heard any more from them as yet.

Graham Pinder (Principle social worker. Community Support)

**Matthew** has an application for a tenancy with Northampton Borough Council, we filled it in together in early Sept as he had reached 17.75 years. NBC received the application on 22.09.05 and numbered it Z035555. In communication with the council since they have said they cannot find him anything as he has asked for popular areas, various communication have taken place since. The last e mail was sent on 17.01.05 I asked Emily Sawford to add two additional areas on Matt's behalf. I have as yet had no reply to that e mail.

Paul Pateman (Assistant Young person advisor)

**Sam** turned 18 on February 24th 2005.

A housing application form was put in by Sam to Corby Borough Council on March 2004.

Previous to her 18th birthday she was living with foster carers, in Stonham housing and then in her own privately rented bed-sit.

She moved into her bed-sit on 9/8/04 and was very settled and happy. She kept the council informed of all changes of address.

I took Sam for a final assessment interview with the council around her 18th birthday. The council request this of everyone just before they turn 18.

When speaking to the council at this meeting we were informed that Sam will be put on the list and it is anticipated that she will be placed somewhere within 6months to a year.

Unfortunately Sam's placement at the bed-sit broke down because she was burgled, had squatters and her property and room was trashed.

Sam was too scared to return.

She moved into a friend's home, sleeping on the sofa. This was expected to be a short term arrangement as she was keeping in regular contact with the council and was under the impression that a flat would become available soon.

Unfortunately this has never happened.

Sam is now pregnant and due at the beginning of March 2006, she has been to the council to explain her situation and they have informed her that she will not receive a flat or any type of property any time soon.

Sam is in desperate need of a suitable placement so she can settle in and raise her new born child.

Linsey Tiller – (Leaving Care Social Worker)

Daniel (21/06/89)

Daniel was kicked out of home last November after getting drunk one evening and being rude to his mum. Spoke to Mum, she refuses to have him back. Daniel is training to be a chef at Northampton College and works on Saturdays at Pizza Hut, has applied for Income Support and presents as a very mature young man, has no other needs apart from needing somewhere to live. Staying with friends parents, they went to council with him and explained that they could only keep him for a short while, N.B.C. told them to come to C.S.T. for accommodation. Still at friends at present.

Brodie (5/7/88)

Brodie was living with Mum until November 05, when he decided himself to go and live with his Dad. Dad lives in private-rented accommodation and Brodie lived there until Christmas. The landlady then found out he was there and told him he has to leave immediately or dad could lose his tenancy. Brodie went back to mums, but her partner's son had moved into Brodie's old room and there was no space for him there. Brodie went to N.B.C. and took in letters from both parents confirming his situation. They sent him to C.S.T. Brodie is currently moving between friends and has no fixed address. Has applied for J.S.A, is starting on Princes Trust Course next week, his only need is accommodation.

## Housing Scenario-Broken Relationships

L & J and their 3 children were found intentionally homeless\* 12 months after J lost his job. They completed their Housing Benefit forms incorrectly and therefore accrued arrears.

L was 6 months pregnant when they moved into Bed and Breakfast. They occupied 1 family room in a local hotel with no kitchen facilities, Schools for the eldest 2 were on the other side of town so they were often late when they managed to get them there. Washing and drying clothes was a problem as well as feeding the children properly .

L became very depressed about their situation and her midwife was concerned as she was not eating properly. Arguments between the couple increased which upset the children. J left the family about 3 months after the birth of their son.



They were intentionally homeless because housing Benefit wasn't processed =rent not paid=intentionally homeless.It happens with lots of families who struggle with Housing Benefit forms.  
fiona

**Subject:** Homelessness Task & Finish group Visit to Housing Advice Centre Team

Dear Fran' please see mini-report of visit as above on 19th Jan,  
Linda B had arranged for me to see/observe 'customer/team member interactions', unfortunately I was unwell and time became limited'

On arrival, I waited in queue observing discussions with waiting customers, there were a number of people in the waiting room, and the queue was around 6 people. I would totally support Cllr Pritchards comment that although there is a privacy sign, those waiting can overhear discussions at the reception desk.  
After meeting some team members I observed a discussion with a young Man (20 something) who had not kept in touch with centre, had not left accurate addresses, and whose sister had told him he could no longer stay with her. The Centre had supported his application for 'shared ownership' as his income was adequate, but he had probably lost that opportunity due to time span. This young man would try the patience of a saint yet the 'officer; dealt with him extremely well and set about reinstating his support for shared ownership and/ or private tenancy'. I was shown some paperwork about the sort of cases that came in and then went with a Homelessness officer. We went to a home on a 'wellknown' council estate, where a mother had said she wanted her daughter and baby to be rehomed NOW!

The officer had hoped he could talk Mum round while he organised housing, but when we entered the house the mother very quickly and firmly reiterated her stance. The Lady concerned had a baby ? 6 months or so, and seemed to have taken up too much space and time. Her mother felt her daughter was extremely difficult and needed Psychiatric assessment, but the appointment was some time away and she had had enough. The officer explained the procedure emphasising the likelihood of Bed & Breakfast and that the daughter would be on her own, I was left with the unpleasant perception that the mother was possibly trying to precipitate a crisis to get her daughter the help she needed. When we left the officer was concerned too about the young Mum (late teens) would be on her own. When we got back he was going to see what he could do, but I had to leave at that point to return home.

I found the little time I had to be valuable in terms of understanding some situations and thank Linda and her team for their time and the reassurance that here we have an very good team of employees.

Councillor Marion Allen

PS Fran could you circulate to those I have missed. Thankyou

16/02/2006

**Report on the visit to the Homelessness Unit  
on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006 by Cllr Pritchard**

**10.00 – Homeless exit interview**

Visit to a St Barnabus House flat housing a single male foreign student. Previously Social Services were responsible for housing him as he was an asylum seeker who had been granted leave to remain, but as he was now 18, he was no longer their responsibility. He had been in B&B for a week then in this one bedroom flat which was RSL temporary accommodation. As NBC were taking back the flat from RSL, he was offered it as a permanent tenancy. The flat had been furnished, including a washing machine & two beds, which would remain. On his arrival the door to the airing cupboard was badly damaged & the sink & washbasin were blocked, which the officer promised would be repaired. The young man agreed to the tenancy & the paperwork would be sent to him shortly.

**10.45 – Front desk of Housing & Money Advice**

Very busy with two staff manning the desk & a constant queue of six or more, many who spoke poor English. Problems ranged from checking balance of outstanding debt, advising on action to take when bailiffs called, to needing urgent advice as facing eviction.

IT system seemed to work well & staff were friendly, calm, polite & good humoured, although under pressure.

I was concerned about the lack of privacy, at this first point of contact, although there was a barrier where people waited, all conversations could easily be overheard.

**11.30 – Housing options interview** held in a small room which contained Christmas decorations!

The single mother was being evicted by her private landlord at the end of January. She was on the housing list but only had only a few points which would not be enough to give her a council property. Her best option would be the rent assistance scheme & this was explained to her.

She had rent arrears & other debts. She was starting nurse training in February so would need to produce proof of grant & arrears would need to be repaid by instalments before she could be accepted on this scheme

**13.15 – Rent assisted scheme**

The details of how this worked was explained by the staff. Clients could find accommodation where they chose to live, but the rent had to be within the Housing Benefit they could claim. Negotiations with landlords had resulted in reduced rents to enable clients to afford them. Landlords also came to the Council to offer their property, so the staff could inform clients of available accommodation. This scheme had helped many who would otherwise become homeless.

**14.00 – Interview with Debt Counsellor** A disabled young woman who had Council tax & water arrears came for advice. She was also paying off catalogue & a finance company. A future appointment was made when she would bring details of all her debts & income so that a proper assessment could be made.

### **15.00 – Temporary accommodation meeting**

I was told about the current availability of different types of accommodation. There was a move towards using less leased property which cost the NBC whether it was used or not.

This section was not on a computer so made working practices difficult & was time consuming.

There were concerns about Brer Court, as the budget of £2500 had already been spent & there was no money for window locks, & replacement furniture, & repainting which had been promised in house had not been done. In contrast £11,000 had been spent on resurfacing the play area.

### **SUMMARY**

My visit was very interesting & gave me a better insight into the running of the Homelessness Department. I would like to thank all the staff who gave up their time & who were very honest about their work, which I perceived to be quite pressurised & emotionally draining.

I would suggest that further improvements could be made in

1. On the front desk as regarding privacy
2. In the interview rooms
3. Computer database for temporary accommodation units
4. Re-allocation of finance to improve the living conditions in Brer Court & especially the security of the houses.