



London Borough of Brent
DRAFT
Homelessness Review, Strategy and
Action Plan
2008-2013

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1. Introduction

The homelessness review has been thorough in bringing together research from work which has been taking place across the Housing and Community Care Department and the Council as a whole, which has enabled us to have a clear evidence base on which to take forward our next homelessness strategy from 2008 to 2013. This strategy consolidates the Council's corporate commitment to prevent homeless as set out within the Corporate Strategy 2006-2010.

We have analysed data which has given us a clear picture of whether or not we have achieved our strategic objectives to date but we have also consulted our customers and stakeholders who have given us a clear insight into how they would like to see the service develop and what the priorities are for them. Achievements in the past five years include:

- Reduced levels of homelessness
- Increased homeless prevention
- A reduction in the use of hotel accommodation
- A reduction in the use of temporary accommodation by 12.5%
- Improved support services for the vulnerable
- Minimal levels of rough sleeping

But change continues apace and there is no room for complacency. As the review indicates there are a number of drivers for change including a need for greater efficiency in the context of increased expectation from our customers.

We have had our performance reviewed and challenged by government and are taking on board recommendations from this and the extensive feedback we have had from customers, service delivery partners, staff and other stakeholders. We have identified best practice being delivered elsewhere over a number of aspects of the service and are now able to learn from parts of this which are relevant to the local environment in Brent.

2. Background

The first Homelessness Strategy was adopted by the Executive on 21 July 2003 and was developed following a comprehensive assessment of need and a review of homelessness in the borough. The Homelessness Act, 2002 requires local authorities to publish a five year strategy, addressing issues of prevention of homelessness, availability of accommodation and support for people who are homeless or may become homeless.

Since publication of Brent's first five year strategy, a number of government initiatives have introduced fundamental changes to the way the housing needs of homeless households are met, including limiting the use of hotels, an emphasis on the effective prevention of homelessness, the introduction of a new performance framework and publication of 'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives', a national strategy which includes the commitment to reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 50% for homeless households by 2010 and a requirement to take a more holistic approach in tackling homelessness, including the wider causes of homelessness such as worklessness and employment and over-crowding. The homelessness review in 2003 identified the major causes of homelessness in Brent which led to the development of five strategic priorities which formed the framework for the strategy. A number of initiatives were derived from these and have been delivered both through Council services and through voluntary sector funded projects. The strategic priorities were:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Increasing supply of accommodation in all sectors
- Supporting the vulnerable
- Reducing the use of hotel accommodation
- Supporting non-priority applicants and rough sleepers

A review of the strategy was carried out in 2006/7 and an update of the review was received at the Council's Executive Committee on 12 March 2007.

3. Service Review & Methodology 2008

A further review of the service has been undertaken over the latter part of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, with the aim of developing the next five year strategy and action plan. This review aims to update the 2006/7 review and outline findings and issues arising from recent consultation, the review of processes and benchmarking against best practice.

Review methodology

The review has considered the findings from:

- Consultation with key stakeholders such as service users, service providers, the voluntary sector and staff
- Benchmarking against best practice authorities and West London Housing Alliance authorities
- Extensive good practice guidance and self assessment tool kits issued by Communities and Local Government (CLG).
- A review of processes relating to housing needs customer services, which has enabled us to identify where efficiencies can be achieved and where customer experience and performance can be improved

4. Drivers for 2008 – 2013

Evidence from the 2007/8 review shows that overall the level of homelessness is decreasing and that we are improving upon homelessness prevention and the provision of support services for the vulnerable. Whilst we are improving upon service delivery, the underlying causes of homelessness have been consistent over the past five years and the ongoing strategic priorities will therefore be similar. However, demand for housing and associated support services remain a huge challenge for delivery of the next strategy in a more challenging local environment in which the population is growing and the private sector rental market is changing affecting availability of accommodation to the homeless, for example many landlords are showing an increasing reluctance to let to those claiming benefits

The 2008 to 2013 Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan therefore seeks to continue to deliver improvements on existing challenges whilst meeting the demands of new challenges brought about by customer expectation, improved performance expectation from government and an increasing need to demonstrate efficiency and value for money.

This will require a more targeted approach to service delivery and an increased focus on partnership working in order to avoid duplication of service delivery and to offer a more coordinated response to meet customer priorities, needs and expectations.

Government Drivers

There are a number of Government led proposals which may affect service delivery over the next five years and which will affect the ongoing strategic priorities for the service. These have to be balanced with drivers arising from the local environment and local priorities, including those identified by service users and stakeholders. Current drivers include:

- with effect from April 2008, which may have a positive or negative affect on the private rental sector
- Proposals to revise Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements for temporary accommodation with effect from October 2009 which may impact on the Council's overall budget
- Legislation which will limit the use of hotel accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds The introduction of Local Housing Allowance replacing Housing Benefit from April 2010
- Case law requiring better coordination of services between housing authorities and social services departments to meet the needs of 16 and 17 year olds
- The Government target to reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 50% for homeless households by 2010
- Government investment to tackle overcrowding

- Government investment to tackle worklessness and the link between worklessness and housing need

Other Drivers

Other critical drivers effecting homelessness in Brent over the next five years are:

- Transformation of Adult Social Care
- Transformation of customer contact arrangements
- Corporate 'step change' challenge for service improvement
- Population growth, particularly in relation to young people (under 30)
- The particular pressure arising from the attractiveness of Brent as a genuinely established ethnic population
- Diminishing private sector housing market
- Rising interest rates creating uncertainty in the sales market
- Increasing customer expectations

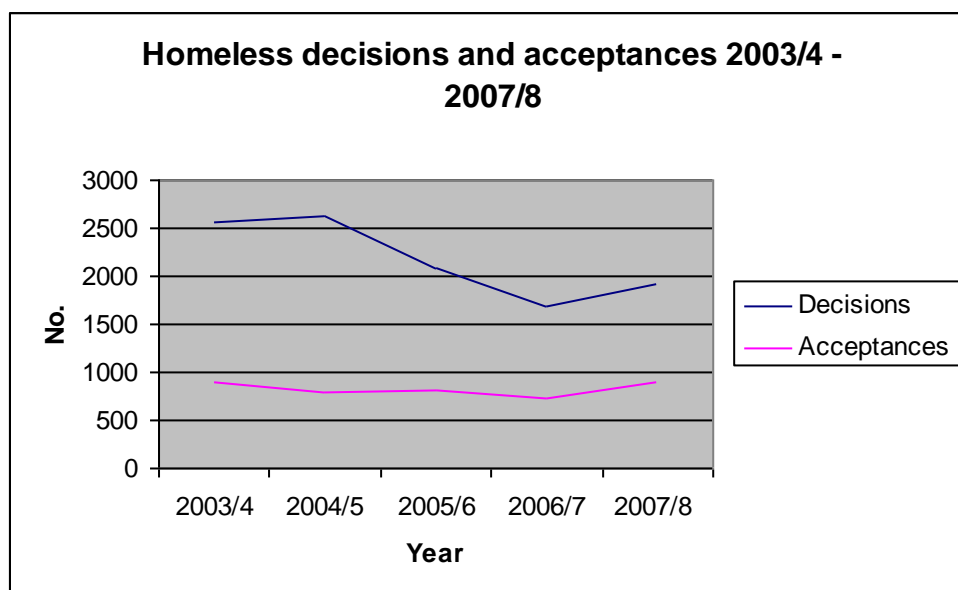
However, the relatively long term of this strategy means that other factors may impact on drivers for the strategy, for example there may be a new government in this period.

5. Analysis of Homelessness

Reasons for Homelessness

There has been a year on year reduction in the level of homelessness approaches and acceptances from 2003/4 to 2006/7 due to the prevention initiatives being delivered as part of the last strategy. However, the last year has shown an upturn in both homelessness decisions and acceptances, largely due to a reduction in available private sector accommodation.

Numbers of homeless decisions and acceptances



The causes of homelessness in Brent have remained consistent over the last five years and these can broadly be summarised in the following categories:

- Exclusion by parents, other family and friends
- Eviction from assured short hold tenancies
- Violence, including domestic violence from within the home, domestic violence outside of the home or fear of violence from others
- Non violent family breakdown
- Harassment and hate crime
- Rent arrears
- Mortgage arrears
- Discharge from hospital, prison or the armed forces

The table below gives a more detailed breakdown of reasons for homelessness acceptances in Brent over the last five years.

Reasons for homelessness acceptances

Reasons for becoming homeless – accepted cases	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5	2003/4
	%	%	%	%	%
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	12.3	16.8	29.76	13%	19.17
Other friends / relatives no longer willing to accommodate	29.75	23.17	17.59	19.49	20.28
Non violent breakdown of relationship with partner	1.79	6.5	10.58	23.77	19.62
Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	4.36	7	4.3	3.65	5.13
Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated person	2.35	3.11	4.3	4.53	2.56
Racially motivated violence	0	0.13	0.12	0	0
Other forms of violence	0.11	0.13	0	0.12	0.11
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0.12	0	0
Other forms of harassment	0	0	0.25	0.38	0.33
Mortgage arrears	0.56	1.35	0.4	0	0.11
Rent arrears council tenant	2.12	2.98	2.9	1.76	2.34
Rent arrears housing association	0.11	0.68	0.25	1.13	1.11
Rent arrears privately rented	0	0	0	0.12	0.33
Loss of assured short-hold tenancy	26.96	20.46	12.42	12.7	10.92
Loss of rented or tied accommodation other than AST	2.12	6.23	5.41	4.9	3.78
Required to leave home office asylum accommodation	0	0	0	0	0
Left prison / remand	0.67	0	2.21	3.77	2.56
Left hospital	2.35	3.11	1.7	*NR	*NR
Left care or other institution	0	0.41	1.6	*NR	*NR
Left HM forces	0	0	0	*NR	*NR
Other (emergency / rough sleeping)	14.43	7.86	6.88	9.94	11.59

*NOT RECORDED

Underlying Causes of Homelessness

Under current Homelessness legislation, households must have a priority need, in order to be assisted. With the exception of families with dependent children, 17 and 17 year olds and those becoming homeless as a result of fire, flood or disaster, the local authority must determine if other applicants are vulnerable and in priority need. This assessment is carried out on a case by case basis and groups of applicants who may be considered vulnerable include:

- Young people, including those leaving care
- Older people
- Families
- Those dependent on alcohol or drugs
- Those with mental and physical health issues and disabilities
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Those in fear of violence, including domestic violence
- Rough sleepers

The table below indicates the vulnerable groups that we have an accepted a homelessness duty to in Brent over the last five years.

In some cases, this can be different to the reasons for homelessness. For example a family may have become homeless through loss of an assured short-hold tenancy but their vulnerability may be because they have dependent children. A victim of domestic violence may have lost their accommodation due to violence and may also be accepted as being in priority need because of that violence.

Reasons for vulnerability

Vulnerability	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5	2003/4
	%	%	%	%	%
Dependent Children	66.22	64.87	64.77	62.83	63.56
Pregnant & no other children	7	11.03	8.28	11.25	8.37
16/17	7.77	6.46	6.79	12	7.39
18-20 formerly in care	0	0	0.37	1.76	0.54
Having been in care over 20	0	0	1.97	0	0
Old age	3.77	4.84	2.71	3.53	5.66
Physical disability	3.11	0.53	0.98	1.76	1.19
Mental disability	.77	0.67	1.73	2.4	3.04
Drug dependency	0	0	0	0	NR
Alcohol dependency	.66	0.8	0.37	0.37	NR
Former asylum seeker	1	1.07	1.73	0	NR
Other	7.55	6.59	7.03	0	0
Leaving HM forces	0	0	0	0	0
Leaving custody / remand	.11	0	0.49	0.88	1.3
Fear Of Violence	1.11	2.29	2.1	2.02	6.08
Domestic Violence	.88	0.8	0.61	1.13	2.72
Total					

The majority of homeless acceptances have consistently been for those who are in priority need because they are pregnant or already have dependent children, or are aged 16 or 17 and last year these groups made up over 80% of all those where the Council accepted a homeless duty.

Diversity

The Equalities Standard

The Equalities Standard is a framework of standards which authorities must aim to achieve to ensure that service provision is of a high standard and meets the needs of the entire community. Brent has achieved level 3 against the equalities standard and is in the process of developing a Single Equalities Scheme (SES) to consolidate work done to date and to set the department on the path to achieving The Equality Charter mark at Level 5 by 2011.

Nationally, there is also a growing emphasis on measuring the equalities outcomes across performance management arrangements. This is highlighted in the revised National Indicator sets and arrangements for the new Local Area Assessment Framework which will replace the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. Locally having signed up to the “The Equality Standard” has meant that we have an integrated framework for addressing issues across all five diversity strands, including sexuality and faith/belief.

The implications that stem from these developments has meant that in addressing issues of diversity across employment and service delivery, we need to build an evidence base of achieving positive equality outcomes and ensure that the culture of continuous improvement is firmly embedded across the organisation. The departmental Equalities Action Plan consists of both cross cutting departmental and service specific priorities/targets and those relevant to the Homelessness Strategy have been incorporated into the Homelessness Action Plan.

An Equalities Impact and Needs Requirement Assessment (INRA) has been undertaken as part of the analyses for developing this strategy. This has not identified any adverse implications for particular communities in developing the project, and has highlighted benefits for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Ethnicity

The demographic make up of the borough is reflected, though not mirrored, in homeless applications. Ethnic minority households historically have been and continue to be proportionately over-represented in homeless applications. Reasons for this are complex and relate to a variety of social, economic and demographic factors, including income levels, family size, and quality of housing and patterns of tenure.

The table below shows the comparisons by ethnicity, between the population of Brent according to the 2001 census and those applying for and being granted assistance as homeless. Whilst Black residents make up just below 20% of Brent’s population in 2001, they have consistently accounted for

nearly half of all homeless applications. Conversely over a fifth of all homeless applications were made by White households although making up 45% of the resident population in the 2001 census.

Diversity information is collected from all applicants and periodic statistical analysis is undertaken to ensure lettings are carried out in accordance with the Council's diversity policy and continue to meet the needs of our multi-ethnic community.

The table below indicates that acceptances are reasonably proportionate to homeless decisions indicating that decisions are made fairly and consistently. Not all applicants have given their ethnic origin.

We have recently started to collate more detailed information about ethnicity. We are collating data about Travellers and will be collating more detailed information about the white and black categories. There will be further analyses once a data set is available and we expect this to be in March 2009.

Ethnic breakdown of homeless applicants and homeless acceptances compared to the community overall

	White			Black		
	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population
2003/04	18.41	15.05	45.3	40.68	41.47	19.9
2004/05	18.39	16.98		39.64	44.9	
2005/06	19.85	18.81		40.67	42.92	
2006/07	18.14	19.24		39.61	42.55	
2007/08	16.36	16.33		38.89	41.83	
	Asian			Mixed		
	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population
2003/04	15.76	18.17	27.7			3.8
2004/05	15.25	12.32		5	5.28	
2005/06	11.76	12.42		5.01	5.41	
2006/07	14.46	16.94		5.23	5.28	
2007/08	12.44	13.87		4.39	4.13	
	Chinese			Other		
	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population	%Applicants	%Acceptances	%population
2003/04	0.51	0.64	1.1	8.14	9.81	2.3
2004/05	0.63	0.45		4.73	3.16	
2005/06	0.24	0.12		4.16	5.19	
2006/07	0.36	0		3.4	3.94	
2007/08	0.11	0.11		4.39	4.70	

Gender

The 2001 census data shows that 51.6% of Brent's population is female; however 59% of all homeless applications are from women. Breaking this figure down into accepted homeless applications and non-homeless applications shows noticeable variations.

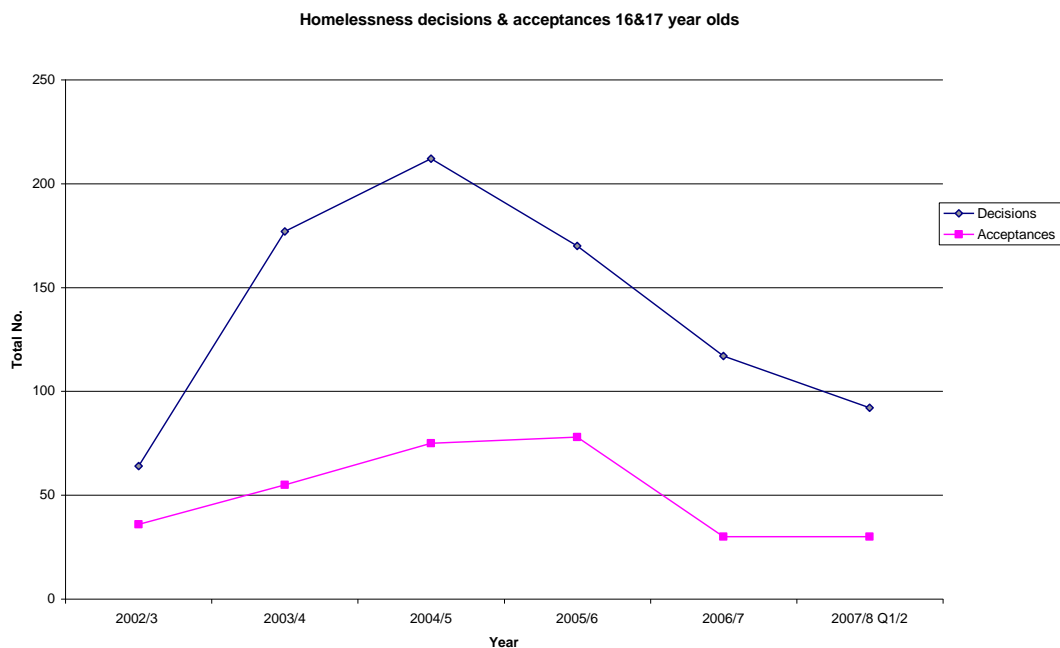
The legislation governing assessment of homeless applications requires vulnerability criteria to be met before an before the Council has a duty to offer

housing assistance. As women are generally the primary care givers in families it is not surprising that 65% of accepted homeless applications are from women with dependent children.

Single 16/17 year olds

In 2006/07 6,061 16 and 17 year olds were accepted as homeless nationally, which represents 8.5% of all homelessness acceptances nationally. Brent accepted a duty towards 48, 16 and 17 years olds which represents 7% of the Brent total. This rose to nearly 8% in 2007/8.

16 & 17 year old Homeless approaches and acceptances 2002/3 to 2007/8



Where a duty is not accepted to house a young person, it can be for a variety of reasons but primarily because it is deemed that they have made themselves intentionally homeless or that they are not homeless. In many cases it is the behaviour and refusal to change behaviour which could be reasonably expected which leads to the family excluding the young person. In many cases the family are making a home available but place conditions on the young person to which they are unwilling to comply. These young people are referred to the Children and Families Department (C&F) for support but there is no tracking of outcomes in this regard by either the housing needs service or C&F which could mean that these young people may be at risk in many ways including, being victims of crime or offending themselves or failing to engage in other services including education, training or employment.

There is anecdotal evidence of collusion between young people and their families, alleging exclusion because homelessness can be seen as the route into social sector housing.

Single 18 – 24 year olds

There are many risks for young homeless people, which may have long term implications for their safety, wellbeing and future prospects of education and employment. There is national and local research linking homeless to an increased risk of exclusion from education and low educational attainment, risk of offending and drifting into criminality and risk of drugs and alcohol misuse. In 2007/8 we made 229 decisions about homelessness from this group and accepted a duty to house 54 of these (23.58%).

Teenage pregnancy and young parents

Most teenage pregnancy is unintended and young parents are more at risk of other factors which can increase the likelihood of homelessness including, postnatal depression, low income and benefit dependency, inadequate housing and over-crowding, relationship breakdown, poor health and reduced educational prospects. In 2007/8 we made 86 decisions on homeless applications from this group and accepted a duty to house 54 of these households (63%).

Care Leavers

Nationally, 11% of young people accepted as homeless in 2006/7 were for care leavers aged 18-20 years. However there have been none in Brent since 2005/6 as this group are housed through the Housing Register and forward planning for the housing needs of this group. During 2007/8 55 lettings from the Housing Register were targeted for Children Leaving Care, to assist the C&F department in re-housing young adults. Supporting People funded floating support is provided to those young people offered tenancies to support sustainment.

Older People

There has been a relatively low level of homelessness applications from those aged 60 and over, which has averaged at 4% for the period of the last strategy. Those aged 60 and over are eligible to be assessed for sheltered accommodation for which housing register waiting times are generally lower, thus enabling the Council to manage housing need for this group through the Housing register.

Disability

According to the census data, 15.6% of Brent's population stated that they had a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability, which limited their daily activity or work. However this does not mean that 15.6% of the population are disabled. Elsewhere in the census data, under the questions regarding economic activity, 4.7% of the respondents defined themselves as permanently sick or disabled.

A direct comparison with homelessness data is difficult. However a medical assessment is carried out where an applicant indicates that there is a medical problem. The Council's District Medical Officer (DMO) awards a priority band to applicants depending upon the severity of the medical condition. A priority band of A or B indicates a severe medical problem. According to housing register data, 14.4% of all applicants have priority bands A, B or C, due to their medical needs. This is in line with the 15.6% of the population with a limiting illness.

Mental Health

The Council is currently reviewing and developing a strategy around the housing needs of people with mental health issues. A number of service gaps have been identified, including a lack of self contained supported accommodation, a lack of shared accommodation where people have access to a private bathroom, difficulties accessing independent accommodation, a lack of provision for people with dual diagnoses of mental health, drug and alcohol needs, no supported accommodation for people with a history of offending and mental health needs and a lack of housing related services catering for diverse needs, including cultural.

A number of recommendations are being considered to address those service gaps identified including in reviewing and possible tendering of supporting people funded services and ensuring that the needs of this group are supported through all housing procurement, including in the private sector.

In 2006/7 we housed 65 households through the Housing Register where a member of the household declared a family member with a mental illness, which represents approximately 7% of all lettings.

New Areas of diversity monitoring

We have recently started to collect data regarding sexual orientation and faith and it is recognised that in order to plan effectively for the needs of different faith groups and the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, the Council needs to collate and analyse such data. Analyses of this information will commence when a full data set is available.

6. Housing Market Analysis

The Homelessness Review of 2007 set out the broad context of the housing market as it affects Brent. The Council's most recent Housing Needs Survey carried out in 2003, indicates that the housing market is stabilising for many Brent residents following house price rises in Brent of up to 300% in the previous decade, the largest rise in any London borough. These increasing housing costs have not kept pace with household incomes thus exacerbating the issue of affordability for many home seekers and placing greater expectation and demand upon the Council to provide and facilitate the provision of accommodation. This review makes reference more specifically to supply and demand for those presenting themselves as homeless or in housing need to the Council. The Council is currently developing its Housing Strategy for the period 2008 to 2013 and this will review the broader housing market.

Supply and Demand

The Housing Resource Centre make projections around supply and demand for accommodation by using a model which brings together information regarding the demand for housing from the homeless, Council tenants seeking a transfer and applicants to the Housing Register. This demand is mapped against expected supply levels in the social and private housing sectors.

The table below sets out a high level view of supply and demand, showing that the level of unmet demand in the Borough is expected to be just over 18,000 households over the next three years.

Supply and Demand 2006/7 to 2010/11

	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Demand from all groups	19,138	19,189	19,604	19,940	19,968
Permanent supply – Brent / RSL's	964	921	1043	1050	1030
Total lettings including private sector	1,015	1,041	1,518	1,665	1,730
Unmet demand	18,167	18,772	18,369	18,355	18,318

Housing Demand

Housing Register and Transfer Demand

The table below provides an overview of the demand by the size of accommodation needed but a full breakdown of live applications on the Housing Register and Transfer list by demand group is available through the annual Supply and Demand Report which is agreed by the Council's Executive Committee annually.

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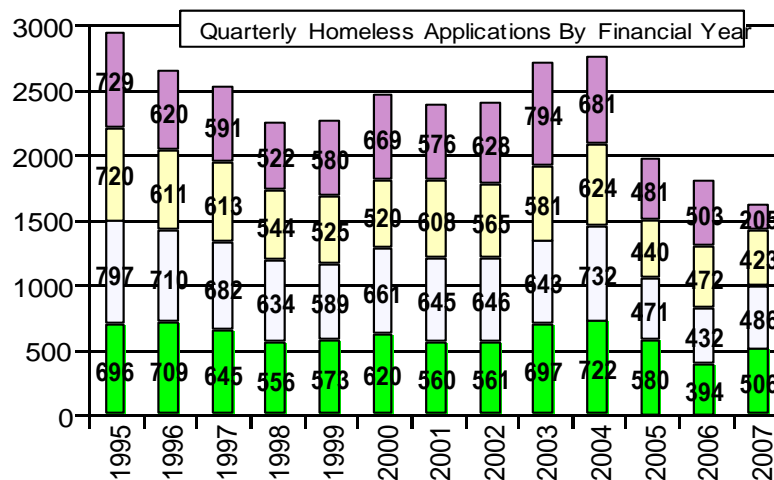
Accommodation Demand

No. rooms required	Housing Register	Transfer
Bedsit	8,495	600
1	1,131	99
2	5,830	580
3	2,776	503
4	995	197
5	235	32
6+	42	3
Sub Totals	19,954	2,014
Grand Total	21,968	

Total demand on these lists is currently just under 22,000 households, of which 3,882 are in temporary accommodation provided by the Council. Given the high level of demand within the borough and the limited supply of housing, it is likely that a large number of these households will never be rehoused, and those that are assisted with rehousing face lengthy waits in many cases.

Homeless Applications and Decisions

The graph below shows homeless applications received per quarter by financial year up to the end of January 2008.



There has been an increase in homeless applications in the current financial year and a corresponding increase in the number of acceptances. There was a slight decrease in the number of homeless applications received in quarter 3 compared to the previous quarters this financial year. However, this is largely due to a seasonal trend.

In the first three quarters of 2006/07, 461 homeless applications were accepted, in the same period of 2007/08, just over 700 applications were accepted. This is a significant increase. Part of the reason for the increase in homeless applications and acceptances has been a general downturn in the

supply of private rented sector properties in the borough. This is also the case across West London in general.

Some households exercise their legal right to make a homeless application, and that there is no penalty if a household chooses to refuse an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector, and then makes a homeless application. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is a factor contributing to the increase in homelessness applications over the last year.

Housing Supply

Permanent Supply

Permanent lettings are made through Locata which is a choice-based letting scheme, operated in the West London boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow. Our other partners in Locata are Paddington Churches Housing Association, Ealing Families Housing Association and Paradigm Housing Group. Existing Council and housing association tenants within this partnership who would like to transfer to a new home can use Locata as well as people who are on one of the participating Council's housing register or who are homeless. Priority is awarded on a banding system from A to D with Band A having the highest level of priority. Priority is also determined by the date of registration on the housing register.

Projected lettings, despite being an increase on 2007/08, will only be able to meet less than 5% of the total housing need in the Borough. As projected lettings can only meet a small proportion of the housing need in the borough, it is therefore important that prioritisation of lettings is considered in line with the allocations scheme. The Supply and Demand report which is agreed by the Council's Executive Committee on an annual basis details the quota allocation from the available lets.

However, 50% of all available lets are targeted at the homeless in temporary accommodation to support the Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan. The others are targeted at urgent management transfers of council tenants, transfers required due to major works, the under-occupation scheme and the move on of clients from supported hostels clients of adult social care who are ready to move on. A new category being targeted for 2008/9 is the 'Emerging Households' which caters for households at risk of becoming homeless through family exclusion by existing social sector tenants. The aim of the scheme is to provide an alternative to going down the route of presenting themselves to the Council as homeless.

Private Sector Supply

In house lettings

The last Homelessness Strategy recognised the dependence on private rented sector procurement to both assist in the prevention of homelessness

and to ensure sufficient supply of accommodation in the borough. This supply not only supports the Temporary Accommodation Reduction Strategy but assists in delivering other strategic priorities such as the move on from hostel accommodation to independent living. Over many years Brent has had a very positive relationship with landlords in the private sector which it has maintained through regular forums both officer and member led.

However there has been a steep reduction in the number of private sector properties the Council has been able to secure over the last three years for these initiatives; in 2005/6 400 properties were procured and this reduced to 265 in 2006/7 and 200 in 2007/8. However, very early indications from the implementation of Local Housing Allowance in April 2008 is that it is seen positively by landlords and we have already started to an upturn in procurement.

The shortfall in the supply of private sector properties has meant that many households threatened with homelessness who have expressed an interest in taking an offer in the private rented sector, make homeless applications and that many hostel residents able to move into independent living are unable to.

Under current arrangements private sector procurement for letting to those where a statutory duty is owed is carried out by a number of teams. Through a review of private sector accommodation we have identified the need to engage new landlords and to encourage existing landlords we work with to expand their property portfolios. We believe that this can be achieved by bringing together all private sector procurement within one team. This will enable a more coordinated package of services for landlords and tenants including:

- Streamlined rent deposit and rent guarantee schemes
- A marketing strategy for engaging landlords
- Expanding floating support to private tenants
- Providing tenancy sustainment resource to support landlords and tenants during the course of the tenancy
- Prioritisation of letting

The new team is expected to be in place by the Autumn of 2008.

Paradigm Housing Group supply – Solo Scheme

In addition to in-house procurement we have been working with the Paradigm Housing Group which procures accommodation for single non-priority home seekers under the Solo scheme. On average the project has been able to procure up to 140 tenancies each year and over the period of the last strategy, close working with landlords and tenants has enabled an incremental increase in the level of tenancy sustainment amongst those lettings facilitated. In 2004 when lettings were first arranged through this scheme, 16% of tenants moved out in the first 3 months and 45% remained in their properties after one year. By December 2006, only 4.6% of clients had

moved out in within 3 month and 71.3% still remained in the same property after a year. During the year 2007, out of 140 tenants, only 5 moved out within 3 months (2.6%).

Hostel Accommodation

Supporting People funding provides supported accommodation for almost 2,000 households and housing related 'floating' support for an additional 1,500 people. Funding however, has decreased over the last five years from £13.7m per year to £12.8m per year from 2006-2007 with this level confirmed through to 2010-2011. In line with the National Supporting People strategy, funding from 2009 will be incorporated into the Local Area Agreement (LAA) from 2009 and it will be important to ensure that Supporting People services meet the objectives of the LAA and that the service is able to also retain its identity as 'housing' support.

The table below summarises the level and type of provision available within the borough.

Hostel and floating support by client group

Client Group	Accommodation based service	Floating Support Service	Outreach	TOTAL	% of Total
Generic	0	53		53	1.51
Homeless Families with Support Needs	48	83		131	3.73
Offenders or People at risk of Offending	35	50		85	2.42
Older people with support needs	948	270		1253	35.65
People with a Physical or Sensory Disability	79	123		202	5.75
People with Alcohol Problems	23	20		43	1.22
People with Drug Problems	6	40		46	1.31
People with HIV / AIDS	0	15		15	0.43
People with Learning Disabilities	89	90		179	5.09
People with Mental Health Problems	204	173	85	462	13.14
Refugees	19	15		34	0.97
Single Homeless with Support Needs	371	466		837	23.81
Teenage Parents	29	0		29	0.83
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	19	0		19	0.54
Young People at Risk	77	0		77	2.19
Young People Leaving Care	0	50		50	1.42
TOTAL	1947	1448		3515	

The supporting people funded services are key to homeless prevention and tackling social exclusion through the provision of appropriate accommodation and assistance to moving into independent living through accessing other accommodation streams and providing support in life skills, training, and employment.

65% of Supporting People funding is allocated to services for homeless people and those with complex and multiple needs who may be socially excluded. This funding has an important part to play, for example, in providing an alternative to hotel accommodation for young people and a joint review by HRC / SP of young people's accommodation and support needs is planned for 2008/9.

Move on to independent living

The hostel move on project scheme enables those in supported accommodation to move into independent living through limited nomination rights through the housing register and through supporting clients to find accommodation in the private rented sector. The scheme supports the client to identify and secure accommodation and also supports clients with the associated issues of moving and any issues which arise after the move.

The 'silt up' of hostel accommodation has proved to impact on supply as many hostel residents remain in supported accommodation beyond the point when they are ready to move on therefore reducing the chances of those requiring services being offered them. Consultation and analyses of data indicate that this arises from lack of affordable private rented accommodation and of the perception by some hostel workers and residents that social sector housing is the only acceptable type. The Housing Needs Division will be working closely with the Supporting People Unit to introduce a single point of access for supported accommodation and floating support to ensure that optimum use is made of available resources and that the Council offers a more coordinated response in working with hostels to assist people to move into independent living. There is a project team working on the development of this new service which is planned to be in place by October 2008. A separate report is being put forward to the June 2008 Executive Committee regarding this.

Pilot crash pad for 16 and 17 year olds

A pilot crash pad has been in operation from October 2007 and the pilot is due to end on 31 March 2008. The pilot was part funded by the CLG and match funded through the Housing Resource Centre. It was set up in response to high levels of housing need amongst young people in the borough, which largely results from family break down. The primary aim of the pilot was to prevent youth homelessness through intensive support and mediation for young people and their families. In the event that this was not possible the aim was to support the young people to obtain and sustain long term accommodation.

There are particular concerns about the suitability of short term accommodation available for 16 and 17 year olds, who are often placed in hotel accommodation or self contained temporary accommodation, neither of which is geared to meet their specific needs. The Crash Pad model provided three bed spaces for 16 and 17 year olds for a six week period in which

mediation, support and life skills training take place to identify housing options and options for employment, education and training.

The continuing aim of the pilot will be to facilitate the return home of young people presenting to the Council in housing need or to assist the young person to access suitable longer term housing options. It is recognised, however, that it is not possible for all young people to return home and that there is a need to provide safe and secure supported accommodation until young people are in a position to obtain and sustain longer term accommodation.

A strategic review of young people's services has commenced and is led by the Supporting People Unit but with significant input from the Children and Families Department and the Needs and Private Sector Division. The scope of the review includes young people aged 16 to 24, including young parents. As part of the review we will identify housing need and will consult with stakeholders and customers. The review is expected to report to the Executive Committee by the end of 2008.

Temporary Accommodation

The Council needs to use temporary accommodation for statutorily homeless households due to the gap between supply and demand for permanent accommodation. The majority of this is self contained accommodation of all sizes but it also necessary to use a limited supply of hotel accommodation.

The Council uses just under 4,000 units of temporary accommodation at any given time and of this the majority (73%) is managed by housing associations whilst the remainder is Private Sector Leasing and Private Leasing Accommodation.

In 2005 the government set a target for the reduction of the use of Temporary Accommodation (TA) of 50% by 2010, within the context of 'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives'. In accordance with this the Council set its own target to reduce temporary accommodation by 50% through a variety of measures including reducing homelessness approaches through effective prevention, offering private sector alternatives both within the borough and outside, converting temporary accommodation to settled accommodation, increasing the supply of new permanent accommodation and the converting temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation.

Significant progress has been made in reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation but further work is needed to address the increase in homeless acceptances, to enable further reductions in TA use. The Council is currently looking at other ways of reducing homelessness approaches through more proactive prevention work and a number of projects and cross-cutting initiatives are currently being progressed.

The table below sets out progress to date in decreasing the use of TA and this should be viewed in the light of year on year increases in the 10 years prior to 2005. This performance brings the number of households in TA below 4,000 for the first time since June 2003 gives Brent the 8th highest numeric reduction in London, and across the country as a whole.

Reduction of temporary accommodation

	Baseline 1.1.05	@	March 2007	March 2008	March 2009	March 2010
No. in TA	4,466		3,953		3,239	2,243
Cumulative reduction			513	559	1,227	2,223
% reduction			11	12.50	27	50

However, it is clear that the following two years' targets present a significant challenge, with nearly three-quarters of our total reduction target still to be achieved.

There remain substantial risks involved in achieving the revised targets. In particular the revised action plan places a heavy reliance on there being a readily available supply of private rented properties but the available supply has reduced. In addition, the TA reduction plan continues to assume that we will be able to achieve a successful TA conversion scheme, and slippage on either the Temporary to Permanent or Private Finance Initiative schemes could have a significant impact on the borough's ability to meet the 2010 target. A large part of our original strategy to reduce TA numbers by 50% was based on the Council being able to successfully implement a scheme to convert temporary accommodation leases into settled accommodation. This scheme was expected to account for around 27% of our total planned reduction target. The TA reduction plan is due to be reviewed during the remainder of 2008.

Under section 8 Customer Consultation of this report feedback is detailed about a postal survey carried out amongst TA tenants across West London with borough specific information relating to Brent tenants. The feedback from this indicates that TA is being well managed within the borough with the majority of respondents expressing reasonable levels of satisfaction with the quality of accommodation. Similarly, our main TA provider Pathmeads have recently had an Audit Commission inspection of its overall operation, including quality of TA and was found to provide a good service with promising prospects of improvement. This contrasts starkly with the information gauged at the homeless strategy consultation carried out with families (most of which are in TA) where there were high levels of dissatisfaction about the quality of accommodation and the responsiveness of repairs services.

Hotel Accommodation

Hotel accommodation is a very expensive means of providing temporary accommodation and is not able to provide the conditions that homeless people need in terms of amenities and privacy. We therefore only offer hotel accommodation when there are no other options available. Legislation limits the use of hotel accommodation for pregnant women and families with children to six weeks and we are able to comply with this. The same rules will apply to 16 and 17 year olds from 2010.

However, there will always be a necessity for using hotel accommodation to some extent, as there will always be emergencies where the household need to be housed on the day that they approach the Council. Sometimes there are exceptional reasons for people remaining in hotels for more than six weeks, for example in the case of domestic violence or fear of violence large parts of the borough may not be suitable for some clients.

Supply Initiatives and New Build Accommodation

The Council is aiming to develop up to 2,000 new affordable homes over the next four years. The majority of newly built units are funded under the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme, and given this, nomination rights to new build properties are distributed on a sub regional basis, taking into account levels of housing need in each authority and its capacity to deliver new homes. The sub regional basis for allocation means that the Council may have access to properties built elsewhere in West London.

The Council has granted planning consents to deliver more than 7,000 new homes and is currently reviewing its draft Site Specific Allocation statement which identifies a further capacity to deliver 6,000 new homes. In addition, a further 1,500 homes are to be provided through the approved regeneration strategy for South Kilburn and there is significant potential to provide over 5,000 new homes in growth areas such as Colindale, Alperton, Church End and Wembley.

During 2008/09, over 270 affordable homes will be completed around Wembley Stadium and Wembley Town Centre, of which 55% will be affordable to rent. In 2009/10, nearly 163 affordable homes are forecast to have completed in the Alperton growth area, and further phases of the Wembley regeneration will have completed providing 149 affordable units. In addition to this, the Council's ALMO, Brent Housing Partnership Limited, has also commenced with its own development programme. It is one of three ALMO's in the country receiving an allocation of social housing grant funding to develop three family homes for renting across an infill site.

In the next three years, the Council aims to deliver over 1,000 new homes for intermediate sale (more commonly known as Homebuy) and intermediate rent, especially for key workers and local residents. The Council has recently held a Home Ownership Open Day which was very well attended and

generated a wide interest and demand for low cost home ownership opportunities.

The Council's Housing and Social Care, Private Finance Initiative is aiming to deliver up to 400 new homes over the next five years. The new homes will provide a combination of permanent and temporary accommodation and 15 supported living flats over the next 20 years, and thereafter access to available properties under a nomination agreement. In addition, the Contractor will develop and transfer to the Council and provide the Council two new care dwellings for people with learning disabilities. Since the last report was presented to the Executive, the planning consents have been grant obtained for all of the phase 1 sites providing 215 properties. Further negotiations are still ongoing and officers are to finalise the contract negotiations and agree financial arrangements so works can commence by the end of the summer 2008.

In February 2008, The Executive has also provided it support for the Council ALMO, Brent Housing Limited and a consortium led by LloydsTSB to deliver a settled homes pilot through a temporary to permanent schemes. Since February, officers have been working to finalise the Special Purpose Vehicles structures and reviewing the funding availability for these two projects. Officers are working to deliver up 560 new temporary to permanent units from this scheme from later summer this year.

The Council has conducted a survey to identify tenants under-occupying Council properties and an incentive grant of £4,000 is offered to encourage tenants, in this position to move.

Owners of empty properties in Brent are able to get a grant to bring it up to a lettable standard on condition that the property is let to the Council to meet its housing needs.

7. Best Practice & Benchmarking

Best Practice

CLG health check review of homelessness strategy

In September 2006 the Council carried out a self assessment of the 2003-8 strategy against the CLG self assessment tool kit, developed to assist authorities to identify service gaps and opportunities for improvement. The assessment evaluated performance against criteria in four broad categories of: strategic management, prevention of homelessness, tackling the wider causes of homelessness and administration of homelessness applications. The CLG worked with Council officers and stakeholders on site in November 2006 in the role of 'critical friend' to enable us to develop our strategy and action plan. We have already implemented many of the recommendations made by CLG. The following is a summary of feedback from this with more detail at Appendix 3:

Areas of strong performance

- Strong strategic leadership and commitment to the service by managers, chief officers and members
- Commitment and hard work of front line staff
- A desire and demonstration to move towards early intervention and homeless prevention
- Continual shift of resources towards homeless prevention

Areas for improvement

- Fluctuation in the levels of homelessness acceptances with reductions between 2003/4 and 2004/5 but an increase in 2005/6 and reductions again in the first two quarters of 2006/7
- Brent homeless acceptances higher at 8 per thousand of the population compared with London average of 6.8 suggest further scope for improvement.
- A need for a further push towards homeless preventions and the housing options agenda

Benchmarking

West London Benchmarking

The West London Housing Alliance commissioned independent consultants to carry out a benchmarking survey in the summer and early autumn of 2007 to compare performance amongst the seven West London Alliance authorities for the financial year 2006/7. The areas reviewed included prevention and housing advice, homelessness assessment and interim and temporary accommodation.

To draw reasonable comparisons caseloads and costs have been adjusted to take account of levels of deprivation within each borough.

Prevention and Housing Advice

Highest number of successful preventions overall and highest number prevented through court advocacy
Low percentage of preventions result from a payment suggest success of other approaches

Homelessness Assessments

Highest level of homeless acceptances at 2.26 per 1,000 of the population compared to the lowest at .66 and the median at 1.4

Temporary Accommodation

Households in interim and temporary accommodation per adjusted 1,000 of the population is 12.61 compared to the group average minimum of 4.02, maximum 12.61 (Brent) and median 4.98
Average time in interim and temporary accommodation per adjusted 1,000 of the population is 48 months compared to the group minimum of 33 months, maximum of 58 months and median of 39.6 months

Comparisons with centres of good practice

There have been two discrete service reviews; one to improve customer care at Mahatma Gandhi House and one to review the Housing Advice Service. As part of these reviews we have visited authorities delivering best practice initiatives to learn how they can assist in improving our service.

The review of the Housing Advice Service will be reported to the Executive Committee separately in June 2008. The summary below sets out the best practice identified through carrying out benchmarking with other local authorities.

A summary of learning points for Brent is attached at Appendix 3 but the overall areas which we can adopt good practice from includes:

- Targeted homeless prevention and housing options advice rather than generic housing advice
- Customer care including arrangements for monitoring performance and procedures which enable customers to get appropriate advice promptly
- Proactive services for prevention of homelessness amongst young people and clear pathways to housing and support services for 16 and 17 yea olds
- Coordinated procurement with clear and consistent incentive packages available for landlords
- Modern use of technology including palm held computers for visiting and automated telephone and customer queue management software

8. Customer Consultation and Feedback

Customer Focus Groups

During late 2007 and early 2008, the Council undertook an extensive consultation exercise with the involvement of an independent facilitator to record stakeholder views and opinions about their perceptions of homelessness issues, service gaps and priorities. This section summarises the consultation views, although full details of consultation findings are contained within background papers. Appendix 4 details the consultation findings and themes. We found that more positive results emerged from postal and face to face surveys but the response from smaller focus group tended to give a more negative perception of services. Many of the themes emerging from the consultation and feedback were known to the Council and there are many initiatives already in progress around these.

Temporary Accommodation Survey

The West London Housing Alliance carried out a postal survey of temporary accommodation residents to gauge satisfaction with service provision by the Council, the extent to which support services such as advice on employment are used and needed and the quality of accommodation and quality of service by accommodation providers in Brent.

In Brent the main suppliers of temporary accommodation are RSL's but the Council also procures some properties through direct leasing arrangements. The main RSL managing temporary accommodation is Pathmeads. There are overlaps of temporary accommodation management across West London.

For Brent 543 TA tenants responded to the survey of which 61% are in Housing Association managed accommodation and 39% are in schemes arranged through the Council including Private Sector Leasing (PSL) and Private Leasing Agreement (PSL) accommodation.

The table below indicates the length of time respondents had spent in their temporary accommodation and how long they had spent in temporary accommodation overall.

Time spent in TA

Length in accommodation	Current Accommodation	Overall in TA
Less than 3 months	3%	3%
3 – 6 months	13%	7%
7 – 11 months	12%	7%
1 – 2 years	25%	18%
Over 2 years	46% Compares with average of 48%	63% Compares with average 67%

A number of questions were asked about satisfaction with a broad range of service issues, including assistance in moving in, quality of accommodation, responsiveness of repairs and ongoing support needs. A summary of results is shown Appendix 5 of this report indicating satisfaction levels in Brent compared to the average across West London. There are no major variances between satisfaction levels in Brent in comparison to the rest of the West London Boroughs. However, across the board there are low satisfaction levels in the areas of: help moving in and the provision of information about the availability of local services including health services, housing services and the availability of training. 25 % of Brent respondents said that they did not understand how to bid compared to an average of 17% across West London and 28% said that they were not regularly bidding compared to an average of 21% across West London. Many tenants indicated that they had current support needs including in the areas of welfare benefits advice and assistance in seeking employment and training.

Private Tenant Survey

A questionnaire was distributed at the landlord and tenant fair held in February 2008 and tenants were asked to provide information about their experiences and preferences of renting private accommodation in Brent. We obtained completed questionnaires from 10 tenants and a summary of their responses is detailed below:

- 50% would definitely consider living in decent rented accommodation, 33.3% possibly would and 8.3% would not.
- Of those who responded 25% were single, 41.7% single parent families and 33.3% were single
- There were no respondents who stated that they had support needs or alcohol or drugs misuse issues. 16.7% expressed a need for mental health support needs, 8.3% stated that they were ex-offenders and 8.3% stated that they had other health issues.
- When asked about what perceptions they held of difficulties in obtaining private sector accommodation the following concerns were raised:
 - Personal security
 - Damage to property
 - Delays in housing benefit or housing benefit not sufficient to pay rent
 - Landlords will not accept Council deposit guarantee
- There was a perception held by a large majority of 83.3% that landlords prefer not to rent to people on housing benefit
- 58.3% said that they had approached an agency for renting accommodation, of which 41% say the agency was not interested in helping people on benefits

- 92% did not know about changes to the housing benefit scheme but the survey was before the Housing Benefit Division issued publicity
- 50% did not know about rent deposit guarantee
- 41% believed that landlords would be more encouraged to rent if a non refundable payment were made to them but 83.3% felt that this would dependent on the amount being offered
- 83.3% felt that housing benefit fast tracking would encourage landlords to rent
- 58% agree that landlords find it difficult to deal with the Council in lettings and 91% felt that better communication was needed.
- 91% want a flat or a house
- 66% willing to consider moving to another borough
- 50% would most prefer 3 year tenancy, whilst 67% least prefer 1 year
- Whilst 50% felt that quality standards required by the Council are not relevant to a landlords' willingness to rent, 42% felt that standards were not too high and 8% felt that they are too high

Customer Services Survey

A customer survey was carried out over a two week period in October 2007. We carried out 240 face to face interviews in order to get views from users of services at Mahatma Gandhi House about their perception of the services and how they think they can be improved. A full report is available but the summary below outlines some of the key findings:

A review of processes had already identified the need to revise procedures to reduce the amount of unnecessary contact from customers, largely through reducing the levels of double handling and collation of personal data. The survey, which is based on responses from 240 respondents identified that some 25% of service users had visited Mahatma Gandhi House (MGH) in excess of seven times to resolve their enquiry and that 40% of respondents needed to visit three times in order to resolve their enquiry. This corroborates with perception around problem resolution which almost half of the respondents viewed as poor. Some two thirds of respondents expressed a preference for a home visit. This supports the department's plans to expand the level of home visiting. It is felt that collecting data from service users at their home is more likely to enable us to assist them in meeting their housing needs. It also supports the continued review of processes, in particular the identification of technology which will assist with reducing unnecessary contact and double handling of data.

The survey showed that service users currently access the service by telephoning or calling into to MGH in person. However, there is a preference for using other access channels such as the internet but there is not sufficient confidence in this aspect of the service to encourage service users to change their behaviour. In conjunction with the corporate review of customer contact we will review the need to set standards around all access channels and will further review the use of technology to open up the avenues of access, for example through increased use of text messaging.

The survey showed that whilst over 58% of respondents viewed the telephone service offered through the MGH contact centre to be average or better, there was a leaning towards this service being poor in relation to problem resolution and information provision. Whilst service users wanted an improvement to telephone services, there was virtually no support for increased use of automated telephone services.

A third of respondents experienced dissatisfaction at the level of support offered to assist them in finding accommodation. This partly confirms the seriousness of the issues facing Brent around the supply and demand for accommodation, particularly in the social sector. However, this information supports the high priority to which the department has given to improving the quantity of procurement of private sector accommodation and plans are in place to increase levels of procurement. It also supports the priority and resources given to work which is being carried out in optimising the use of Supporting People funded hostel provision and support for private tenants in sustaining their tenancies.

Waiting times are considered to be a major source of dissatisfaction and procedures are being revised to improve waiting times, along with technology already available in the One Stop Service for monitoring waiting times and outcomes of visits to MGH. We will be investing more resource at the first point of contact by reviewing procedures and re-directing customer service staff. This should have a positive influence on the amount of unnecessary contact and therefore waiting times.

We will review our opening times in the light of information we have obtained through carrying out this survey, taking into account resource constraints. We currently provide emergency only drop in advice and appointments on Wednesdays and Friday afternoons but it seems that service users have a preference for a full time drop in service from Mondays to Fridays. Whilst there is no strong preference for weekend opening there is a relatively strong preference for some evening opening, which almost half of the respondents thought would improve the service.

The overall perception of staff helpfulness and knowledge was very positive given the pressures on the service and 75% of respondents have found staff to be helpful to some degree. There has been a major training programme across the division to improve our staff customer handling skills and whilst there is no room for complacency it is encouraging that this training along with the commitment of staff has contributed so significantly to customer perception.

In overall terms almost two thirds of respondents found the service average or better. This is encouraging in the light of the many areas of the service which we are working towards improving and particularly in a service in which we are unable to meet the huge housing demand with relatively low levels of housing supply. This along with perception of staff helpfulness shows that we

are working well at conveying very difficult messages to service users whose expectations we are often unable to meet.

Mystery Shopping

The West London Housing Alliance commissioned Brent Homeless User Group (B.HUG) to carry out a 'mystery shopping' exercise across the sub region. 'Shoppers' approached authorities in person, by telephone and by e-mail and the responsiveness and quality of services was fed back. The project was nominated for an Andy Ludlow award which recognises and rewards creativity and innovation in the area of tackling homelessness and supporting homeless people in London. The project was voted as runner up in the 2007 competition. The summary below details the findings for Brent:

- A real commitment to assisting the homeless person
- Telephone numbers, email addresses were generally easy to find via the website
- An interpretation service was offered immediately at the first visit and this was available quickly
- Good, relevant selection of written information
- Drinking water in the reception area which, provided cups were available by the machine
- Information offered in a range of languages

A number of recommendations were made for improvement:

- Advice should be offered to clients about how they can provide required identification
- Targets should be set for customer access, in particular for waiting times as one shopper waited 90 minutes to be seen
- A review be carried out of the reception area with particular focus on lay out and provision of a play area for children
- Require staff to wear name badges and ensure regular customer care training for staff
- Improve sign-posting to other services for example domestic violence applicants and young people
- The housing options DVD developed by the West London Housing Alliance should be more widely distributed to customers

9. Stakeholder Consultation

During late 2007 and early 2008, the Council undertook an extensive consultation exercise with the involvement of an independent facilitator to accurately record stakeholder views and opinions about their perceptions of homelessness issues, service gaps and priorities. This includes focus groups with:

- A broad range of partners working with young people, including 16 and 17 years old
- The homeless forum
- The Supporting People sub group for single providers
- The Domestic Violence Forum Housing Sub Group

In addition feedback has been obtained from the Probation Service, the PCT and from staff working across the Housing Needs Division.

A summary of the consultation views and feedback is attached in Appendix 5.

10. Process Review

Process Review methodology and findings

Methodology

An independent consultant was commissioned in August 2007 to review and assist the Council in improving the processes and organisational arrangements of the Needs and Private Sector Division, arising from customer contact. The aims of the review were to improve customer outcomes and efficiency.

The review was conducted by an initial mapping of existing processes which were used in a number of workshops involving staff at all levels across the Needs and Private Sector Division, to challenge the current way of working and develop new processes.

Findings

The review found that the processes were not geared up to enable staff to meet the needs or expectations of our customers. Processes were driven through existing organisational requirements in which meant that different teams and service units were working in 'silos'. Overall, the review identified a lack of clarity around processes and the need to improve the use of technology in driving process to delivery better customer care and efficiency. A more detailed summary of the findings is attached as Appendix 5.

11. Voluntary Sector Review

A review of the voluntary sector groups working within the broad area of homelessness and being funded through the Homelessness Strategy Grant has recently been undertaken to evaluate their contribution and often important role in homelessness outcomes. The following summarises the key issues emerging from this review, which have again contributed to our revised Homelessness Strategy.

- Performance requirements and indicators have not been sufficiently outcome based in the past, so making it difficult to measure links to Homelessness Strategy objectives and value for money
- Objectives need to be more closely geared to homeless prevention as a key priority, particularly where peripheral services such as employment advice are already offered by the Council
- Greater clarity is needed about the role of client monitoring and links to operational services
- Economies of scale could be achieved through working with larger organisations which may provide better value for money and provide better service continuity which has been an issue with some of our smaller partners. However, we do not want to lose expertise offered by smaller organisations

12. Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2008-13

This section of the report summarises the strategic issues identified from all of the sources evaluated during this review, and proposes strategic solutions based upon realistic and deliverable options.

Strategic Themes from Analyses and Consultation

This section summarises the issues and priorities articulated by the many service users and stakeholders throughout our extensive consultation process. Because of the sheer scale of feedback, it would be inappropriate to attempt to engage with all of the issues individually, and therefore the following represents a fair overview of the key points that participants believed were important, and which are also recognised by the housing needs division.

The review has confirmed the appropriateness of the strategic priorities agreed for the last strategy with some change in emphasis. For example the reduction of temporary accommodation is a new driver but in addition there is an increased demand for more accessible services provided in a more holistic manner and therefore working in partnership with others is more important than ever. Improving customer care and partnership working are therefore additional strategic requirements. The strategic objectives identified for 2008-13 are therefore:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Increasing supply of housing and widening housing options
- Supporting the vulnerable
- Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible
- Limiting the use of hotel accommodation and reducing the use of temporary accommodation
- Improving customer service and accessibility
- Improving and developing partnership working and protocols

Current Initiatives

Prevention of homelessness

Mediation

For many there is genuine pressure brought about by family disagreements. In these cases we have worked with families through mediation and floating support to assist excluded people to plan to meet their housing need at the earliest opportunity to avoid crisis.

Tenancy Protection

Our strategy has centred on tenancy protection and advice work, along with lay advocacy, and these elements of our work make up the single highest contribution towards our overall homelessness prevention. However, further analyses is needed around the current root causes for 'evictions' resulting in homelessness applications, and some additional work with landlords renting in the borough indicates there may be a willingness to work with us to better sustain tenancies in the private sector, particularly for those in housing need.

Domestic Violence

The Council has developed very strong strategic links with partners the borough on the issue of domestic violence which represents some 35% of crime in the borough. There is an active **Domestic Violence Forum** with a housing sub group which works closely with the housing division and Domestic Violence Advocates, and the Needs and Private Sector Division part-funded a Domestic Violence Training Coordinator post within the Community Safety Team up to March 2008.

The **Sanctuary Scheme** provides security to a property and advocacy support for households in fear of violence. The scheme is aimed at reducing the impact of domestic violence on individuals and families.

Homelessness Roadshows

We have undertaken regular educational road shows in partnership with Connexions and Brent Homeless User Group, to make young people aware of the realities of homelessness and how they can access services before reaching a crisis around their housing needs and other support needs. Positive, improving trends with Black African and Black Caribbean under 18's indicates some reasonable measure of success for this key vulnerable group, which we recognise is in part due to the roadshows.

Housing Advice and Options

The Council has a Housing Advice Service which provides housing advice to assist customers to prevent homelessness and outline available housing options. This includes access to private sector lettings and rent deposit guarantees. In partnership with other West London Councils we have developed a DVD outlining housing options available for use by customers and advisors.

A pilot single homelessness surgery has been in operation since March 2008, specifically to improve services for applicants who are in housing need or at the risk of homelessness and who do not have a priority need under the homelessness legislation. Customers are signposted to a Single Homeless Surgery at which various statutory and voluntary agencies are present,

providing coordinated existing services for this client group, from a single point of access. The pilot will be reviewed in September 2008.

The Citizens Advice Bureau and Brent Community Law Centre provide advice, assistance and sign posting at a generalist level across all categories of law to residents living or working in the borough. The services are run on an appointment based service to customers referred directly by the Councils Housing Advice Service (HAS) as part of an agreed referral protocol. The HAS will book appointments for customers who require debt and/or money advice and those who may require housing options advice. The BCLC also provide second tier specialist support to the Council's HAS Team, the Tenancy Protection Team and other voluntary and community sector agencies.

The Homelessness Visiting Service has worked successfully to verify homelessness applications. A home is visited by a Homelessness Persons Officer to discuss why an exclusion by a parent or other excluder has, or is about to take place. This service mediates and if possible will resolve issues which may have caused the exclusion or threat of exclusion. At the time of writing this service is about to be moved to the HAS service.

We have been working very closely with the Housing Benefit Division to ensure that housing benefit is 'fast-tracked' to prevent possession proceedings. Having a prompt and responsive service has enabled us to build good relationships with landlords and has contributed towards encouraging more landlords to participate in the Council's letting schemes.

The partnership between the Council and Connexions has provided for a Connexions Personal Advisor to be based within the Housing and Community Care Department to support young people with housing or emotional issues which may be preventing them from accessing or remaining employment, education or training.

Increasing supply of housing and widening housing options

Brent is a member of the London Landlords Accreditation Scheme, membership of which is conditional on completing a training course facilitated by the Council's Private Housing Information Unit (PHIU). The Brent Landlords Group (BLG), supported by PHIU, offers the opportunity of continuing direct engagement with landlords. Officers offer bespoke sessions on housing law and responsibilities of a landlord. The committee of the BLG meets monthly and a public meeting is held quarterly for all landlords.

The Private Housing Forum (PHF), which meets quarterly, provides another arena in which consultation and information sharing with landlords, is offered. Each meeting of the PHF includes a surgery for landlords and tenants in privately rented accommodation and tenants in temporary accommodation when problems and/or queries can be raised with Councillors and Council

officers. There are also presentation on items of interest including Licensing and Local Housing Allowance.

Similarly, Brent runs the Brent Landlord Group where landlords have an opportunity to liaise with Council Officers and Members concerning matters affecting the ongoing relationship. Brent Officers have regularly attended the London Landlord Day which is a London wide conference enabling opportunities to attract landlords to the Borough by outlining the advantages of working with us.

The Council offers advice and assistance on the website or by telephone to help people to find their own accommodation. Information is available on the website, giving a step-by-step guide for moving within Brent, into Brent or moving to anywhere in the country.

Homezone4u is a dedicated scheme run by the Council that is specifically aimed at young people. It is aimed at providing a 'reality check' that outlines the difficulties and problems associated with leaving home. Advisors are available for one-to-one interviews with young people who are thinking about leaving home. The scheme advises caution, advice-seeking and detailed planning before leaving the parental home.

An incentive payment, based on the size of the property, up to £500 is offered to landlords, payable towards the end of a tenancy and can take the form of:-

- Deposit Guarantee
- Cash Deposit
- Assured Letting Scheme (ALS)

A Homeless Prevention Fund has been in operation since November 2007 and is aimed at providing a one off payment which can prevent homelessness for customers which the Council believes it may have a statutory duty to house. Payments are intended to compliment the existing financial incentives offered such as deposit guarantee and could include payments for travel expenses in the instance of a family having a home outside of London but are unable to meet travel costs.

The Council has developed an information pack which has been used on a series of road shows at hostels, which is aimed at encouraging hostel residents who are ready to move on to move into the private rented sector.

A review of services provided for homeless 16/17 year olds (who have a priority need under the homeless legislation) has also begun. This is linked to the wider service development plan, which summarises the main outputs needed from a number of different, but inter-related, projects. A "crash pad" facility for 16/17 year olds threatened with homelessness was launched in October 2007 in partnership with the DePaul Trust and supported by some CLG funding. This provides emergency accommodation for 16/17 year olds at risk of becoming homeless for a period of up to six weeks, whilst intensive work is carried out with the young person and their family to assess whether

they can return to the family home, and also to enable them to access appropriate training and educational opportunities.

The Solo scheme run by Paradigm Housing Group assists the single, non statutory homeless to find accommodation and supports them in sustaining their tenancies. Clients are also given advice and signposted to a variety of organisations for training, work or voluntary work. This scheme has accommodated up to 140 single people each year.

The Better Renting Scheme project was delivered by the Brent Private Tenants Rights Group up until March 2007 and was proactive in providing advice and information on the duties and responsibilities of a landlord through training, information leaflets and promotion of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

Supporting the vulnerable

The Brent Linx project which is run by the DePaul Trust was set up to assist those 16 -25 year olds who were accommodated by the authority under the Priority Needs Order 2002. The aim of the project is to assist clients with training and education to enhance life skills and improve employment prospects. Each client has a development plan based on a training needs assessment and geared towards job search and skills assessment preparation.

Brent Homeless User Group deliver the homeless compact which is a combination of the homeless road shows mentioned above under prevention of homelessness as well as capacity building through assistance in finding education and employment and speak outs which are events which enable people who are or have been homeless to speak directly with policy makers to impact on policy decisions. Examples of speak outs held are around the following issues: equalities, the Mayor's housing strategy, literacy and inclusiveness around poetry and youth homelessness. BHUG run a number of projects not funded by the Council and have been providing debt and money advice surgeries for their clients.

The START project (Supported Tenancies Assessment and Referral Team) in Brent is the single point of access to all floating support services in the borough, and has been operational since November 2006. Since inception, the project has received on average 100 referrals a month and has been successful in improving access to floating support services in a number of ways: ensuring that people in priority need requiring support are able to access services in a timely way, that providers receive appropriate referrals for their services, and that a more co-ordinated and transparent process for accessing support has been developed.

Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible

The low levels of rough sleeping in Brent has been achieved by working with our partners Cricklewood Homeless Concern (CHC) who have been funded to provide a rough sleeping outreach service. The last formal rough sleeper count carried out in March 2008, identified 4 rough sleepers. This count was carried out in accordance with CLG criteria and represents a 'snapshot' of the position on the night of the count. However, CHC officers visit rough sleeping 'hot spots' early in the mornings on a daily basis to attempt to engage with rough sleepers and encourage them to take up more settled accommodation. The outreach service identifies clients who are rough sleeping in disused buildings, parks or hidden sites and on an annual basis approximately 100 rough sleepers are assisted.

It is not always possible to accommodate rough sleepers in hostel accommodation immediately but in some circumstances the Council will place rough sleepers in hotel accommodation to enable them to work with a range of service providers to find accommodation and access other services.

The Brent Resettlement Service is also run by Cricklewood Homeless Concern who work with many hostel providers to settle rough sleepers by finding accommodation and support for them. Many of the clients have multiple-needs and present with a dual diagnosis of mental health, alcohol or drug misuse.

The London Resettlement Project aims to settle ex-offenders back into the community following prison discharge. Since the summer of 2006 the Housing Advice Service has worked with the Probation Service to identify the needs of ex-offenders leaving Wormwood Scrubbs and has assist them in establishing their lives back in the community.

Limiting the use of hotel accommodation and reducing the use of temporary accommodation

The Council's ability to limit the use of hotel accommodation and reduce temporary accommodation is highly dependent upon its ability to prevent homeless and ensure the supply of accommodation, and therefore all of the initiatives being delivered in line with those strategic objectives impact on this objective. Overall the Council has achieved a 12.5% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation since 2005, in the context of escalating use of temporary accommodation in the decade previous to that.

In addition to the initiatives above the Council has been looking at whether it is possible to arrange direct tenancies between existing temporary accommodation landlords and tenants. If this were possible it would enable a discharge of the Council's homelessness duty and reduce use of temporary accommodation. We been conducting research amongst 270 tenants placed under the Assured Lettings Scheme, with a view to tenancy conversion but there appears to be little enthusiasm for this as tenants have expressed a preference to remain in temporary accommodation pending allocation of social sector accommodation.

HomePlan is a scheme run by Brent Private Tenant Rights Group and is aimed at assisting families in Temporary Accommodation to meet their aspirations in terms of housing and employment and to achieve wider quality of life aspirations. The scheme has been running for one year and provides advice on housing (including options for moving out of London), finance, employment and training. In the first year of operation the scheme has enabled 10 clients to develop training and employment search plans. Others have been assisted with financial planning which has resulted in an increased income and the ability to plan for changes ahead, thus avoiding debt. Some have been assisted with homelessness prevention or the move to more suitable accommodation.

Improving customer service and accessibility

Over the past year extensive research has taken place to inform the development of customer access to housing needs services and a number of quick wins and pilots have taken place in this area. Much of this work will come to fruition over the next year and there is still huge scope for development and improvement, in line with the Council's overall customer contact strategy, which will be detailed later in this report.

The achievements to date include:

- Improved waiting times
- A 'floor walker' who ensures that customers are in the right place and are not waiting unnecessarily
- Less congestion in the waiting area

Improving and developing partnership working and protocols

We have a number of strategic and operational links to other services both within the Council and across the borough.

The Homelessness Strategy is also informed by and in turn supports other Council strategies, including the:-

- Supporting People Strategy,
- Drug and Alcohol Action Plan,
- Neighbourhood Renewal Plan,
- Regeneration Strategy,
- Crime Reduction Strategy,
- Private Housing Strategy,
- Unitary Development Plan,
- Housing Investment Plan,
- Temporary Accommodation Reduction Action Plan,
- Diversity Strategy,
- Older Peoples Strategy,

- Domestic Violence Strategy,
- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy,
- Refugee Strategy,

Linkages with External Partners

In addition to the linkages to other council policies and strategies, the Homelessness Strategy also links to external partners' strategies and policy objectives, including:

- Health Authority,
- Local Health Delivery Plan,
- Sustainable Communities : Homes for All,
- Sustainable Communities Strategy,
- West London Homelessness Strategy,
- West London Affordable Housing Strategy,
- White Paper on Our Health, Our Care, Our Say,
- London Resettlement Strategy
- Government Office for London
- Greater London Authority – London Housing Strategy
- Brent Housing Partnership
- Local Area Agreement

Further Initiatives

Recognising the impacts of the (above) current initiatives, it is clear that additional focus is required to attempt to reconcile demand and customer expectation with the Council's capacity to act as a provider and facilitator of housing options. This section of the report details the Council's considered response to the growing housing need and homelessness pressures identified during this review.

It is clear that a new and coordinated raft of initiatives is required to meet the growth in housing pressures, yet must be balanced against the resources available from central government, the Council and partner organisations. The Housing Needs Division has developed its own 'Housing Needs Improvement Plan' which sets out a broad spectrum of initiatives across the division and the relevant aspects of this have been brought into the Homelessness Action Plan attached as Appendix 5 together with other homelessness initiatives.

It is equally clear that there is no absolute solution available to prevent homelessness or indeed necessarily contain the growth in housing need in the short to mid term. The aim of the homeless strategy for 2008 to 2013 is to ameliorate the impacts of housing need and homelessness, to provide the best outcomes for those affected and to optimise the deployment of resources in this dynamic area.

Further Analysis Requirements

This review determined that it was not appropriate to analyse the issues surrounding homelessness of older people and its links to the overall older people strategy as the adult social care service was undergoing a major service transformation programme and was under government inspection. In comparison to other groups there are low levels of homelessness for this age group but this is an important area for further analyses.

The views of landlords and 16 and 17 year old service users has been fed into this review, but due to the limited input from these sources, the strategy recognises that further research is still required, and it is planned that this will be undertaken during the remainder of this year. In particular we intend to track young people who are not eligible for assistance because they are deemed 'intentionally homeless' as we believe that they may not be receiving appropriate services.

We have started to collate a more detailed set of data about ethnicity, sexuality and faith but there is insufficient data detail currently available, and only when this has been expanded and captured will it be possible to assess any further implications for the strategy. At the time of this report there is no

specific timetable for the analyses and production of this data, which is now being collected.

For ease, the various initiatives detailed below have been grouped into seven key headings. However, it must be recognised that the majority of these initiatives have significant degrees of overlap and are often cross cutting in nature. Accordingly the Homelessness Action Plan draws together each of these initiatives, which in turn underpins the Housing Needs Improvement Plan.

Projects

Prevention of homelessness

Much of the consultation and research indicates that the Council can move still further in improving its **housing solutions** processes to identify where early support would avoid homelessness. This has also been demonstrated by other authorities, and has the advantage of providing better potential outcomes for customers, albeit predominantly within the private sector. This requires the Council and its voluntary sector partners to undertake a cultural as well as organisational change, where greater emphasis is placed on prevention without undermining the Council's statutory homeless duty. Extensive work has been undertaken through the Council's Housing Advice Review and a comprehensive review of existing processes to identify where constructive change can be made and it is our intention to focus housing advice more strongly towards prevention and intervention whilst maintaining our duty to offer general advice.

A new initiative has been the launch of the **single person advice surgery** which receives referrals directly from the housing needs service and self referrals from clients. The role of the surgery is a pilot to establish effectiveness of coordinated service provision, involving a range of services, including housing solutions but also health, welfare benefits, social care, education and training. The surgery was established in March 2008, and will be evaluated in September 2008, to judge the effectiveness of the approach. The strategy recognises that this is a service enhancement as we are able to offer more relevant, holistic and prompt advice, but it is required because of the complex needs of the client group. Early evidence from other authorities indicates that this approach can have mixed results, but initial feedback from the pilot indicates a commitment from partners in Brent to work in this way and a real benefit for customers.

We have expanded our **Visiting Team** which will operate from the Private Housing Information Unit and will have a greater focus on homeless prevention and intervention, particularly for those customers approaching in housing need due to family exclusion. The role of a 'home visit', is to better establish the circumstances and issues relating to an individual or family, and to make more informed and earlier decisions about the appropriate housing solutions or other options available. Again, experience of other authorities

indicates this is an effective means to obtain clarity about the circumstances of households and provide better outcomes.

The Council already has **mediation** referral arrangements in place, to attempt to forestall family breakdown through appropriate counselling and intervention. It is apparent from this review that whilst existing mediation arrangements have helped achieve prevention and improved family relationships, this has not necessarily produced the prevention focus and outcomes needed.

In order to provide further focus on the prevention of family breakdown, the Council believes that it is necessary to re-focus its mediation arrangements and to begin to specialise these towards the differing needs of 16 and 17 year old exclusions and more general family breakdown. We believe that in relation to **16 and 17 years olds mediation** should be provided as part of a wider support package addressing their individual needs which might include accommodation, life skills training and assistance with employment. To achieve this, we are specifically reviewing young people's services provided across the Council and will be extending the current **Crash Pad** arrangements with DePaul Trust and the mediation arrangements with Relate until services can be re-specified and tendered later this year.

Responding to the relatively high levels of **domestic violence** and threats of violence, the Council has already established a specific Sanctuary Scheme, delivering a small number of safe accommodation and support options. We have also developed close links with the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and Domestic Violence Forum which have led to improved policy development and training for housing staff. The conclusion from our review is that whilst both initiatives have provided improved outcomes for women, this area is ready to develop on a more practical and extensive domestic violence support arrangements. Further work is required with our partners to create improved coordination of our combined operational services that advocacy is a pivotal first element of homelessness prevention for those under threat of domestic violence.

Building upon the existing **road show initiative**, which is delivered in partnership with Brent Homeless User Group and Connexions, it is apparent that improved prevention requires this approach to be more targeted in regard to children but extended to parents so that the whole family understands the consequences of homelessness upon young people. We will be re-specifying and tendering this service later this year.

Within Brent **overcrowding** has become a more severe problem than for most other authorities in the UK. This stems from the high density of population within the authority which continues to grow, resulting in genuine pressures for families brought about by over-crowding and leads to homelessness through family exclusion. We have started to develop an over-crowding plan with the assistance of a small amount of government funding.

The Council has already established strong relationships with **registered social landlords**, in an attempt to forestall unnecessary evictions, which result in a further housing need or homelessness problem. However, the fact that a homeless duty has been accepted on a small proportion of evicted tenants implies further scope to work on preventing homelessness. We will be working with social landlords to develop their homelessness strategies in accordance with recent Housing Corporation guidance.

We have a highly successful tenancy protection team, whose work contributes some 27% of the overall reduction of homelessness in the borough. Given the disproportionate level of homelessness amongst **black African and Caribbean** home seekers we are aiming to use the expertise of this team to **reduce homeless approaches from this group by 5%**.

Increasing supply of housing and widening housing options

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this strategy is the need to stimulate the **private rented sector** which was pivotal to the last strategy. However, the supply of private sector housing has diminished drastically over the last two years. We have carried out a review of private sector procurement to evaluate opportunities for the Council to facilitate an improvement in procurement. The review has established that many teams within the Housing Needs Division have a role in procurement and that there are several financial packages available to landlords and that the ad hoc approach to letting created by the disparate nature of the current service does not allow for prioritisation of letting. As a result of that review we have decided to bring all aspects of private sector procurement within the Housing Needs Division under one line of management. We will be separating the roles of procurement and letting to enable the development of specialist skills and will be streamlining financial incentive packages for landlords. We will have a specialist tenancy sustainment role as it is clear that issues arise after a letting is facilitated by the Council and that landlords require some support to resolve them. In order to support tenants we will be extending floating support to tenants in the private rented sector.

We will extend the **Crash Pad pilot** for a further six months to October 2008 with Supporting People funding. Whilst the crash pad has assisted a small number of young people we have had a 50% success rate in young people returning to family or friends. For those who have not been able to return home there has been an opportunity through counselling, mediation and life skills training to develop healthier relationships with their families and develop opportunities for employment and training, increasing prospects of independent living. In the meantime a joint **review of young people's housing and support need** will commence in May 2008, lead by the Supporting People Unit, with the Housing Needs Division and Children and Families Department having a key role.

We will be evaluating the options around developing a **Supported Lodgings Scheme** for 16/17 year olds. This has worked well in some best practice authorities. Under the scheme local families would be asked to provide short term accommodation to young people along with parental support. The scheme widens choices for young people who are unable to remain with their parents or guardians but who would not thrive well in an institutional environment.

The 'silt up' of hostel accommodation has been a great challenge for the Council and as has been described above it results in hostel residents remaining in hostels beyond the point where they are able to live independently whilst the Council is sometimes unable to offer supported accommodation to those in need. Resolving this problem has been a key priority for the Council and is a priority within the Local Area Agreement. The ramifications of the silt up can sometimes mean that people in residential or hospital care are unable to move into supported accommodation. We are establishing a single point of **access to hostel accommodation** and support. A specialist team will manage the move into hostels and the move on from them. We are developing a data base which will assist the overall flow and management of use of hostel accommodation.

The Housing Benefit Service has implemented the legislation for **Local Housing Allowance** to replace housing benefit for new tenants. The impact on the private sector rental market is not yet clear but early indications are that this scheme is more attractive to landlords and at the time of writing we had already been able to increase private sector procurement which we believe is largely due to the introduction of this scheme. We intend to promote the scheme with landlords as we believe that the increased clarity of flat rent levels determined by size of accommodation and households could lead to speeding up payments even further. We will also promote the success of the benefit service to landlords as the scheme is processing claims increasingly quickly and accurately and the limited consultation with landlords has indicated that finances are the top issue for them in deciding whether or not to let.

We intend to continue procurement of private accommodation for non-priority home-seekers currently undertaken through the **Solo Scheme** which has achieved major success in procurement. Most of the accommodation is shared and intensive work is carried out with landlords and tenants to enable tenancy sustainment. We would like to increase levels of procurement in this type of accommodation and create greater links between the Solo scheme and floating support to assist in tenancy sustainment. We will be re-specifying and tendering this service later this year.

Other initiatives intended to increase supply have been detailed in Section 7 of this report where issues around supply and demand are detailed.

Supporting the vulnerable

Youth homelessness is a particular issue for Brent as the population is growing overall with an increasing proportion of the population aged under 30. The result of this has been high levels of homeless acceptances and high use of hotel and temporary accommodation for young people. In response, the Council has been developing a range of services to meet the needs of young people but the review has identified that services are not sufficiently cohesive and are not always meeting the needs of this group.

We are developing a clear pathway for young people to access services recognising that homelessness is often one of a complex set of needs and that often homelessness is a result of other needs not being met.

We have been working with our Children and Families Department who have been leading, with Connexions, on the development of an integrated youth services strategy and action plan for the period up to 2011, which has now been agreed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. This strategy aims to deliver:

- A comprehensive guide for youth services across the borough for use by young people and advisors
- Training for all relevant staff, including housing needs staff on Common Framework Assessment (CAF) procedures and identifying risks of neglect and abuse
- The development of five integrated youth service outlets in key localities where young people up to the age of 19 can access all services, including housing needs

The result of this coordinated approach will be to deliver a clearer route to the range of support services required by this vulnerable group. In relation to this strategy this will require coordination with hostels and support agencies along with the Housing Needs Division and Children and Families Department. In practical terms this will require improved access to hostel spaces combined with more tailored personal support arrangements to enable young people to move towards independent living. This also relates to the supply of accommodation issues detailed above.

Other initiatives to support the vulnerable have close links to other strategic priorities, particularly in relation to prevention of homelessness, rough sleeping and increasing the supply of accommodation. These initiatives include:

- The continuation of a **mediation** service
- Continued support for those fleeing **Domestic Violence**

- The refurbishment of **Pound Lane Hostel** which is due to be complete in 2010 and will provide modern self contained units for residents when it re-opens. It will also offer a range of recovery focussed support services to meet individual support needs and comprehensive Resettlement service.
- The continuance of the **START service** and the establishment of the **START + team** which will enable us to optimise the use of hostel accommodation and floating support enabling those with support needs to access appropriate and prompt services
- The pilot **single person's advice surgery**

Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible

The Council has significant impact and success upon minimising **rough sleeping** in the borough and providing support to enable rough sleepers to establish more settled living. This good work undertaken in partnership with Cricklewood Homeless Concern however requires improved focus on vulnerable customer outcomes, and we envisage this will be achieved through a clearer outcome based specification of service requirements, and clearer links with the Council's strategies, in particular the Crime Reduction Strategy and Anti Social Behaviour Strategy. We will be re-specifying and tendering this service later this year.

As we have no access to emergency accommodation for rough sleepers in the borough we will continue to provide hotel accommodation to rough sleepers in certain circumstances through the **Non Priority Rough Sleeper Scheme** as long as resources enable us to continue this scheme. We will review management of this scheme which has close links to hostel move in, move on and may be better placed within the START + team.

Limiting the use of hotel accommodation and reducing the use of temporary accommodation

We have made significant progress in reducing the use of temporary accommodation, achieving a 12.5% reduction from 2005 to 2008. However, limiting the use of hotel and temporary accommodation is heavily dependent on the impact of pressures in delivering other strategic objectives, in particular, homeless prevention and the supply of private rented sector accommodation.

By March 2009 we aim to have made an overall **reduction of 27% in the use of temporary accommodation** which we aim to **increase to 50% by March 2010**. These targets are under discussion as part of the forthcoming Local Area Agreement and are therefore subject to review. We will be reviewing the Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan although the key elements will remain as they are.

By **March 2010** we also aim to **limit use hotel accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds** which we will only use in emergencies and then, only for up to six weeks.

Improving customer service and accessibility

We have a number of plans in place to significantly improve customer care for housing needs customers over the next five years.

We are carrying out a **refurbishment of our reception** area which will enable a more customer friendly atmosphere for our customers including greater levels of privacy, more interviewing space and a play area for children. This will be complete by July 2008.

We have invested in new **processes and software** to support their implementation by July 2008. By then we plan to be able to carry out an initial **'sift' interview with customers within five minutes** of them arriving, in order to determine who they need to see. Having established this, if we are unable to deal with the enquiry immediately we are aiming to **offer an appointment for a more detailed interview on the same day of approach**. This will mean that customers will not have to wait in the reception for their interview. We will have new queue management and appointment software which will enable monitoring and reporting of performance which will enable us to pin point further areas of improvement. In addition to these targets we will be establishing the level of **unnecessary customer contact** within the service presently and will set targets to reduce this.

We will be introducing a revised staffing structure for management and running of this aspect of the service and whilst this is not yet fully agreed we intend to **strengthen management arrangements** and have a greater floor walking presence in the waiting area to ensure that customers are in the right place at the right time.

We are implementing **new telephone answering software** to enable more efficient handling of telephone calls. We are also working across the Council to establish what scope exists to rationalise call handling and review the extent to which housing needs clients could be served through a corporate service.

Corporately we are reviewing customer access and aim to introduce **new access channels** including greater use of e-mail and text messaging to reduce the level of personal contact by telephone or in person.

We are participating in a number of corporate customer projects including the introduction of a **client index system** and **customer relationship**

management system which will enable greater joint working and a more cohesive approach to customer handling across the Council. Corporately we are introducing a **customer information pack** aimed at people new to the borough to give them an immediate sense of services they can access in the borough and their area.

Improving and developing partnership working and protocols

We have developed very close operational and strategic relationships with a wide range of partners in developing youth homelessness services but our aims for the next 5 years in reducing the level of homelessness and use of hotel accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds will place greater demands on these relationships. Delivering more cohesive services will mean not only providing seamless operational services but also operating new joint contractual and management arrangements.

Increasing employment opportunities for households in temporary accommodation is a priority for the Local Area Agreement and we have already started working with **Brentin2Work** who are providing advice and support at the single non priority drop in service. Once we have completed the refurbishment of Mahatma Gandhi House Brentin2Work will also operate a regular employment service from the reception. We have implemented a new **'HELP'** scheme along with colleagues across West London. The CLG funded scheme has provided training for all housing staff dealing with the public to identify customers who need assistance in seeking employment and to make referrals for advice and assistance. Brentin2Work have agreed funding for the post of **Training Director** to work with **Cricklewood Homeless Concern (CHC)** to develop training and employment opportunities for CHC clients. This role will compliment existing roles operating within CHC, including **BACES** training courses offered at a new **Resource Centre** recently opened by CHC and employment advice offered at surgeries run by the **Department of Work and Pensions**. CHC will also be coordinating an **'ABC Step Up'** programme jointly funded by **London Councils, Acton Housing Association and Broadway**.

Improving services for people being **discharge from hospital and prison** are clear priorities emerging from this strategy and we aim to create new working protocols with the **Primary Care Trust**, the **Probation Service** and the **Prison Service** to ensure a more proactive way of working together. We aim to establish formal arrangements to enable us to facilitate and meet housing need in a more proactive and planned manner. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that although arrangements may be agreed this year, such arrangements often take many months to become culturally embedded and effective.

13. Risks and Constraints

There are a number of risks and constraints arising from this strategy which are detailed below:

The Temporary Accommodation reduction is heavily linked to homeless demand. Homelessness prevention and the supply of private sector procurement performance will therefore key to our ability to deliver the desired level of reduction. To some extent aspects of demand and supply are out of the Council's direct control.

The Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan continues to assume that we will be able to achieve a successful conversion scheme, and slippage on either the temporary to permanent or private finance initiative schemes could have a significant impact on the borough's ability to meet the 2010 target.

There may be external demand pressures on demand and supply which are out of our control and may place greater pressure on our service, for example a recent survey commissioned by CLG (which included Brent) indicated that some 18% rough sleeping was by recently arrived European Union nationals.

We are placing more emphasis on joint working in this strategy and cooperation around new ways of working will be key to delivery if we are to deliver improved services, efficiently.

There are financial risks related to temporary accommodation. The total agreed budget for expenditure on Temporary Accommodation for 2008/09 is £5,292,000. There are wider supply and demand factors which could impact on the ability to control this budget, including the level of approaches from homeless households and our ability to successfully prevent homelessness where possible, and therefore reduce overall temporary accommodation costs.

Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements for leased temporary accommodation have been reduced by 5% for 2007/8 and a further 10% for 2008/09. A change in the way leased temporary accommodation rents are set from 2009/10 onwards was also announced. It is expected that this will mean that a separate payment will be made for management costs, probably through a grant mechanism. Final proposals are awaited from the Department of Work and Pensions.

14. Financial Issues

The CLG have provided funding for the strategy since 2004/5 when £783,000 was allocated. The allocation reduced to £740,000 for each subsequent financial year to 2007/8. Funding has been confirmed at £805,000 per year from 2008/9 onwards. Longer term commitment from CLG will enable us to develop longer term plans and will provide more security for our voluntary sector partners as we will be in a position to reach longer term agreements with them when tendering services.

Delivery of this strategy will be within overall existing budgets and resources available, including the Temporary Accommodation budget, the Homeless Strategy Grant and the Supporting People budget. In the event of funding not being available a further report will be made to the Executive Committee.

Housing Benefit subsidy cap levels for leased temporary accommodation have been reduced by 5% for 2007/08 and 10% for 2008/09. Officers forecast that the impact on the Council of this change for 2008/09 is a loss of income of £1.927m. This has been taken into account when preparing the Council's overall budget for 2008/09. A change in how leased temporary accommodation rents are set is anticipated in 2010/11 with the capped subsidy levels continuing for 2009/10. It is expected that from April 2010 a separate payment made for management costs and this is likely to be through a grant mechanism.

Supporting People Funding has decreased over the last five years from £13.7m per year to £12.8m per year from 2006-2007 with this level confirmed through to 2010-2011. In line with the National Supporting People strategy, funding from 2009 will be incorporated into the Local Area Agreement (LAA) from 2009 and it will be important to ensure that Supporting People services meet the objectives of the LAA and that the service is able to also retain its identity as 'housing' support.

The Council is aiming to develop up to 2,000 new affordable homes over the next four years. The majority of newly built units are funded under the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme.

In February 2008, The Executive has also provided its support for the Council ALMO, Brent Housing Limited and a consortium led by LloydsTSB to deliver a settled homes pilot through a temporary to permanent scheme. Since February, officers have been working to finalise the Special Purpose Vehicles structures and reviewing the funding availability for these two projects.

Appendix 2 Action Plan

Homelessness Strategic Plan 2008-13

Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
Preventing homelessness	Develop more intervention and prevention focus to housing solutions and advice	Identify and implement process changes moving from generic advice to prevention and intervention approach		
	Provide prompt and relevant housing options and solutions advice for single non-priority homeless	Review single person pilot advice surgery outcomes and partnership arrangements	Implement findings of review and agree and implement new advice arrangements	
	Increase homeless prevention for home-seekers being excluded by friends and family	Implement review of visiting – locate visiting team to Private Housing Information Unit and implement new prevention focussed procedures.	Review visiting arrangements and impact on prevention of homelessness for this group	
	Improve prevention of homelessness caused by family breakdown	Review mediation contract arrangements – specify, tender and agree new arrangements	Review outcomes of new arrangements	
	Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic violence	Agree operational working arrangements between Housing and Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and	Implement new arrangements	Review impact on homeless caused by domestic violence

Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
		sanctuary scheme		
	Increase prevention of youth homelessness	Re-specify and tender educational awareness programme in schools and educational establishments Agree and specify arrangements for an educational awareness programme about youth homelessness for parenting groups	Review impact on youth homelessness prevention	
	Prevent homelessness through tackling over-crowding			
	Prevent homelessness through working with social sector landlords to develop their own homelessness strategy			
	Reduce homeless approaches from Black African and Caribbean home-seekers through targeted tenancy protection arrangements			
Increasing the supply of housing and widening housing options	Increase the supply of private sector accommodation available for vulnerable groups – 250 properties for 2008/9 and 300 properties for 2009/10	Implement procurement review recommendations bringing all private rented sector procurement into a single line of management		

Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
	Provide sufficient and suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds – reduce the use of hotel and temporary accommodation for this age group	Extend crash pad pilot, evaluate impact and incorporate to review of young people's services		
	Reduce the use of hotel and temporary accommodation for this age group	Commence joint review of young people's housing and support needs	Implement review findings	
	Reduce use of hotel and temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds	Evaluate scope and options for implementing a supported lodgings scheme for young people	Implement options	
	Increase move on from hostel accommodation and maintain control over letting and vacation of hostel spaces to optimise use	Implement findings from move in, move out review and establish a single point of access and vacation for supported hostel accommodation and floating support	Review implementation and impact of flow in use of accommodation and make changes if necessary	

Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
	Expand use of private sector landlords through promoting of financial incentives to let , advantages of Local Housing Allowance and efficiency of Housing Benefit Service			
	Increase private sector lettings for single non-priority home-seekers	Review and expand Solo scheme and re-specify and tender service		
	Increase the availability and quality of hostel accommodation for those with multi and complex support needs	Working with St Mungos on the refurbishment of the new facility		
	Increase supply of up to 500 additional units of mixed accommodation			Working with partners to conclude and implement PFI arrangements
	Increase supply of up to 500 additional units of temporary to permanent accommodation			Working with partners, including sub-regional authorities to conclude and implement projects

	Increase supply of 280 mixed properties			Implement Wembley regeneration project
Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
Improving support services to vulnerable people	Reduce homeless amongst 16 and 17 year old	Develop clear pathway for young people to access services and support through co-located youth service provision. Agree housing needs referral protocols through joint working across Children and Families, Connexions and the Housing Needs Division	Implement new working arrangements	
Reducing the use of hotel and temporary accommodation	Reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010	Work with landlords and tenants to enter into direct letting arrangements at the end of temporary accommodation lease		
	Limit use of hotel accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010			
	Evaluate longer term supply and demand needs			Review supply and demand model dependent on

				outcomes from the plan to 2010
Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible	To minimise rough sleeping through using local intelligence to identify and provide outreach for rough sleepers in known 'hot spots'	Re-specify and tender the rough sleeping outreach and resettlement services, ensuring corporate links are made on reduction of crime and anti social behaviour	Review new arrangements	
		Transfer the non priority rough sleeper scheme accommodation letting to the move in, move out team		
Improving customer services and accessibility	To provide a customer friendly reception service	Refurbishment of MGH reception including, increased privacy and a children's play area		
	To improve customer waiting times at MGH	Implement targets for customer services, first sift interview within 5 minutes and appointments on the day of approach		Introduction of client index system, customer relationship management system

	To reduce unnecessary customer contact	Identify how and when this arises and review procedures	Implement new procedures	
	To improve telephone call answering times and abandonment rates	Implement new call handling software and monitoring capability		
Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
		Review scope for rationalising telephone contact across the Council		
	Increase access channels for housing needs services	Review use of e-mail and text messaging		
	Increase information available to new tenants in the borough	Introduction of customer information pack across the Council		
Improving and developing partnership working and protocols	To reduce youth homelessness and provide clear service access arrangements to respond to young people's needs, including housing need	Build on existing relationships to improve joint working with Children and Families, Connexions and the Voluntary Sector to agree arrangements, including operational, structural, contractual and financial		
	Improve employment prospects of families in Temporary accommodation to increase	Review Brentin2Work service at the pilot single non priority advice		

	their housing options	<p>surgery</p> <p>Implement Brentin2Work advice arrangements at Mahatma Gandhi House</p>		
Strategic Priority	Strategic Objective / Outcome	Key actions 2008/9	Key actions 2009/10	Longer term actions
	To develop clear arrangements for people being discharged from hospital or prison to prevent homelessness	Agree protocols with the PCT, Probation Service and Prison Service	Pilot protocols	Review pilot, and embed new working arrangements

Appendix 3 CLG Feedback

Areas of strong performance

- Good strategic approach and track record of meeting homelessness targets
- Evidence that tackling homelessness has become more of a priority for the Council
- Evidence that the strategy acts as a 'live' strategy for both the council and its stakeholders.
- Financial incentives such as the rent deposit scheme
- Educational road shows to promote homeless prevention in educational establishments and strong partnerships between housing, Connexions and the Youth Offending Team
- The Housing Advice Service has prevented homelessness in over 70% of the cases they have seen in the current financial year
- Sanctuary scheme, which has been in place for almost a year
- Temporary Accommodation Reduction Group meeting which meets every 6 weeks and is chaired by the Assistant Director Needs and Private Sector
- The Council has produced a long term plan incorporating a demand and supply analysis that forecasts the number of homelessness acceptances for each of the next four years.
- Brent has operated Choice Based Lettings for a number of years by being one of the founder members of LOCATA and uses a variety of user friendly media methods to enable their residents to bid for available properties. Their scheme provides choice for applicants either through the council's web site, the LOCATA magazine, telephone or via SMS text message.
- There are many aspects of partnership working that are excellent. The council has built a number of strong partnerships, through the delivery of its Homelessness Strategy and the Brent Homelessness Forum which has developed into a significant group drawing in and linking both voluntary and statutory sector groups.
- The Council is an active participants in the West London Sub region Homelessness Group
- Good working relationship with the majority of the RSL'S in the borough The NAHP grant funding from the Housing Corporation for 2006-2008 programme also allow for over £40m to develop an additional 440 new homes with 209 for rent and 86 units for supported housing
- Housing Benefit performance has incrementally improved year on year and there are strong relationships between the Housing Benefits and Housing Needs Division.
- Training and guidance for staff

Areas for improvement

- Shift of emphasis from homelessness assessment to prevention
- Prevention focussed visiting
- Analysis of the first contact process to make sure the right people are in the right place doing the right things at the right time
- Challenging but achievable targets needed for homelessness acceptances and prevention of homelessness for the next 3 years around friends and family exclusions.
- Broader partnerships with health, as it appears that hospital discharges can cause problems
- Close working links with the private rented sector in order to help prevent homelessness, maximise the range of housing options available and provide settled solutions to homelessness.
- The relation Brent has with its RSL partners is very positive but from it would appear that a small number of the Council's RSL partners are either evicting households too quickly

CLG Specialist Policy Advisor view on Youth Homelessness in Brent

The CLG Specialist Policy Advisor has been supporting the Council in developing plans for tackling youth homelessness in view of the relatively high numbers of homelessness acceptances amongst 16 and 17 year olds in the borough and the high levels of hotel accommodation being used to house those accepted.

A conference was held in December 2007 with participants working at a senior and strategic level across the borough discussed issues affecting youth homelessness and how partnership working can be developed to reduce homelessness and minimise its impact on those affected.

In addition to colleagues from boroughs considered to be operating best and innovative practice in working with homeless young people and their families the CLG Policy Advisor gave a review of the current service in Brent and the challenges Brent will need to manage in order to deliver better service to this group.

A summary of the issues discussed are detailed below:

Some Good Practice

- 60 – 70 units of supported accommodation
- Floating support services that will work with young people before they leave home
- Some mediation
- Crash pad pilot with De Paul Trust
- Connexions Personal Advisor working with housing options

- Schools education programme in partnership with Brent Homeless User Group
- Supporting People Service Directory and Referral Gateway
- Regular partnership meetings with service providers across the borough working with this age group

Areas for development

- Pathways to support transitions to sustainable independence not yet fully developed
- Changing culture and expectations which focus on accommodation as answer to needs of vulnerable young people to addressing the wider needs of young people to prevent homelessness
- Addressing the fragmentation of early intervention services and working more cohesively within the Council and with partners to address young people's needs, including housing need

Improvement plans will need to:

- Identify agencies whose services contribute to the youth homelessness prevention agenda
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Map services and develop referral routes through and between different agencies
- Produce service directories to improve information sharing and joint working
- Improve family mediation and life skills training
- Consider peer mentoring
- Homelessness education for professionals
- Family Support (parenting skills)
- Family Conflict Resolution (anger management)
- Floating Support (to prevent homelessness)
- A clear pathway to meeting housing need, avoiding using hotel accommodation and providing a high level of support to enable young people to move into independent living

Appendix 4 Housing Advice Review

In order to assess the Council's current position and to establish best practice the Housing Advice Review has intentionally selected boroughs from the top quartile of all London Boroughs to visit and compare with. The visits identified how these top quartile boroughs were structured and organised and highlighted key areas for improvement in Brent. By default this will inevitably show Brent in a less positive light, nevertheless, the selection of these boroughs does demonstrate the Council's enthusiasm to embrace improved methods of working and provides insight into the strategic planning that is crucial to the successful of the service.

With this in mind and to provide some balance and context the report includes performance information across all London boroughs where available in order to demonstrate how Brent compares with all London Boroughs. The Audit Family that Brent is traditionally compared with includes the following boroughs, Barnet, Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Hounslow, Waltham Forest and Westminster. A full report outlining the findings of the review and making recommendations is being put before the Executive Committee in June 2008. However, the review identified the following gaps in service provision which this strategy has taken into account.

Service Gaps and key priorities:

- The absence of a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to single homeless customers and 16/17 year olds.
- The absence of clear pathways, from hostel provision to independent living for single homeless customers.
- The absence of a co-ordinated approach, and dedicated centralised team for the acquisition of private sector properties.
- The absence of floating support assessment for customers placed in the private sector to assist in sustainment of the tenancy and address any other areas of concern.

Appendix 5 Customer Consultation Findings and Feedback

Focus Groups

Young People (16 to 24)

- Difficulty in securing private sector accommodation due to Housing Benefit restrictions to a single room rent level for those under 25 and delays in receiving Housing Benefit payments
- Difficulties sharing accommodation with others, particularly if they have problems
- Limited access to employment so inability to pay rents
- Particular difficulties for 16 and 17 years olds in securing employment in order to sustain overheads of maintaining a tenancy
- Not having rent deposits or rent guarantees
- Homelessness or other housing needs issues place pressure on ability to attend school, college or work and vying priorities make it difficult
- Little or no experience of independent living makes tenancy sustainment difficult
- Parents often unable to provide support
- Cultural clashes, particularly focussed around differences in behavioural expectations between generations
- Not enough accommodation available
- Insufficient information about opportunities to move outside of Brent
- Being sent outside of Brent for temporary or supported accommodation
- Young people are not given due priority
- Young people assumed to be the cause of problems and not parents
- Wider family may be out of London or UK so limited extended family support
- Negative messages give the impression that alcohol and substance misuse and pregnancy are a route to social sector housing

Service gaps / improvement priorities

- Provide more affordable accommodation for young people – a mix of self contained and shared
- Support to enable completion of education and prevent isolation
- Provide interim accommodation and support for respite where young people are not homeless
- Work more closely within the Council to ensure clarity and ownership of issues, particularly between Housing and Children and Families and Housing and Housing Benefits
- Increase levels of Housing Benefit
- Work with Landlords to provide more shared accommodation

- If homeless do not move from one temporary address to another so frequently
- Make quicker housing decisions
- Pay Housing Benefit more quickly
- Provide appropriate accommodation as it is difficult to study in a hotel or bed and breakfast
- Improve the quality of temporary accommodation
-

Single Homeless (including hostel residents)

- Reluctance to take-on Private tenancies through fears about affordability and the impact on future employment prospects, security of tenure and perceived concerns about the quality of accommodation in the private sector
- Rent Levels promote Benefits dependency and local rent levels, and the steady escalation of these, make it impossible for low earners to secure reasonable accommodation of any type
- Housing Benefit restrictions for people under 25 make it difficult to access private sector accommodation
- Inadequate Supported Accommodation - there is a need for much more secure and supported accommodation for those under 25, who often have a range of personal issues, with differing levels of support needs
- No real availability or choice of appropriate 'transitional' accommodation, to help cope and move-on from supported hostel accommodation to independent accommodation
- It is believed that individuals did not receive the kind and levels of support needed to help them stabilise their often chaotic lifestyles, and move on to more 'normal' arrangements and that this lack of support focus and resources meant that it was unlikely that many individuals could/would progress to a point of self-reliance, which they 'could' achieve if helped appropriately
- There was significant agreement that pregnancy was perceived as a more straightforward route into housing arrangements, than available through other choices
- There was unanimity that 'homelessness' carried a stigma and emotional impact that was difficult to shake-off and became almost self-fulfilling which contributed to a real lack of self-respect, with attendant behavioural difficulties, deterioration of appearance and loss of confidence and coping mechanisms
- It was broadly believed they were the lowest priority, with no resource or support available to help them in any meaningful way
- It was observed that there was no real planning for prison release, leading inevitably towards re-offending
- Landlord Persuasion to Accept 'Homeless' - it was felt that little was being done to actively persuade landlords to accept homeless
- Language & Ethnicity Barriers - there was a belief that language and ethnicity (and perhaps cultural expectations) often made it difficult for single homeless to access accommodation

- Informal Relationship Issues - the present bureaucracy (rules) took no account and placed barriers in the way of new or informal relationships (e.g. new potential partners) which could obviously be abused, but could also offer a real route to move-on. This needed more consideration and flexibility
- Accessing and caring for children from broken relationships was another real source of difficulty for both parent and their children and is most evident in hostels, where strict segregation is required
- Institutions give little opportunity to rebuild control over personal lifestyle/s (e.g. no choice of catering arrangements; canteen versus self catering)
- It was believed that agencies did not work well together or communicate effectively
- It was commented that hostel workers often lacked the commitment and competencies to support and enable individuals to move-on
- Inadequate Housing 'Outreach' Arrangements – two outreach workers are inadequate to cope with the scale of need and demand
- Homefinder Scheme - there is a completely inadequate accommodation supply, making this a fictional option
- There are generally not enough hostel places, creating particular difficulties for women, young people and those with a range of (and different levels of support needs)
- Rehabilitation and detox. funding is cash limited and has generally been exhausted mid-year

Families

Weaknesses

- DMO not carrying out physical examination and GP's views not taken into account
- Difficult speaking to case worker and being refused – feels like they are invisible and poor case work
- Waiting very long to get housed
- Unfairness in allocations – people being housed before others who have been waiting longer
- Rents very high and cannot be paid by people working
- Unacceptable levels of repairs needed and very long waiting periods for repairs to be completed
- Furniture old and broken
- Damp in TA causing health problems such as asthma
- Landlords changing locks without notice to tenant
- Perception of victimisation following complaints and no apology following complaint
- Post going astray even if sent by special delivery
- Telephone calls not returned
- People who have English as a second language not listened to

Service improvement

- Better trained staff
- Staff showing respect and kindness
- Somewhere for children to play
- Returning phone calls
- People working given higher priority banding on Locata
- Better liaison with Social Services
- More readily available interpretation services
- Faster repairs work

Temporary Accommodation Survey

In the latter part of 2007, the West London Housing alliance commissioned a survey of Temporary Accommodation tenants. The table below details responses from Brent tenants compared to the average response across the rest of the sub-region.

Temporary Accommodation Survey – Brent satisfaction compared to West London sub-region

Aspect of the service questioned	Brent response		Average West London response	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Overall satisfaction with accommodation provider	45%	31%	46.57%	30.41%
Satisfaction with accommodation	60%	21%	63.57%	19%
Satisfaction of consideration given to individual needs	51%	27%	52%	24%
Satisfaction with information given upon moving in	49%	23%	49.57%	20.42%
Satisfaction with information on claiming HB	57%	14%	58.57%	12.57%
Satisfaction with advice & support claiming welfare benefits	46%	22%	49.57%	18.28%
Satisfaction with help moving in	32%	36%	30.71%	36.85%
Satisfaction with advice & support paying rent	52%	19%	49%	14.57%
Satisfaction with standard of furnishing	46%	33%	41.1%	33.14%
Satisfaction with facilities i.e. kitchen and bathroom	51%	27%	52.42%	27.14%
Satisfaction with size of rooms	56%	23%	59.71%	21.28%
Satisfaction with safety	52%	27%	57.85%	23.14%
Satisfaction with cleanliness	56%	27%	59.28%	23%
Satisfaction with repairs / maintenance	41%	41%	42.14%	36.85%
Satisfaction with Information given on local services i.e. GP, schools	34%	34%	38.71%	29.28%
Satisfaction with Information on other housing services	28%	33%	32.42%	29%
Satisfaction with way changes in circumstances are	36%	26%	38%	23.57%

taking account				
Satisfaction with assistance to get training	22%	33%	25%	29%
Satisfaction with allocations system explanation	25%	38%	30%	35%
Satisfaction with Progress on re-housing app	20%	52%	21%	48%
Satisfaction with information on choice based letting (LOCATA)	33%	37%	39%	33%

Appendix 6 Stakeholder Consultation and Feedback

Focus Groups

People Working with Young People (16 to 24)

Issues identified:

- Teenage pregnancy is sometimes viewed as a 'career choice' by young people, offering a clear route to secure a home, support and some measure of security but accidental pregnancy remains an issue, leading to family upheaval, tensions and overcrowding
- Many U25's have unrealistic expectations in relation to their housing options, and the support they will receive which is fed by genuine ignorance of the homelessness pressures combined with peer group disinformation
- There is a lack of effective 'marketing' of the realities of homelessness, and insufficient focus on Housing Options, to counter prevalent attitudes
- Homelessness, actual or potential, is a real driver of crime
- Voluntary Sector organisations in Brent press for statutory outcomes rather than appropriate outcomes to this vulnerable group
- The lack of a single point of access to under 25 services is a real impediment to coordinated and effective action with
- There is a need for a clear focus on all the personal issues impacting upon the young person, and an effective process to coordinate and tackle these, to genuinely improve outcomes (including homelessness)
- Difficulties in parenting and insufficient support services available to assist parents

The focus group and the conference participants identified a number of improvement objectives as summarised below:

- Better coordination of support for young people who are not homeless in accordance with the legislation but who nonetheless have similar support needs
- Policy changes for women's refuges to support families with male children over 14
- There is a need for a specific service for 16 and 17 year olds with cross agency links
- There is a need for a more coordinated and intervention based mediation, to work with families and actively prevent homelessness
- There is a need to 'market' and engage schools in promoting information and advice to children and families, particularly to those who appear most at risk from 'homelessness'
- There is a need to actively re-set expectations about rights and to encourage planning for young people around what is in the best interests of the young person in the long term

- Establish a multi-agency drop-in facility so that partners can work together to support young people
- Learn from & adopt Good Practise from elsewhere
- Provide sufficient accommodation, appropriate to the support needs of young people
- Influence the market to encourage landlords to increase the supply of accommodation to young people

Single People's Housing Providers

Issues identified:

- Lack of Affordable Housing
 - Brent lacks an adequate supply of affordable housing, significantly impacting those on lower incomes who have no realistic options
 - HB does not offer an adequate & realistic safety net, and may get worse with the introduction of LHA
 - Current HB arrangements prejudice the U25 group, which are a large proportion of Brent's population
- Brent's Expectation Legacy
 - Brent has 'set' unrealistic aspirations and expectations over many years amongst homeless persons groups, particularly those who have been accepted as homeless
 - The prevalent and unrealistic culture is towards securing their own flat/home
- Housing Benefit & the Public Sector
 - The public sector is perceived as offering a better option than a single room outcome under the HB rules within the private sector, strengthening homelessness aspirations
 - Pre Tenancy Determinations (PTD) are often unrealistically set within a fluid private sector rental market, offering little incentive to many (marginal) private landlords
 - HB has a history of being hard to secure and maintain, and is not trusted by many landlords, particularly where payments are directly to the tenant
- Brent's Composition
 - Brent's diversity has itself become a 'magnet' attracting further individuals and groups to the Borough, in preference to other localities
 - This is placing disproportionate pressure on local housing options
- Local Area Agreement (LAA)
 - Brent corporate focus is not sufficiently upon the broader homelessness issues, but is largely centred around the stretch target of reducing use of temporary accommodation
 - Important social areas, such as street homelessness and exclusions of young people, are accordingly given little priority
 -

- Inadequate Support to Access/Maintain Private Sector Housing Options
 - The Council does not adequately recognise or resource a 'support framework' (multi agency / multi landlord) to assist vulnerable clients in securing and maintaining any viable private sector option
 - There is a need to 'handhold' both the individual client and the landlord to avoid a tenancy breakdown and homelessness pressure
 - Common problems that are not effectively 'managed' (as tenants often lack the real capability) are
 - Arrears issues (often HB)
 - Financial & broader debt issues
 - Addiction/s
 - Medical issues
 - Family issues
- Difficulty Accessing Private Sector Options
 - There are no really effective 'partnerships' with landlords designed to jointly secure accommodation and prevent homelessness
 - Partnership arrangements should really embrace rent, damage, nuisance and illegal use of property issues
- Street Homelessness
 - The lack of street counts/surveys means a lack of focus on a real area of need
 - This may also have resulted in a resource deficit
- Nomination Reciprocally
 - Nominations (Band B) are not a priority for other landlords, who will always place their own priorities first where supply is limited
- Private Sector Options
 - There has been no adequate/systematic review of the present and future private sector market, and whether this can/will meet demand expectations
 - Policy development assumes the private sector offers a way forward and/or solution, but this is based on little substantial evidence, and is thereby deeply flawed
 - There is a prima facie case that there is inadequate 'decent standard' accommodation available, and the position is deteriorating rather than improving because of demand/financial pressures
 - Need 'incentive packages' capable of delivering reasonable quality HMO's/shared accommodation outcomes targeted at landlords and tenants
- Customer Expectations
 - Expectations are unrealistic and unreasonably high about housing options
 - Little has been done (in a genuinely coordinated manner) to condition appropriate expectations

- Providers should take greater responsibility for conditioning customer housing views
 - People should not be ‘sitting in schemes’ no longer appropriate to their needs
 - ‘Decent’ accommodation does not only exist within the social sector
 - Need to address ‘bias’ instilled by many agencies
- Client Perception of Security in Social Sector
 - Social Sector is perceived as more benevolent, and secure than the private sector
 - Few people understand the pervasiveness of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST’s)
 - The social sector is seen as better able to reconcile the conflicts that exist with empowerment and independence, as often support and intervention is required with the tenant
 - Tenants are often unknowing or unrealistic of their own responsibilities, often expecting and relying upon the social sector to resolve their issues
- Lack of Job Opportunities
 - The absence of reasonably paid job opportunities, mean that many people still effectively face a ‘poverty trap’, unable to meet rent local levels without reliance on state benefits
 - Many customers require much more effective transitional support to move from benefits dependency, necessarily including improved financial support arrangements (and incentives)
- Client Perception of Security in Social Sector
 - Social Sector is perceived as more benevolent, and secure than the private sector
 - Few people understand the pervasiveness of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST’s)
 - The social sector is seen as better able to reconcile the conflicts that exist with empowerment and independence, as often support and intervention is required with the tenant
 - Tenants are often unknowing or unrealistic of their own responsibilities, often expecting and relying upon the social sector to resolve their issues

Service gaps:

- Housing Benefit
 - Fluctuations in HB mean that Landlords experience unreliable revenue streams with few options or remedies, short of eviction processes
 - There is a lack of effective liaison with most landlords to actually ‘resolve’ issues at source
 - Payments to tenants are difficult to monitor and result in a ‘total loss’ to landlords if misspent [Local Housing Allowance arrangements will worsen this position]

- Housing Options
 - There is a real lack of Housing Options to meet the needs of a wide range of clients, often requiring very different levels of support/intervention [often people occupy inappropriate accommodation as there is no viable alternative available]
 - An appropriate ‘package’ of services is rarely, adequately linked to each housing option
- Single Access Arrangements
 - There is no appropriate single point of access channel designed to fit (or signpost) the range of customer social and housing needs with accommodation options
 - There is an absence of the necessary ‘linkages’ to address the underlying causes of homelessness (present or future)
 - This may or may not be a single physical point of access
- Coordinated Services
 - The Council is poor at identifying and coordinating internal referral arrangements
 - The position is worse in relation to broader stakeholders
- Private Sector Initiatives
 - These are presently insufficient to stimulate the private sector market and generate real options
 - They also do not deliver the wide range of property required to meet housing need
- Multi Agency Forums
 - Where these exist, they are ‘strategic’ rather than ‘operational’, and do not provide focussed improvements in practical outcomes
 - There is a fundamental lack of Council/Health coordination and funding, with genuinely shared aims/plans/funding priorities/outcomes
 - Non-Supporting People initiatives are largely non-existent as they receive no focus or funding
- Rough Sleeping
 - There is no rough sleeping focus in Brent, despite self-evident issues
- Hidden Homelessness
 - There is a substantial ‘gap’ in service provision where the Council has no statutory duty

Improvements

- Improving Affordable Housing Provision
 - Build more affordable housing to meet demand pressures and profile (may need to be social housing, but key is ‘affordability’)
 - This is key to diffusing worsening housing need and homelessness pressures
- Improved ‘Support’ Arrangements

- Need to provide greater reassurance and support packages to both tenants and landlords, to stimulate private sector options
- The aim is to motivate both parties towards an improved range of housing options more in keeping with the varied needs of homeless persons
- There is a strong need to extend and improve ‘transitional’ support arrangements to avoid/prevent homelessness, targeted at both tenants and landlords, with the necessary resources and funding to make these arrangements effective
- Develop Rough Sleeping Services
 - Address (presently) unknown rough sleeping needs
 - Address future pressures likely to result from immigration focus on Brent, and likely displacement and exacerbation of competition for limited housing
- Empty/Under Utilised Dwellings
 - Provide genuine incentives to stimulate access to accommodation, presently not available within the housing market
 - Consider legal changes to allow better utilisation of existing stock, balanced against reasonable protection of people’s ‘home’
 - Offer genuine support to reluctant landlords
- Landlord Incentivisation
 - Need to provide improved and more creative approaches to stimulate private sector and social landlords to bring more affordable properties into the local market place
 - Need to provide greater landlord financial security (guarantees) to reduce prejudice against risk of ‘homeless’ groups
 - Need to increase financial support, of which fair, market relevant and reliable HB arrangements are fundamental
 - Need better ‘packaging’ of support to landlords/tenants to reduce perceptions of risk

Domestic Violence Forum

Perceptions of the service:

- Consultation with service users and agencies and use of outcomes embedded in service plans
- Advocates report appropriate housing advice, empathy, support and understanding
- Good day to day working relationship between Relate and operational housing staff
- Reception floor walking role working well – people feel attended to and not forgotten
- Reception staff able to multi task very well and work well under pressure
- Well publicised DV services at reception – posters show commitment to dealing with DV

- HRC commitment to DV Forum – Moji’s involvement has resulted in some very positive working
- Information sharing through DV Housing Sub Group has developed services through the sharing best practice

Services weaknesses:

- Lack of privacy at reception
- Feeling that managers are not filtering down information to front line staff as there is inconsistency in knowledge about protocols
- Needs to be a broader involvement of all housing divisions in DV work
- Needs to be a recognition of tensions between drivers and targets between DV advocacy which aims to increase reporting of DV and housing which aims to reduce homeless acceptances and approaches

Service gaps and priorities for improvement:

- Need service leads on DV to enable to increase specialist knowledge and expertise within housing
- Housing staff need to be made more aware of referral routes
- Communication mechanisms and protocols need to be reviewed
- Community involvement lead jointly by partners delivering services to deliver more cohesive information sharing
- Senior management / strategic review of service development to enable a systematic and partnership approach to delivering services
- Mapping of services and networks for delivering DV services to make best use of resources, set expectations and communicate
- More creative use of existing means of communication i.e. use of community newsletters and magazines
- Identifying best practice in identifying DV and making referrals
- DV risk assessment and referrals could be improved by locating a DV advocate service within housing to assist with homelessness prevention – front line staff would start to see advocacy as an enabler and not an impediment
- Shadowing of staff between housing/RSL’s and voluntary sector agencies to develop best practice and improve communication
- Improved written information (up to date, accurate and relevant) - review all advice and sign-posting materials
- Training / knowledge of staff about referral routes for all front line housing staff
- Housing should proactively make referral through direct contact with agency referring to rather than expecting client to self refer
- DV lead officers / champions within housing
- Pilot on site DV advocacy at MGH
- Organise strategic event to kick off better partnership working and business development plan
- Alleviate tensions between DV/Housing objectives by improved monitoring and consistent risk assessment work i.e. DV risk assessment should coincide with housing needs assessment

Equalities issues

- Challenging to support clients with no recourse to public funds
- Develop monitoring of LGBT issues and how they impact on homelessness
- Ongoing equalities training should deal specifically with equalities related housing needs issues
- DV approved interpreters

Landlords

A survey was carried out amongst landlords attending the landlord and tenant fair held at the Town Hall in February 2008 and the results of two responses are summarised below.

- Equal preference was expressed to rent to families or single people
- Both were letting flats and houses and had properties in other boroughs
- None willing to let to the elderly or people with care needs, mental health issues or learning disability
- Both preferred 1 year tenancy and least preferred 3 year tenancy.
- Both would prefer to let to those paying their own deposits / rent in advance and providing references
- None were definitely willing to let to ex-offenders, people with substance or alcohol misuse issues but half said they would consider it as a possibility
- Both said that the critical issue on letting decisions was on rent level but other issues were a concern including: security, damage, risks presented by tenants with support needs,
- 1 sometimes uses an agency and 1 never uses agencies to let
- The one who sometimes uses agencies said that this is to enable them to get the type of tenant they want and higher rent level
- 1 had experience of using the Housing Benefit and did not feel Housing Benefit levels were fair but that it was paid quickly and accurately and easy to sort out. 1 preferred rent direct to them not the tenant and 1 felt that recovering overpayments from them is fair
- Both knew about changes to HB
- Both knew about rent deposit scheme and said that it represented sufficient security but would prefer an actual deposit
- Both said they would consider tenants from the Council if they received a non refundable deposit

Probation Service

A meeting was held with the Probation Service and St Mungos Floating Support services to look at how the needs of ex-offenders on probation were being met and how improvements could be achieved.

Issues:

- Varying and sometimes subjective attitude to ex-offenders
- Case managers inaccessible
- Crime reduction strategy not understood on the ground
- Apparent harsh decision making on homeless applications from ex-offenders
- Lack of communication and feedback on referrals
- Refurbishment of Pound Lane hostel presenting difficulty as main referral route for ex-offenders
- Lack of clarity about quotas on Locata
- 40% of ex-offenders released on Friday afternoons but MGH closed Fridays

Service Improvement

- Closer links for probation to the resettlement strategy or roll out of resettlement strategy for all ex-offenders
- Protocols / dedicated liaison links for referrals including arrangements for prolific offenders to enable a more proactive approach to providing advice and information
- Assistance for probationers to get help with claiming welfare benefits

PCT

Issues about hospital discharge protocols have been raised at the Homeless Forum by a PCT Homeless and Health Worker. There are no formal protocols and it is felt that the development of protocols and closer liaison between the hospitals and housing needs division would enable a more proactive response to people being discharged from hospital and would enable a more planned approach which would result in homeless prevention.

Staff Consultation

A number of staff meetings have been held and a summary of views which relate to this strategy are listed below:

Review of Private Sector Strategy

- Housing advice should be focused on homelessness prevention, NOT generic;

- Improve incentives through better management of procurement – one centralised team;
- Negotiate with landlords before enforcement action taken on disrepair;
- Tenancy sustainment role needed to support landlords;
- Packs for tenants with information on what they should expect from their landlord and responsibilities to their landlord;
- Improved publicity re advice and prevention – Brent Magazine;
- Improved information for partners;
- IT system needs to be revamped so information is accessible to all officers within the unit.
- Focus on customer
- Communication of realities of homelessness

Housing Resource Centre Managers Workshop

- Reception Manager needed
- Managers to monitor staff who cause repeat visitors
- Publicise / alternate methods of contact / communication e.g. adverts, GP, Library
- Customer Service
 - Officers to have a clear understanding of their role
 - Promote cultural & respect (posters, staff instructions, training for staff on respect, random monitoring)
 - Sharing skills between officers (debriefing, good practice)
 - Link worker with outside agencies
- Space in Reception
 - Outreach surgeries.
 - Review opening times
 - Encourage other agencies to provide service.
 - Use of other building to provide our service e.g. domestic violence & high risk clients.
 - Use of online – booking appointments.
- Empowering Officers – getting it right.
 - Having access to all information
 - Flow-charts
 - How to manage telephones
 - Setting standards e.g. greeting people pass onto other officers.
 - Communicating with customers & keeping a rapport.
- Regular customer satisfaction monitoring.
- More self service by customers e.g. via telephone choices.
- Communication
 - Better use of Plasma Screen /TV/Information strip
 - Get it right first time.
 - Better communication between teams
 - Updated information to be cascaded to voluntary groups
 - Up to date information packs.

Housing Resource Centre and Private Housing Information Unit Staff - Review of Customer Service and Service Improvement

Staff identified the following as the most important improvements to transform the present service. These are not in any priority order:

- Prevention needs to take precedence over homelessness acceptances
- Housing options need to be developed and available to provide customers with improved and realistic outcomes
- There is a need to manage expectations through improved outreach arrangements (targeting stakeholders, schools, web, etc.)
- More creative arrangements and incentives are required to stimulate the private sector market and produce a viable housing options agenda
- Specialist functional areas (e.g. 16/17) need to sit within a clear housing options framework
- Systems investment is required to underpin the delivery of more efficient processes (e.g. appointments, on-line forms, customer web self-help, clear workflow processes, improved scanning of documents, etc.)
- Improved meet & greet / security staff function to enhance customer outcomes and staff security
- Need to develop a better, calmer and more friendly atmosphere within the public areas of MGH

Process Review

The following is a summary of the strategic issues identified by the review:

- The customer interfaces have not been designed to meet customer needs, and are relatively inflexible in relation to the fluctuation in demand and the customer perception of urgency. Staff, their roles and their physical environment need to be able to 'flex' to meet customer demand, and be continuously monitored and directed to achieve this.
- There is a need for still further effective engagement with private sector landlords to secure routes to suitable accommodation, for the majority of customers of the HRC who currently present themselves and can be given no constructive help. Despite the Council's acknowledged private sector progress, further action is required in relation to stimulating supply and coordinating new landlord relationships, in an increasingly difficult and critical market sector if the Council is to have any effective role.
- The existing Housing Needs processes reflect the Department's organisational 'silo's' rather than an efficient and cohesive approach to customer needs and handling. There are long and unacceptable delays in people being helped.
- Many processes and roles are not clearly defined, or agreed, resulting in significant variations in approach and the resulting outcomes. Also, many of the existing processes involve significant duplication of effort and recording of information.
- There is a heavy reliance on the use of paper based systems, which take further resources to process onto systems, involving delay and/or poor subsequent access and sharing of key information.
- Housing Needs appears to be a relatively low priority in terms of the Council's broad CRM development, and the potential offered by automating some telephone processes (via the new ACD)
- There is an absence of key management data, in terms of customer demand, stages and outcomes to inform future change and improvement.
- The physical reception and waiting areas are not appropriate or designed to provide decent, efficient and effective customer handling and outcomes.
- Staff across Housing Needs are specifically trained, rather than being broadly trained to offer greater flexibility in meeting customer and operational needs
- Staff and organisational arrangements ought to reflect the process (continuum) that begins with initial assessment and advice on realistic options, includes prevention, and ends with small numbers of statutory homeless.
- There are few agreed and well documented processes, and there is little high quality training material to support these

- MGH has poor external signage, identifying building, services and opening hours
- MGH opening hours do not reflect customer needs, and are compromised by some public access still being offered when the office is said to be closed
- .There is a need for faster and improved 'filtering' to Housing Advice & Homelessness functions, and for these staff to be flexible to meet demand in a timely manner
- Requirements to provide proof of identify and other evidence (e.g. crime reference numbers) prior to arranging an appointment appear bureaucratic and an unproductive customer hurdle
- Existing booths (1-3) offer no privacy, and screen arrangements produce raised voices and difficult communication
- Poor document records (on EDM) or delays in updating, make it very difficult to aid customers quickly and effectively. The current calibre of system record keeping (which is accessible to all) varies significantly, and may be a function of the present bias towards paper records, as well as staff practises