



Executive
27th May 2008

**Report from the Director of
Housing and Community Care**

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan
2008 - 2013**

Forward Plan Ref: H&CC-07/08-40

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides:

- An update on progress against the Council's five year Homelessness Strategy (2003-08)
- Findings from the review of homelessness during 2007-2008
- The Homelessness Strategy for the period 2008-2013
- The Homelessness Action Plan for 2008-2013

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the findings of the homelessness review attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Members are asked to approve the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan for 2008-2013 attached as Appendix 1 and 2.
- 2.3 Members are asked to delegate authority to the Director of Housing and Community Care, to make any minor amendments to the Homelessness Review, Strategy and Action Plan.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The first Homelessness Strategy was adopted by the Executive Committee 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.

3.1.2 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.

3.1.3 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

3.1.4 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.

3.1.5 This Homelessness review aims to update the 2006-2007 review and outline findings and issues arising from the extensive recent consultation, the review of processes and benchmarking against best practice. The resulting 2008 to 2013 Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 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.

3.2 Homelessness and its Causes

3.2.1 The main 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 shorthold 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 most common reason for people losing their homes in Brent is through exclusion by family, other relatives or friends, which in 2007/8 made up almost 40% of households the Council accepted a duty towards. Loss of assured shorthold tenancy is another major cause and made up over 20% whilst the violent break down of relationships accounts for over 10%.

3.2.2 Under current Homelessness legislation, households must have a priority need, in order to be assisted. With the exception of families with dependent children, 16 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
- Families with dependent children
- 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

The most common reason for deciding priority need in Brent is because dependent children or pregnant women are part of the household and in 2007/8 this represented 76% of households where a duty to provide accommodation was accepted by the Council. Almost 8% of homelessness acceptances were for 16 and 17 year olds.

3.3 Accommodation Demand and Supply

3.3.1 The total current demand on the housing register is just under 22,000 households, of which 3,882 are provided with temporary accommodation by the Council. Against this demand the Council is able to let approximately 1,000 social sector properties each year. This includes accommodation available through Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) as well as Council owned stock. 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 through the housing register and those that can be assisted with rehousing face lengthy waits in the majority of cases. The gap between accommodation supply and demand within the borough means that there is unmet demand expected to be over 18,000 households in the next three years.

3.3.2 On the supply side, the Council requires its RSL partners to provide 100% nomination rights to first lettings of all newly funded units, and aims to receive nomination rights of up to 75% on re-lettings to void properties thereafter. There are some schemes which the Council is able to negotiate 100% nomination rights to, in perpetuity, for example,

Council disposal sites which have been redeveloped. 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. Housing 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. From an analysis of the trend in local authority and RSL lettings, it is anticipated that there will be 1,043 lettings made in 2008/09.

3.3.4 Council procurement of accommodation within the private rented sector offers the greatest potential to both assist in the prevention of homelessness and to stimulate a sufficient supply of accommodation in the borough. The Council's range of initiatives in this area include targeting the reduction of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010, the move on from hostel accommodation to independent living, and the improved use of rent deposit guarantees and rent deposits. 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, for factors largely beyond the Council's control, 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. This very limited level of supply again reflects the very acute pressures on housing within Brent. The impact of this also translates to an increase in homelessness acceptances.

3.3.5 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

3.3.6 In addition to the above in-house procurement initiatives, we have been working with the Paradigm Housing Group, who specifically procure accommodation for single non-priority home seekers under the Solo Scheme. On average the project has been able to procure 140 tenancies each year and over the period of the strategy, close working with landlords and tenants has enabled an incremental increase in the level of tenancy sustainment amongst those lettings facilitated.

3.3.7 A further means of housing supply is through Supporting People funding, which provides supported accommodation for almost 2,000

households in hostels, and housing related 'floating' support for an additional 1,500 people living independently. However, the 'silt up' of hostel accommodation has had a major negative impact on supply of hostel accommodation 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 that social sector housing is the only acceptable type.

- 3.3.8 Targeting 16 and 17 year old homelessness resulted in the creation of a pilot Crash Pad, which has been in operation from October 2007 and ended on 31 March 2008. The pilot has been part funded by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) and match funded by the Needs and Private Sector Division. 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 and exclusion by family and other relatives. There are particular concerns about the suitability of short term accommodation available for 16 and 17 year olds, who can often be placed in hotel accommodation which is not 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 took place to identify housing options and options for employment, education and training.
- 3.3.9 As noted above, because of the scale of demand, the Council needs to use Temporary Accommodation. The majority of this is self contained accommodation of all sizes but it also necessary to use a limited supply of hotel accommodation. In 2005 the government set a target for the reduction of the use of TA of 50% by 2010, within the context of 'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives', which the Council embraced. The Council has been working towards this target through a variety of measures, including attempting to reduce the pressure on homelessness acceptances, offering private sector alternatives both within the borough and outside, converting temporary accommodation to settled accommodation, the supply of new permanent accommodation and the conversion of temporary to permanent schemes. 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.
- 3.3.10 To cope with the current pressures on housing needs, the Council attempts to restrict the use of Hotel Accommodation for homeless people, in particular 16 and 17 year olds but regrettably there will always be a need to use it.
- 3.3.11 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.

- 3.3.12 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.
- 3.3.13 During 2008/09, over 270 affordable homes will be completed around Wembley Stadium and Wembley Town Centre, of which 55% will have affordable rents. In 2009/10, nearly 163 affordable homes are forecast to be 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 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.
- 3.3.14 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.
- 3.3.15 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.
- 3.3.16 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 scheme. 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.
- 3.3.17 A full report updating on the Temporary Accommodation Reduction

Plan was made to the Executive Committee in January 2008 and a report updating on Supply and Demand was made to the Executive in March 2008.

3.4 Best Practice & Benchmarking

3.4.1 In reviewing the service the Council has evaluated its performance by benchmarking against best practice with authorities within the West London Sub Region. The specific benchmarking exercise carried out included self assessment against the CLG's self assessment 'tool kit', which was developed to assist authorities identify gaps in service provision and priorities for improvement. This was evaluated by CLG through on site observation of our operation and meetings with stakeholders. Feedback was given to us by CLG which is summarised below, with a more detailed summary provided under Appendix 3:

Areas of strong performance

- There is strong strategic leadership and commitment to the service by managers, chief officers and members
- Equal commitment and hard work of front line staff
- A desire and demonstration to move towards early intervention and homeless prevention
- The Council has managed a shift of resources towards homeless prevention

Areas for improvement

- There has been considerable fluctuation in the levels of homelessness acceptances
- Brent homeless acceptances are higher, at 8 per thousand of the population, compared with the London average of 6.8, suggesting further scope for improvement.
- There is a need for a further push towards homeless preventions and the housing options agenda

3.4.2 Further benchmarking has been undertaken through our involvement with the West London Housing Alliance, which commissioned independent consultants to carry out a benchmarking survey in the summer and early autumn of 2007, reviewing prevention and housing advice, homelessness assessment and interim and temporary accommodation. A summary of findings are detailed below:

- Highest number of successful preventions overall and highest number prevented through court advocacy
- 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
- Weekly charges for hotels relatively high

3.4.3 The Council has also undertaken two discreet service reviews; one to improve customer care at Mahatma Gandhi House and one to review

the Housing Advice Service. The review of the Housing Advice Service will be reported to the Executive Committee separately in June 2008 and a summary of issues is attached as Appendix 4. The summary below sets out the best practice identified through carrying out benchmarking with other local authorities, including:

- There should be greater emphasis and targeting of homeless prevention and housing options advice rather than generic housing advice
- There is a need for improved customer care, including arrangements for monitoring performance and procedures which enable customers to get appropriate advice promptly
- There is a need for further proactive homelessness prevention, particularly for homelessness amongst young people and clear pathways to housing and support services for 16 and 17 year olds
- There should be improved and better coordinated accommodation procurement with clear and consistent incentive packages available for landlords
- There should be much better utilisation of technology (including palm held computers for visiting and automated telephone and customer queue management software)

3.5 Customer & Stakeholder Consultation

3.5.1 An extensive, primarily independently facilitated and reported consultation exercise was undertaken with both direct service users and the many stakeholders involved in the service. The major part of this consultation took place during early 2008, concentrating on identifying perceived service issues, any gaps in homeless service provision and support and suggested actions that might be taken to improve homelessness outcomes. Because of the sheer scale of the consultation feedback, a summary of the documented feedback is attached as Appendices 5.

3.5.2 The consultation views and experiences have, been an important element in shaping our new Homelessness Strategy, as they have helped refocus on the current homelessness issues and practical solutions.

3.6 Process Review

3.6.1 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 consultant's report noted that the Council offers a reasonable service and outcomes despite being exposed to some of the most severe housing and homelessness pressures in the UK, and that staff were very largely found to be committed to customer care and client outcomes.

3.6.2 However, a number of observations were made, as well as the need for development of a more streamlined array of processes, which

require systems, organisational and physical changes to accomplish. A summary of feedback is detailed below and more information is attached at Appendix 5.

- 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
- 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 Housing Needs Division who currently present themselves and can only be given advice
- 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
- The physical reception and waiting areas are not appropriate or designed to provide decent, efficient and effective customer handling and outcomes.
- 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.

3.7 Voluntary Sector Review

3.7.1 A review of the voluntary sector groups working within the broad area of homelessness and being funded through the Homeless 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 new 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 offered by the Council
- Greater clarity about the role of client monitoring and links to operational services is needed
- Economies of scale achieved through working with larger organisations may provide better value for money and provide better service continuity which has been an issue with some of our smaller partners but we do not want to lose expertise we have gained by working with

small organisations

3.8 Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

3.8.1 The following section summarises the issues and priorities articulated by the many service users and stakeholders throughout our extensive consultation process, which have confirmed the appropriateness of the strategic priorities agreed for the last strategy, but have resulted in some changes in emphasis.

The strategic themes 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

3.8.2 To properly tackle these themes, and promote improved customer outcomes requires a range of initiatives, some of which are already in place. But with further work needed and development required in other areas. In essence the approach for 2008-13 is to build upon the successful foundations contributing towards improving homelessness prevention within Brent, but to refocus and enhance these through the development of smarter initiatives, within the same broad financial umbrella. The remainder of section 3.8 of this report will outline current initiatives being undertaken and 3.9 of this report outlines further initiatives planned for the five years of the next strategy.

3.8.3 Prevention of homelessness

3.8.3.1 Mediation

For many there is genuine pressure brought about by family disagreements. In these cases we have worked with families through mediation provided by Relate and floating support to assist people excluded by their family to assist them to plan to meet their housing need at the earliest opportunity in order to avoid crisis. If we are unable to assist in preventing homelessness we can work with families to delay it, in order that we can assist with the provision of alternative accommodation and avoid the need for a homeless application.

3.8.3.2 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. We have a tenancy protection team which carries out case work and provides lay advocacy support at Willesden County Court which has proved to be highly successful in preventing evictions.

3.8.3.3 Domestic Violence

The Council has developed very strong strategic links with partners across the borough on the issue of domestic violence. 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 Housing Need Division part funds a Domestic Violence Training Coordinator post within the Community Safety Team.

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 and providing safe housing options.

3.8.3.4 Homelessness Road Shows

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 need 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 is in part due to the road-shows.

3.8.3.5 Housing Advice and Options

The Council has a Housing Advice Service (HAS) 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. The Housing Advice Service has recently been reviewed and will be reported to the Executive Committee in June 2008.

3.8.3.6 Single Homelessness Advice Surgery Pilot

A single homelessness advice surgery is currently in operation and has been piloted 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 the Surgery at which various statutory and voluntary agencies are present, and offer coordinated existing services for this client group.

3.8.3.7 Independent Advice

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Brent Community Law Centre (BCLC) provide advice, assistance and sign posting at a generalist and specialist level respectively across all categories of law to residents living or working in the borough. Both agencies provide an appointment based service to customers referred directly by the Council's 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 with the CAB. The HAS will also book appointments for customers with complex legal cases or cases outside of the scope of the Council's service with BCLC. The BCLC also provide second tier specialist support to the Councils HAS Team, the Tenancy Protection Team and other

voluntary and community sector agencies.

3.8.3.8 Home Visiting

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.

3.8.3.4 Housing Benefit

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.

3.8.3.5 Connexions Personal Advisor

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 in employment, education or training and supporting them to establish and maintain healthy relationships with their families, increasing the possibility of the young people remaining in the family home.

3.8.3.5 Landlord Negotiation

The HAS and STATRT teams play an important role in negotiating with landlords to prevent eviction. This can be regarding one issue or a set of more complex issues which may include mediation between tenants or within families, assistance in resolving housing benefits issues, making a prevention fund payment or resolving issues around anti-social behaviour.

3.8.4 Increasing supply of housing and widening housing options

3.8.4.1 Better Renting

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.

3.8.4.2 Landlord's Accreditation Scheme

Brent is a member of the London Landlords Accreditation Scheme, which provides a framework of standards for Landlords which the Private Housing Information Unit (PHIU) uses in training of landlords within Brent. Landlords are invited to meetings with Council Officers on a quarterly basis to receive training and discuss operational and strategic issues affecting them.

3.8.4.3 Private Housing Forum

Landlord and tenant liaison takes place at the Private Housing Forum (PHF), which meets quarterly, providing 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, enables individual problems and/or queries to be raised with Councillors and Council officers. Presentations are also given on topics of interest, for example on the introduction of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing and the introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

3.8.4.2 Support for Home Seekers

The Council offers advice and assistance on its 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 outside of the borough.

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, of 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)

3.8.4.3 Prevention Fund

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 a deposit guarantee and could include payments for travel expenses in the instance of a family having access to accommodation outside of London which they are unable to get to as they are unable meet travel costs.

3.8.4.4 Hostel Move On Advice

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 into independent living in the private rented sector.

3.8.4.5 Accommodation for young people

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 Housing Needs Improvement 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.

3.8.4.6 Accommodation for single non-priority homeless

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.

3.8.5 Supporting the vulnerable

3.8.5.1 Linx Project

The Brent Linx project which is run by the DePaul Trust was set up to assist those 16 -25 year olds who are accommodated by the authority under the homeless legislation. 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.

3.8.5.2 Brent Homeless User Group

In addition to the Road Shows referred to above under prevention of homelessness, Brent Homeless User Group (B.HUG) has delivered capacity building for single non-priority home-seekers by providing assistance in skills development.

B.HUG also manage 'speak outs' to enable those who are or have been homeless to speak directly with policy makers to contribute towards policy decisions. Examples of speak outs held are: equalities, the Mayor's housing strategy, youth homelessness and literacy and inclusiveness through poetry.

3.8.5.3 The Supported Tenancies and Assessment Team (START)

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 approach is taken.

3.8.5.4 The London Resettlement Project

Brent is participating in this London wide scheme which 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 and Prison Services to identify the needs of ex-offenders leaving Wormwood Scrubs and has assist them in establishing their lives back in the community.

3.8.5.5 Prolific and Other Priority Offenders (PPO's)

The Council is working in accordance with the PPO Programme which is a cross cutting, crime reduction strategy established in 2004. PPO's are

considered by the Police and other relevant partners to contribute significantly towards crime levels and therefore supporting them within the community is an important priority being addressed through the Local Area Agreement. This group often have complex support needs and the Council aims to provide coordinated multi agency support through the Operational Resettlement Group. The Housing Crime Team is able to identify housing need and sign post clients for appropriate advice.

3.8. 6 Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible

3.8.6.1 Brent Outreach Service

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 whereby officers visit rough sleeping 'hot spots', early in the morning to attempt to engage with rough sleepers and encourage them into more settled accommodation.

3.8.6.2 Non Priority and Rough Sleeper Scheme

There is limited emergency hostel accommodation in the borough and in some circumstances rough sleepers are placed in hotel accommodation for a short period of time to enable them to work with a range of service providers to find accommodation and access other services. Many rough sleepers have medium to high support needs and will usually require hostel accommodation as the first stage of resettlement.

3.8.6.3 The Brent Resettlement Service

This scheme is also run by CHC who work with 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.

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

3.8.7.1 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.

3.8.7.2 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 have 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.

3.8.7.3 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.

3.8.8 Improving customer service and accessibility

3.8.8.1 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
- Improved signage
- Staff uniforms
- The launch of the 'singles' advice surgery at Cricklewood Homeless Concern

3.9 Further Initiatives

3.9.1 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.

3.9.2 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.

3.9.3 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 homelessness strategy for 2008 to 2013 is to ameliorate the impacts of housing need and homelessness to provide best outcomes for those affected and to optimise the deployment of resources in this dynamic area.

3.9.4 This review was not able to analyse the issues surrounding homelessness of older people and its links to the overall older people strategy. In comparison to other groups there a low levels of

homelessness as housing need for this group is largely managed through the housing register but this is an important area for further analyses, particularly in light of the ongoing transformation of adult social care.

- 3.9.5 The review did not attract as good a response as was hoped from landlords and 16 and 17 year old service users and these are areas where further research is planned over the next 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.
- 3.9.6 We have started to collate a more detailed set of data about ethnicity, (including Travellers) sexuality and faith but there is insufficient data currently available currently but this will be reviewed when data is available, which is expected to be March 2009.

3.9.7 Prevention of homelessness

3.9.7.1 Advice, Options and Intervention

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 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.

3.9.7.2 Single Non Priority Advice Surgery

As stated under 3.8 above, the surgery pilot 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 often complex needs of the client group. Early evidence from other authorities indicates that this approach can have mixed results, but initial feedback from the Brent pilot indicates a commitment from partners to work in this way and a real benefit for customers.

3.9.7.3 Visiting

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.

3.9.7.4 Family Mediation

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. We will be re-specifying and tendering the mediation service and will extend current arrangements with Relate in the meantime.

3.9.7.5 Prevention of homelessness amongst 16 and 17 year olds

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 pending a joint review of young people's accommodation and support needs, led by the Supporting People Unit but involving the Children and Families Department.

3.9.7.6 Domestic Violence

The conclusion from our review is that whilst both the Domestic Violence Training Coordinator and Sanctuary Scheme initiatives have provided improved outcomes for women, this area is ready to develop on a more practical level. Further work is required with our partners to create improved coordination of our combined operational services so that advocacy is a pivotal first element of homelessness prevention for those under threat of domestic violence.

3.9.7.7 Road Shows

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.

3.9.7.8 Over-crowding

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 and are particularly focusing on 'emerging households'. Analyses has shown that 25% of homelessness acceptances on the basis of family exclusion are from social sector households. We will be working with these households to assist dependents leaving the household, to do so in a planned way rather than in a crisis situation, which may result in a homeless application.

3.9.7.9 Registered Social Landlords

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 with a particular focus on rent arrears, domestic violence protocols, anti-social behaviour protocols and management transfer arrangements. This work may take a sub-regional focus as we are working with primarily the same landlords across West London.

3.9.7.10 Targeted homeless prevention

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%.

3.9.8 Increasing supply of housing and widening housing options

3.9.8.1 Private Sector Supply

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. Letting of accommodation by a number of teams within the division allows for better prioritisation of letting, targeted at those where the Council believes it might have a homelessness duty. As a result of this 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 within the team 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.

3.9.8.2 We intend to re-specify and tender a private non-priority renting scheme later this year, but in the meantime, we intend to continue with the Solo Scheme which has achieved major success in procurement of private sector property for single non priority homeless people. Most of the accommodation is shared and intensive work is carried out with landlords and tenants to enable tenancy sustainment. We would like to expand the project 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.

3.9.8.3 Crash Pad Pilot

We will extend the Crash Pad pilot for a further six months to October 2008 through 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.

3.9.8.4 Supported Lodgings for Young People

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 type 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.

3.9.8.5 Hostel Accommodation - moving in and moving on

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. A separate report is being made to the Executive Committee in June 2008 about this.

3.9.8.6 Housing Benefit

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 it is proving to be an incentive for landlords and we intend to promote this new scheme with landlords as we believe that the increased clarity of flat rent levels (determined by size of accommodation and households) could lead to further improvements for landlords and could speed 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.

3.9.8.7 Pound Lane Hostel Development

Pound Lane Hostel is being re-developed by St Mungos with the assistance of CLG funding. The current hostel is made up of dormitories and is in need of modernisation. The decant of tenants has started with approximately half of the residents moving to a hostel in East London and the remainder being moved to local accommodation. The project will 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.

3.9.8.8 New Build and Other Supply Initiatives

Detail regarding these initiatives have been set out under sections 3.3.11 to 3.3.16 of this report.

3.9.9 Supporting the vulnerable

3.9.9.1 Youth Homelessness

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 relatively 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 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 will be working with the Children and Families Department to develop referral protocols to enable greater coordination of services in the short to medium term. We are also exploring options around developing holistic service provision and taking the focus away from homelessness and stressing the need to provide a rounded service package for young people.

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. This 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 and we are reviewing how housing needs services can link into this in order to prevent youth homelessness.

3.9.10 Keeping rough sleeping as near to zero as possible

3.9.10.1 The good work undertaken in partnership with Cricklewood Homeless Concern, 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.

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

3.9.11.1 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 review as part of negotiations around the forthcoming Local Area Agreement and are therefore subject to change. 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.

3.9.12 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.

3.9.12.1 Refurbishment of Mahatma Gandhi House Reception

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.

3.9.12.2 New processes and reduced waiting times

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 repeat customer contact within the service presently and will set targets to reduce this.

3.9.12.3 Improving telephone answering service

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.

3.9.12.4 Extending access channels

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.

3.9.12.5 Improved customer management and information

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.

3.9.13 Improving and developing partnership working and protocols

3.9.13.1 Joint Working on Youth Homelessness

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 five 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 may mean not only providing seamless operational services but also operating new joint commissioning and management arrangements.

3.9.13.2 Employment advice partnership working

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.

3.9.13.3 Hospital and Prison Discharge Protocols

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.

3.10 Risks and Constraints

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

3.10.1 Temporary Accommodation reduction is heavily linked to homeless acceptances. Homelessness prevention and the supply of private sector procurement performance will therefore be 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 and there remain real and substantial risks involved in achieving the revised reduction in temporary accommodation targets over the next few years. In particular the Council's revised action plan places a heavy reliance on there being a readily available supply of private rented properties, but the available supply has actually reduced. In addition, the action plan continues to assume that we will be able to achieve a

successful TA conversion scheme, and any 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.

- 3.10.2 The temporary accommodation reduction action 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.
- 3.10.3 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% of rough sleeping was by recently arrived European Union nationals.
- 3.10.4 Uncertainty generally within the housing market and increasing interest rates place a risk to the strategy, both by potentially creating more homelessness but also because it may affect the supply of private rented sector accommodation.
- 3.10.5 We are placing more emphasis on joint working in this strategy and cooperation around new ways of working will be key if we are to deliver improved services, efficiently.
- 3.10.6 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.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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 a separate payment made for management costs, probably through a grant mechanism. Capped subsidy levels will continue for 2009/10.

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 The development up to 2,000 new affordable homes over the next four years, is largely being funded under the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme.
- 4.5 Officers are reviewing funding availability for the temporary to permanent scheme being developed through the Lloyds TSB led consortium.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Production of a five year homelessness strategy is a requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002, pursuant to section 1(1), 1(3) and 1(4) thereof, which came into force on 31 July 2002 and required local authorities to conduct a review of homelessness within its boundaries and develop a strategy based on the review findings.
- 5.2 The Act requires authorities to carry out consultation with other local or public authorities or voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy. The Act also requires authorities to produce a five year homelessness action plan that must be redrawn every five years. The strategy adopted in 2003 was developed through consultation with a wide range of partners and service users as has the proposed strategy and action plan for the period 2008-13.
- 5.3 The primary legislation governing decisions on homelessness applications is the Housing Act 1996, Part VII which is amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. The Council is required to make decisions on homeless applications within the scope of the legislation, bearing in mind local demand.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Monitoring of sexual orientation or faith amongst those approaching the Council in housing need has recently started to be collected but there is no data set available to inform the development of the strategy. This information will be evaluated when it is available.

- 6.2 There are a disproportionately high number of homeless applications amongst the African and Caribbean communities who make up 18% of the population of the borough, yet represent almost half of the homelessness applications. The reasons for this are not fully understood but are linked to a variety of social, economic and demographic factors, including income levels, family size and pattern of tenure. This strategy aims to use the expertise developed in the area of tenancy protection to decrease homelessness approaches from this group by 5% over the period of the strategy.
- 6.3 The increasingly youthful population of the borough is likely to impact on future housing need and will almost certainly increase demand but may also have other adverse impacts such as over-crowding.

Background Papers

Homelessness Review May 2003

Report to Executive 21 July 2003

Census 2001

DCLG Homelessness Strategy:

'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives'.

Homelessness Review March 2007

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