

*Tackling homelessness in Durham City*

***HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY***

***2003-2008***

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## **Signatories to the Strategy**

Durham City Council  
Community Services

Durham County Council  
Supporting People  
Social Services Department

Northumbria Probation Service, Durham

Durham and Chester-le-Street Primary Care Trust

University Hospital North Durham

DISC - DART

Moving On

Three Rivers Housing Assn

Stonham Housing Association

DASH

Housing Action North East

Connexions

Centrepont

Durham Young People's Centre

# ***1 Introduction, purpose, vision and values***

## **1.1 The background and purpose of the Homelessness Strategy**

The Homelessness Act 2002 required each local authority in England to publish a Homelessness Strategy by the end of July 2003. Local authorities are required to show in their strategies how they intend to:

- prevent homelessness
- ensure that there is enough accommodation available to meet needs for homeless people and those who may become homeless
- and ensure that there is satisfactory support available to meet needs of homeless people and those who may become homeless, and prevent them from becoming homeless again

Additionally, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also asked local authorities to set targets to ensure an end the use of Bed & Breakfast for families with children by March 2004, and to help to reduce levels of rough sleeping. Authorities are also asked to consider setting outcome targets for:

- preventing homelessness
- reduced levels of homelessness relating to the main causes of homelessness in the area
- reduced use of inappropriate temporary accommodation
- appropriate health and educational support for households in temporary accommodation

These expectations have helped to shape Durham City's Homelessness Strategy and have informed the vision which we have set out below.

In developing the strategy it also has to be noted that, as a District Council, Durham City Council has only partial control over the range of services that help homeless people. This is particularly important when considering the crucial role that Durham County Council, mainly through Social Services must play in the delivery of this strategy

## **1.2 How this Strategy was produced**

In line with Government requirements and guidance, the Council carried out a review of the homelessness services, provision, and needs, taking into account the work of all the agencies involved with homeless people in Durham City, to produce a Homelessness Review. This enabled the District Council and its partners in the Steering Group working on the Homelessness Strategy to make some conclusions about the areas which need to be

improved and developed, in order to make an impact on the scale of homelessness in the District and the way in which homelessness is dealt with.

The work which contributed to the Review was carried out by Paul Keenan, with Sheila Spencer and Ken Davies from Peter Fletcher Associates, working with staff from the housing service. Needs analysis was built upon the work done across all clients groups and across all agencies to inform the Supporting People Shadow Strategy for County Durham. Additional material was collected for the Homelessness Review, making use of more up-to-date data, a number of strategic plans and documents published after the Shadow Strategy was submitted, and data from agencies working in the area.

A half day consultation event to inform the Review was held for stakeholders, attended by around 19 people from 15 organisations, and several more agencies contributed information and comments. The 2<sup>nd</sup> consultation day involved around 30 people from 17 organisations (including two other district councils in Durham), as well as the Leader of Durham City Council and councillor holding the Housing portfolio. The Review was agreed at this event, and participants then helped to shape the Strategy. A Steering Group of around 12 individuals was formed to steer the last stages of the Review, and this Group agreed the Strategy, which was then submitted for approval to the Leader and Housing portfolio holder. Formal approval will be given by the Council at its Cabinet meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

Service users were consulted through discussion facilitated by DASH and Moving On, the Women's Refuge, and other agencies.

### **1.3 Vision and values**

The vision for the Homelessness Strategy can be summed up as:

***All partner agencies in Durham City will develop effective joint work which aims to prevent homelessness, and to assist people into appropriate housing to meet their needs and aspirations.***

Our values are:

- ◆ A striving for excellence in all services being delivered to homeless people in Durham City
- ◆ A commitment to continuously improve our services and to encourage innovation

- ◆ To develop services based on strong partnerships which connect local resources at the point of delivery
- ◆ To empower homeless people to make the most of the opportunities offered by the district and within the County
- ◆ Service delivery must be co-ordinated, focused on individual needs, and informed by the views of service users, in order to provide the best outcomes for homeless people

## **2 Strategy objectives**

### **2.1 Strategic objectives**

The consultation resulted in the following strategic objectives for the Homelessness Strategy:

1. To provide an excellent homeless service which aims to be needs-led
2. To enable anyone with a housing problem to be able to access appropriate, high quality, housing advice services and good information about how to resolve their problem
3. To develop and better co-ordinate the prevention work that is already done in Durham City
4. To set realistic targets for eliminating the use of B&B for all client groups, and expand the provision of emergency and appropriate temporary accommodation provided locally for both priority and non-priority homeless people
5. To ensure that homeless people can access permanent accommodation with appropriate support through their first approach for help
6. To allow support to be offered to all homeless people
7. To develop effective and robust links between agencies working with homeless people in Durham City and with other districts in County Durham, and together to identify resources (including shared resources) to deliver this plan

These objectives are developed further in section 5 of the Strategy.

### **2.2 Target outcomes**

In "Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness" (Homelessness Directorate, April 2003), the Government asked local authorities to set targets to help it to end the use of B&B for families with children by March 2004, and to continue to reduce the level of rough sleeping. It was suggested that each authority set at least one target outcome to match their primary cause of homelessness. We have applied this approach to the other main causes of homelessness. The following priorities and targets have been agreed for Durham City:

**B&B:** B&B is not used by Durham City Council as temporary accommodation for families with children or other households in priority need, but there is some use of B&B for single people and others who are referred by other agencies or who book themselves in. Some of these single people may be in priority need.

**Target:** Identify individual homeless households making use of B&B and develop a plan to reduce the need for B&B for people who are from Durham City, starting in **October 2003**

**Rough Sleeping:** There have been no rough sleeper counts in the district. A regular count will be required. There is anecdotal and documentary evidence of rough sleeping but it is not likely to be large numbers on any night, and it may occur in other areas where homeless people have gone to find temporary accommodation.

There is a proposal to develop a county-wide system of collecting data on homelessness enquiries, perhaps by extending the Centrepoint system which currently collects data on young homelessness. Durham City Council is committed to being part of this development. Extending this system would help to collect information about the numbers of people sleeping rough, not only on the streets but also in other places.

**Target:** We will endeavour to collect information about the scale of rough sleeping – sleeping in the streets, staying in a structure which cannot be called a home, and staying briefly on friends' floors etc – through the county-wide monitoring scheme to start in **November 2003**.

#### **Other targets for main causes of homelessness in Durham City:**

##### **Relationship breakdowns (violent and non-violent):**

**Target:** For all front-line staff working in Durham City to have had training on domestic violence **by the end of 2003**, and to develop stronger links with the Domestic Violence Forum

##### **Eviction from friends or relatives, and parental evictions for young people**

**Target:** Explore options for developing a mediation service to reduce the number of homeless applications from people being asked to leave by friends or family, investigating the possibility of working with other County Durham authorities and exploring options for funding **during 2004**

##### **Loss of assured shorthold tenancy**

**Target:** Identify the causes of loss of tenancies, and through the better collection of information identify an action plan to prevent homelessness in this area **during 2004**

## **Leaving institution (care, prison, hospital)**

**Target:** Develop relationships with care and institutions providers in order to better understand why homelessness occurs at the end of a stay, and identify ways of preventing homelessness, including protocols for working more effectively between agencies, **during 2004**

### ***3 Working in partnership***

The Homeless Strategy is intended to be delivered through a partnership between the council, the voluntary and private sectors, and other statutory agencies. Durham City is rich in voluntary agencies, and the City is growing and attracting more people and investment into the district.

The council is a small organisation with a wide span of responsibilities. The local services can work together and achieve excellent services. Together we can help to reduce the number of people becoming homeless in Durham, reduce social exclusion, increase the opportunities for successful rehousing, and increase the enjoyment of a booming city. This can be achieved not only through improving access to housing, but also through efforts to enhance people's access to education, health, training and employment.

We will make effective strategic links to improve the support for individual households, and improve access to services. The details of how we intend to achieve this are set out later in Section 5.

## **4     *Executive summary of the Homelessness Review***

### **4.1   The scale and nature of homelessness in Durham City**

Durham City has a small number of homeless applications each year, similar to the number received by other County Durham authorities. In 2002/3, 184 applications were made, and 99 of these were accepted as in priority need and owed a duty by the Council. There is a low rate of decisions that applicants are not homeless or are intentionally homeless, compared to neighbouring authorities, but a higher rate of decisions that applicants are non-priority. However, Centrepoin't's collection of all enquiries for homeless people aged 25 and under shows that 122 young people from Durham City sought help from one or more agencies; this figure is larger than the number of young homeless people approaching the Council for help. This, and other data collected during the Review, leads to the conclusion that homeless people are not always seeking help from the Council or making a homeless application.

It is not possible to give a figure of the number of people aged above 25 who are homeless or seek help with a housing problem in Durham City, but the proposal to establish a county-wide scheme to collect data for all age groups will help in the future.

The major causes of homelessness amongst those who do approach the Council are:

- Family disputes - young single people or young families being asked to leave by their parents or other relatives
- Domestic violence
- Non-violent relationship breakdown
- Loss of assured shorthold tenancies
- Leaving care, hospital, or prison

### **4.2   User and stakeholder views**

**Users** were consulted through discussions at the places where temporary accommodation is provided and through discussions with service users of other agencies. The main points made by users were:

- Women staying in the refuge were happy with the homeless service received from the council but were concerned about being isolated when they were rehoused
- Most users thought that staff in all agencies were friendly and tried to be helpful
- More information and advertising was needed

- Help was needed to access the private rented sector, which is expensive and difficult for people with low incomes to get into
- People wanted to live near their family or near the city centre
- Help with getting furniture could make a difference - the furniture scheme was not well known about yet
- People were willing to share
- The growth of tourism in the city was having an adverse effect on homeless people

**Stakeholders** attended a consultation event in April, and also fed in their views through other meetings and visits. The main points made by stakeholders were:

- Everyone gets an interview, but homeless staff are not specialists and cannot keep up with the changes in the law, policies, procedures, and provision
- Assessments of vulnerable people are not given enough time or attention
- Provision (floating support, prevention services, and furnished tenancies) is improving in Durham but is inadequate to meet demand
- Prevention work has too low a priority
- Links between agencies, particularly housing, social services and health and prison staff, are not good enough to prevent people becoming homeless when they are discharged from hospital or leave care or prison
- There is insufficient temporary and supported accommodation in Durham
- It is not easy for homeless people to access council, Housing Association, or private rented housing in the city centre
- Although there is a good number of agencies working with homeless people in Durham, this does not link into a network which works effectively together at the moment

### **4.3 The Durham City Council Homelessness Service**

The review found that the City Council relied on generic housing staff to cover the homelessness service as well as manage housing estates. The increasing complexity of working with other agencies and providing advice and casework is stretching the current small staff team too far. During the review, and following a review of casework, the council initiated action to improve the service offered to homeless people, through improvements to:

- Decision-making and casework recording
- The Homeless Application Form
- Standard letters

In addition, a booklet is being prepared for housing staff, leaflets and booklets for homeless applicants are being prepared, and the training requirements of Housing Officers are being considered.

Further improvements to the advice and assessment of needs will rely on a review of the staffing structure, and closer co-operation with local advice and support agencies.

#### **4.4 Advice services**

There is a wide range of advice services in the City, but co-ordination and dissemination of information is weak. There are concerns that housing advice may not be easily available to all those needing advice and help with finding appropriate housing.

Agencies in Durham need to work together to improve information available to the public about finding accommodation and resolving housing problems.

#### **4.5 Preventative Services**

There are some examples of very good practice in preventative work, particularly the joint reviews for tenants at risk of possession proceedings, and the growing use of furnished tenancies to support new tenants.

There is no strategy for preventative work, and this must be developed, particularly within the Council. The network of local agencies provide a number of opportunities to do more preventative work – through disseminating information, identifying people at risk, and providing educational and training resources.

#### **4.6 Demand for Temporary Accommodation**

Homeless families and other priority applicants do not appear to need more temporary accommodation; however, although the accommodation is not always full, it is not always suitable for applicants needing additional management input or support.

The Review found that the shortage of emergency and temporary accommodation forces some homeless people to leave the district. This places further strain on families and networks of support, and it also diminishes their ability to use other services – such as their own GP, training, and other support services.

Every agency in the city stressed the problems caused by the lack of appropriate temporary accommodation for single people. Every agency believes there is need for an accommodation project that can respond at any time of day and provide support for a short time – say up to six months.

The numbers of people going outside the district give an indication of unmet need, but the numbers of additional units needed for singles and childless households needs further research. The review found 80 people in the last year being found temporary accommodation outside the district, with a larger number of referrals which did not result in accommodation being provided. Conversely, some temporary accommodation based in Durham City is used to house people from other districts in the county, and if emergency accommodation was provided in those places, the quantity of new provision needed would go down.

#### **4.7 Access to permanent housing**

Most homeless applicants who are accepted as in priority need are rehoused into council accommodation, with only 6% of lets of Housing Association tenancies going to homeless households in priority need.

The City of Durham is a booming housing market and homeless people are often unable to compete in the private sector. The villages outside the City are not quite so pressurised, but the demand from commuters into the city is increasing. The district needs to consider creating a rent guarantee/bond scheme to increase options for homeless people by helping them to access the private rented sector.

The provision of permanent housing by Housing Associations needs to be improved. There is little or no co-ordination, and the homeless service and voluntary agencies work separately with each association.

Council housing will remain the main source of permanent rehousing for homeless people. The council has improved allocations policies and procedures in recent years and more homeless people are being housed, but waiting times for non-priority homeless applicants have lengthened because of greater demand.

The Strategy will require a review of current stock and development strategies to ensure an improving balance and distribution of the right type of houses and flats. The Homelessness Strategy needs to inform the strategic development of housing provision in the future. The Council and its partners in this Strategy should make sure that they contribute to the debate about meeting housing need.

#### **4.8 Support**

Provision of floating support has increased in Durham City, so that there are now around 84 units of support and 100 packages of furniture available in the city. Demand for the Stonham floating support scheme for people with

substance misuse problems is likely to outstrip supply (5 units shared with Chester-le-Street).

#### **4.9 Strategic and operational links**

The Review of homelessness in Durham City found a network of agencies working hard to try and assist homeless people. There are a number of innovative and excellent pieces of work, and organisations have begun to come together to discuss homelessness, particularly in relation to young people.

There are, however, weaknesses in how organisations work together, both at operational level and at the strategic level. Services are poorly co-ordinated, and each agency has only partial information on the policies and services of other agencies. Some work on individual cases is resolved unsatisfactorily because information is not shared effectively, or help is sought only at the last minute, or because there are differences between agencies in interpretation. Strategic planning does not always include all the organisations with knowledge or responsibility for the client group, and there is little joint commissioning as yet.

There is a need to develop a common understanding of the ways in which agencies respond to homelessness, a clear set of shared objectives, and a shared vision. Staff from all the key statutory agencies need to be involved, as well as those from voluntary sector agencies, and work needs to be developed between the County Durham districts as well as within the Durham City area.

## **5     *Specific objectives***

### **5.1   Homelessness services**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Strategic Objective is: To provide an excellent homeless service which aims to be needs-led

The review of homelessness services revealed that while there is a strong commitment by senior managers, there is a lack of dedicated staff resources within the City Council to deal with homelessness, and staff are currently struggling to comply with the legislation and to make effective links with other agencies. There is also a strong presence of voluntary agencies working with homeless people in Durham, with good links with the City Council both through casework and the Youth Accommodation Forum.

Most decisions are made quickly by housing management staff, but case recording did not provide evidence of good decision-making, and there were concerns about whether people who may have been in priority need were being provided with temporary accommodation when it was needed, that threatened homelessness is responded to in time, and that people not in priority need had their needs fully assessed.

A number of aspects of the homeless service were already being addressed while the Homelessness Review was being completed, but a number of areas remain and are included in the Strategy. There is inevitably a strong crossover of specific actions proposed under later headings, particularly improving advice and information, preventing homelessness, and developing strategic links.

The aim for this aspect of work is to develop excellent homelessness services which are easily accessible and responsive, and which are based on strong networking arrangements between agencies.

#### **Specific actions:**

To arrive at this vision for homelessness services, we will

- Improve the council's homelessness service by developing a specialist homelessness function amongst housing management teams, following consultation with other agencies, and review the geographical split of the Claypath and Meadowfield offices
- Discuss the definitions of priority need and exclusions, aiming for a common understanding between all agencies
- Provide additional training for housing management staff dealing with homelessness

- Introduce case monitoring and supervision, to ensure consistency, compliance with the law, and appropriate and timely responses to complex cases
- Develop procedures for assessing housing and support needs for all homeless applicants, including those not in priority need and those who are intentionally homeless, and collect this information to help planning and commissioning services
- Commence rough sleeper counts on an annual basis, and collect more information about the nature and scale of people sleeping in places other than their own home

## 5.2 Improving advice and information

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Objective is: To enable anyone with a housing problem to be able to access appropriate, high quality, housing advice services and good information about how to resolve their problem

The Council, working together with other agencies, will ensure that access to housing advice is available for anyone seeking help within the city. The Homelessness Review concluded that there is a wide range of advice services in the City, but co-ordination and dissemination of information is poor. There needs to be much more information about how to get advice for people with housing problems, and more emphasis put on encouraging people to make contact with the agencies providing housing and other advice in the City. Council staff need to have more resources - both knowledge and up-to-date information about all sectors - in order to give better housing advice, which in turn may reduce the number of people needing to approach the Council as homeless. Better co-ordination with other agencies could help to ensure that access to housing advice and information is as easy as possible, and that solutions are more likely to be found for the housing problems of all types of household, both priority and non-priority.

### Specific actions:

To achieve this aim, we will:

- Work together to co-ordinate housing advice services, share information, and ensure better communication, ensure that housing advice is available for all those who need it, and identify any gaps and overlaps in coverage
- Work towards all agencies providing housing advice in Durham City achieving a Charter Mark
- Record advice-only cases dealt with at Council offices

- Provide more information for housing officers on options for rehousing, private rented sector law and provision, and other agencies which can help with specific problems
- Produce information on housing advice and housing options, in a variety of forms and formats, developed by agencies working together, to be updated regularly
- Revise the Council website to give advice as well as contact points for housing advice agencies and update this information regularly
- Disseminate information widely

### 5.3 Preventing homelessness

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Objective is: To develop and better co-ordinate the prevention work that is already done in Durham City

There are some examples of very good practice in preventative work, particularly the joint reviews between housing management and Revenues staff for council tenants at risk of possession proceedings. There is also growing use of furnished tenancies to support new tenants. However, there is no strategy for prevention, and there was felt by other agencies to be little emphasis put on this aspect of the Council's work, other than in respect of council rent arrears. The network of local agencies provides a number of opportunities to do more preventative work, jointly and separately, and agencies were keen to build upon recent developments such as links between homelessness agencies and schools and colleges.

The Council's preventative approach needs to be extended to tenants in other sectors, and more could be done to prevent the loss of homes as a result of disputes within families or between neighbours. Some of the proposed approaches could best be developed in conjunction with other agencies and with other councils in County Durham, some of which are also considering setting up mediation schemes, for example. Mediation can at the very least help to give people better information about the options and what choices there are if you become homeless.

A key area of difficulty identified in the Homelessness Review is the crisis nature of many discharges from institutions. This is particularly relevant in Durham City which has several prisons located in the districts and no specific accommodation for people leaving those institutions. Stronger relationships and systems need to be developed with Social Services, hospital, and Probation / YOT staff, so that homeless applications for people leaving institutions become the exception. Where a homeless application is the only option, this should ideally happen in such a way that housing staff are best able to find an appropriate solution, that is, with adequate notice, full knowledge of needs and risks, and explicit arrangements for providing support and risk management.

Repeat homelessness (people becoming homeless again after making a previous application) is not currently measured by the City Council, but can be identified from the Centrepoin data collected for agencies working with young homeless people. The county-wide monitoring system will help to identify repeat applications as well as those who approach more than one agency or whose homelessness is not resolved after they first seek help. The Council will need to work with its partners to identify the main reasons for homelessness recurring, and to begin to develop responses which aim to prevent people coming back for help, either after rehousing, or because a solution to their problems was not found. All agencies need also to ensure that they record successes in preventing homelessness.

Better information, advice, and appropriate support will also help to prevent homelessness.

**Specific actions:**

To achieve the aim set out above, we will:

- Develop protocols for young people including those leaving care, people leaving hospital and prison
- Ensure that there is a up-to-date protocol for rehousing sex offenders, and that it is publicised to all agencies working with this group
- Give higher profile to prevention work, including work to prevent loss of council homes, and links to Housing Benefit, and extend this to RSLs
- Identify the causes of loss of tenancies across all tenures, and through the better collection of information, identify an action plan to prevent homelessness in this area
- Develop trigger mechanisms to help prevent tenants getting into serious rent arrears, and publicise help available on benefits and budgeting
- Explore options for developing a mediation scheme to prevent loss of home through neighbour disputes and parental eviction, building on work done by DART and Connexions
- For all front-line staff working in Durham City to have had training on domestic violence, and to develop stronger links with the Domestic Violence Forum
- Develop the existing education work with local schools
- Identify repeat homeless applications and those most at risk of loss of their home, and target resources towards them (e.g. support)
- Identify applications and requests for help where homelessness has been prevented

## 5.4 Improving provision of temporary accommodation in line with needs

The 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Objective is: To set realistic targets for eliminating the use of B&B for all client groups, and expand the provision of emergency and appropriate temporary accommodation provided locally for both priority and non-priority homeless people

The Review showed that there is sufficient temporary accommodation for families in Durham. There are problems caused by the lack of appropriate temporary accommodation for other groups, both for those not in priority need and for some people who are in priority need.

A significant number of people go each year from Durham to Tyneside, Wearside, or elsewhere in County Durham, usually not from choice. Agencies believe there is need for an accommodation project that can respond at any time of day and provide support for a short time for single homeless people who are not in priority need. There is a need for both emergency accommodation and longer term supported accommodation which helps people gain skills to manage on their own and to access permanent accommodation.

There is a need for further research into the numbers requiring temporary accommodation, since there is currently no way to avoid counting each time a person who seeks help from several different agencies across the region. The county-wide scheme proposed by the Supporting People Core Strategy Development Group to assess housing and support needs across the county and across all ages will be considerable help towards this, as will the potential development of a regional bed-finding scheme. Durham City Council will take part in developing both these initiatives, since these are likely to provide assistance in measuring and resolving the problems of finding sufficient temporary accommodation for people who wish to stay in the local area. The initiatives may also lead to jointly commissioning additional temporary accommodation provision, particularly key for young people leaving care, and people with substance misuse problems.

The existing temporary accommodation provided by the Council is increasingly accommodating both families and single people with multiple needs, and a conclusion drawn in the Review is that additional management support needs to be provided for this accommodation, as well as support for those with multiple needs.

Homeless people from Durham do stay in B&B, but its use and which agencies make referrals to B&B remains slightly confused. There is little use of this type of resource for families with children, but its use for other vulnerable households is unclear. Included in the Strategy, therefore, is a

proposal to work with other agencies to better identify who is making referrals and who is going into B&B.

Agencies including the council identified that the length of stay in some temporary accommodation is a problem, since it is contributing to the accommodation becoming blocked up. To address this, the council will work with other agencies to investigate where the blockages are occurring, as a first step to reducing the length of stay, and to increasing the throughput of residents.

A key area for improvement is in developing a better understanding and co-ordination of the current referral mechanisms for temporary housing. Currently this results in a number of agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sector independently of each other making use of a range of accommodation across Tyneside, Wearside, Co Durham and Darlington.

**Specific actions:**

To achieve the objective set out here, we will:

- Seek to provide additional council temporary accommodation, and supported temporary accommodation within the area
- Increase management and support provision at the council's temporary accommodation
- Improve contact between temporary / supported accommodation providers so as to collect better information, resolve problems with rehousing more quickly, improve co-ordination, and identify need for additional provision
- Together, better assess the need for appropriate temporary accommodation, and to develop additional provision for
  - young people (including young people leaving care)
  - people with problems of substance misuse
  - other single people and couples (particularly short stay accommodation)
- Establish which agencies refer clients to B&B, both in and outside Durham, and develop actions to reduce the use of B&B
- Investigate blockages in rehousing homeless people from temporary accommodation, and develop a plan to reduce length of stay in all the temporary accommodation
- Work with other County Durham authorities to develop facilities to meet needs across the County

## 5.5 Access to permanent accommodation

The 5<sup>th</sup> Strategic Objective is: To ensure that homeless people can access permanent accommodation with appropriate support through their first approach for help

The Review noted that the City of Durham is a booming housing market. Demand from students, commuters, and tourists for housing in the private sector is increasing, and homeless people are unable to compete. The council will, with other partners, investigate the development of a deposit scheme to improve access to the private rented sector. Access to Housing Association accommodation for homeless people is not well co-ordinated, and an additional barrier for under 18s has been introduced by one of the local Associations, in the form of a rent guarantor who is in work and has a minimum of £1000 in savings.

Council housing is likely to remain the main source of permanent rehousing for homeless people in Durham. The Council has recently reviewed its allocations policies and improved access for young people and those living outside the city boundaries, but further thought needs to be given to speeding up access for people accepted as homeless, particularly those staying in one of the voluntary sector hostels. Improved access to permanent housing is needed for people who are leaving institutions, particularly offenders, for whom a stable base is a key part of reducing the chances of re-offending.

The application of a date order scheme for allocating introductory tenancies to homeless applicants needs to be reviewed. As a result of a recent court decision elsewhere in the country, the Council needs to be able to demonstrate that it gives homeless applicants both choice and "reasonable preference". Reviewing the system for allocating properties to homeless applicants may also allow the council to find increased access to housing closer to the city centre, shorter stays in temporary accommodation, and ways of reducing the use of temporary accommodation.

### **Specific actions:**

To achieve this objective, we will:

- Plan better move-on systems from hostels
- Review date order system for allocating introductory tenancies to homeless applicants
- Discuss with Probation how more offenders can be assisted into permanent accommodation
- Review arrangements for nominations to RSLs for priority and non-priority applicants, and develop better links with RSLs
- Discuss the requirement for a rent guarantor for under 18s with Three Rivers HA

- Monitor where homeless applicants are rehoused, to aim for wider choice
- Develop rent deposit scheme to improve access to the private rented sector
- Investigate the development of a central point for all applicants for social rented housing
- Seek to engage the University of Durham in discussions about their impact on the housing market in Durham City

## 5.6 Developing the provision of support

The 6<sup>th</sup> Strategic Objective is: To allow support to be offered to all homeless people

There has been a significant increase in the number of people being supported through floating support in Durham City, as a result of the Supporting People initiative. Agencies across Durham feel that this is already beginning to make a notable difference and is helping people to maintain their tenancies, and probably reducing tenancy turnover in council stock, although the schemes are too new to make any major conclusions.

Additional need for support was identified, particularly for those rehoused outside the city centre. Help to build connections in the area is very important, and this could be discussed with other agencies providing support and community development work in villages in Durham.

### **Specific actions:**

To achieve this objective, we will:

- Identify the need for additional floating support, especially for those rehoused outside the city centre
- Develop Service Level Agreements between agencies
- Develop housing-related support across all tenures
- Develop exit plans for all support packages
- Aim to be able to offer support to all homeless applicants
- Monitor outcomes of support provision

## 5.7 Developing strategic and operational links

The 7<sup>th</sup> Strategic Objective is: To develop effective and robust links between agencies working with homeless people in Durham City, and together to identify resources (including shared resources) to deliver this plan:

The Homelessness Review identified that strategic links between agencies in the city were in need of some strengthening. Although there are several examples of creative and successful partnerships, there has been a lack of a network and no shared set of objectives and common targets. Agencies are working hard to rectify this, through the Youth Accommodation Forum, the County Durham Youth Homelessness Partnership, and the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. It has, however, been difficult to engage some agencies in both of those groups, notably the criminal justice agencies, and some of the RSLs.

There are also no regular meeting between senior staff in key agencies, and most senior managers do not appear to know their opposite numbers in other organisations covering the same area. Previous initiatives such as the Supporting People programme have had some success in stimulating joint work in the field of supported housing, and several new initiatives are joining together agencies such as housing and Social Services, to look at homelessness across the county, and a county-wide approach to tackling substance misuse.

There is, however, some work to be done to develop partnership working between agencies working in Durham City, and this requires consistent and persistent attention to ensure it results in tangible results, in relation to discussions about operational matters as well as about strategic developments and joint planning.

In addition, there needs to be some attention paid to seeking homeless people's views, and to ensuring that homelessness is taken into account and influences other strategic plans and strategies operating in Durham City.

### **Specific actions:**

To achieve this objective, we will:

- Develop more effective partnership working and more consistent communication between agencies
- Develop systems for obtaining regular feedback from service users
- Develop better links with Social Services, at strategic level and at casework level
- Improve communication with hospitals and other health services

- Ensure that the Police, Probation, Youth Offending Service, and Domestic Violence Forum are active partners in discussions about homelessness
- Ensure Durham City is represented at county-wide discussions which impact on homelessness, and contribute to the development of a county-wide forum and county-wide initiatives
- Broaden the Youth Accommodation Forum to cover all ages of homeless people
- Ensure that homelessness and prevention becomes a feature of other strategic plans and groups in Durham City
- Make a link between homelessness and developments steered by the Supporting People Strategy

## ***6 Implementation action plan***

An implementation action plan is to be developed to translate the actions set out in Section 5 into a series of steps, with clear agreement over who is to lead on each action, and a timetable for completing each step. The Plan will be developed within a month of the Strategy being finalised.

## ***7 Resourcing the Strategy***

Durham City Council will take the lead role in ensuring that the Action Plan is adhered to and that the Strategy is reviewed annually, alongside the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group.

In order to aid implementation the Strategy needs to be adequately resourced.

All partners have shown a commitment to working with other agencies in order to increase and make the most efficient and effective use of resources, and to identify any overlaps or duplication of services. We will consider reviewing staffing resources from areas of duplication/overlapping of advice/service provision and seek to fill gaps in other areas of advice or service provision. Partners will also adopt the help of other agencies or local community groups etc. to further enhance services to homeless people.

The Implementation Group will endeavour to identify sources of internal and external funding to finance new schemes/projects and be creative in looking for resources from all other agencies by identifying links with other strategies.

## **8 *Performance Management and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation***

The following arrangements will ensure that progress on the Implementation Action Plan is monitored, problems discussed and resolved, and learning from new activities is shared.

The City Council will chair a multi-agency sub group of the Homelessness Forum, currently called the Steering Group, now to be called the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group. This group will meet regularly and ensure progress is being made, and ensure reports and reviews are circulated and discussed.

- There will be an annual review of the whole Strategy by the Homelessness Forum, published as an annual report and update for the strategy
- There will be a brief progress report to each meeting of the Homelessness Forum and to other bodies such as county-wide forums, and the Durham City Strategic Partnership

## ***Appendix One***

### **Membership of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (as at 30.7.03)**

Durham City Council  
Community Services

Paul Koniszewski  
Lynne Boyd

Durham County Council  
Supporting People  
Social Services Department

Danny Michalowicz  
David Shipman

Northumbria Probation Service, Durham

Durham and Chester-le-Street Primary Care Trust  
Dr Tricia Cresswell

University Hospital North Durham

DART

Clare McCreanor

Moving On

Becks Lippe

Three Rivers Housing Assn

Chris Reed

Stonham Housing Association

Isobel Wilkinson

DASH

Sean McDonnell

Housing Action North East

John Rogers

Connexions

Alan Lockyear

Centrepoint

Philippa Scott