

Final Report of
Homelessness in the Lancaster
District Task Group

Lancaster City Council

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1. Foreword

Homelessness has become a focal point for the Government in recent years, illustrated by the publication of its Homelessness Act 2002 which gave guidance to all Local Authorities on how to tackle homelessness and requirements for each Authority to draft their own strategy.

This task group was first established to investigate problems that had been highlighted to Overview and Scrutiny in other areas of its work. Previous Task Groups had raised concerns surrounding the homelessness in the District and the Committee clearly saw the need for this area to have some in-depth investigation. It provides a good example of where Councillors have created a focus on an area that they feel is important. Their work has often revealed more questions than answers - but this report offers a way forward for our Council.

I would like to thank the Councillors and Officers involved in the Homelessness Task Group for their thorough research and recommendations on this issue over the past year. They have spent a lot of time visiting Homeless Agencies in action and considered evidence from agency workers and service users to find out how we could do things better.

I hope that this work will result in a much improved service which is sustainable for many years to come.

**Councillor Stuart Langhorn
Chairman
Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2006/07**

2. Introduction

The Task Group was originally established in response to an exceptionally high level of homeless acceptances compared to other Districts in Lancashire and the North West and the consequent high budgetary requirements for Bed & Breakfast provision. However, during the life of the Task Group, officers within the 'Homelessness' section of Health and Strategic Housing have reduced that budget significantly (from £185k to £25k).

Nevertheless, the Task Group has discovered that young people and single adults within the Lancaster District remain the most vulnerable groups, and the recommendations of the Task Group reflect this.

The statistics show that tenants in the private rented sector are most vulnerable to loss of tenancy (for a number of reasons), and this is where young people and single adults have historically been directed.

Ironically, it is work by the Home Support Unit, working with vulnerable tenants in the West End of Morecambe, which has uncovered single adults and young people in the private rented sector who have not been receiving any, or at best, inadequate support from the relevant support agencies.

The recommendations of the Task Group, therefore, focus on the need for adequate support for vulnerable tenants, with the emphasis firmly on PREVENTION.

It is this theme of PREVENTION that the Task Group sees as part of the 'Spend to Save' initiatives which cuts across all aspects of budgetary considerations. Where prevention is NOT the outcome, then funding ought to be reviewed.

I am, therefore, privileged to introduce this valuable piece of work. In particular I would like to thank Jon Stark from Democratic Services for all the research and hard work in preparing the various drafts of this report and organising the various meetings with service users. I would also like to thank all the members of the Task Group who have indulged me over the past six months.

**Cllr Peter Robinson
Chairman
Homelessness Task Group**

3. Summary of Recommendations

To assist in formulating its recommendations, The Task Group has invited contributions from a variety of homeless agencies across the District, consulted with a number of homeless service users in person, evaluated guidance from central Government policy and assessed the effectiveness of other Authorities' methods in tackling the issue. Based on the evidence received by the Task Group, this report focuses on creating what the Task Group believe are acceptable and feasible means of addressing the problem of Homelessness in the District.

Recommendation 1

That the allocation to the Homeless Prevention Fund be increased to a minimum of £15,000 for 2007/08 to ensure the positive initiatives and savings made thus far are expanded upon for the future.

Recommendation 2

(a) That negotiation takes place with local secondary schools and homeless agencies to establish a schools' road show scheme to educate children on the need to maintain family cohesion, educate on life skills and highlight the pitfalls that can lead to homelessness

(b) That this initiative be reviewed periodically.

Recommendation 3

That the availability of a funding source to provide staffing resources at the Portland Street emergency shelter facility be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 4

That the Task Group endorses the City Council's Domestic Violence Strategy, and the proposed measures contained within, and supports the continuing development of the Sanctuary Scheme by Strategic Housing.

Recommendation 5

That the possibility of establishing a permanent sub-group to the local Homelessness Forum, consisting entirely of service users, be investigated with a view to developing further homeless prevention strategies.

Recommendation 6

That improvement in multi-agency monitoring systems to ensure homeless statistics are recorded more accurately and avoid the occurrence of individuals being recorded more than once be sought as a priority.

Recommendation 7

That the Homelessness Task Group recommends the Grants Task Group note their work, with particular reference to the theme of prevention, when reviewing Service Level Agreements and that subsequently the findings of the Grants Task Group be incorporated into future monitoring of Homeless Service Level Agreements with associated agencies.

Recommendation 8

That the City Council engage with the Local Strategic Partnership to establish how Second Homes Funding can be more effectively used to support issues surrounding homelessness in the District, such as preventative initiatives and projects addressing issues of youth homelessness.

Recommendation 9

That all savings relevant to homeless services made by Health and Strategic Housing be diverted back into homeless prevention initiatives.

Recommendation 10

That additional funding of £25,000 be made available for support services covering tenancy retention and support for vulnerable people who may be at risk of eviction to help them engage with their communities through training and employment.

Recommendation 11

That clear and concise advice be delivered to prospective affordable housing developers on the strategic context for location and volume and that strict 'affordability' criteria be adhered to within the context of the Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 12

That the provision of temporary supported accommodation for young people and single adults be made a top housing priority and options for establishing additional units be thoroughly investigated.

Recommendation 13

That the Task Group endorse a meeting between Andrew Farrell of YMCA England, Andrew Dobson, the City Council's Head of Planning Services and Stephen Matthews, Project Director for the Neighbourhoods Task Force, in order to discuss the potential use of Section 106 agreements to secure funds to increase 'move-on' accommodation across the District, in context of the City Council's Housing Strategy.

4. Role of the Homelessness Task Group

Terms of Reference

The group worked to the following terms of reference:

- 1) To understand and review the Council's performance with regard to homelessness, particularly with regard to rough sleeping and young peoples' issues, across the District in comparison with other Lancashire Districts and national figures.
- 2) To consider what actions and measures could be taken in order to improve the situation in this area.
- 3) To establish current Council practice in the processing of accommodation applications and how this may differ from that carried out by neighbouring authorities, including the use of Service Level Agreements with homeless agencies.
- 4) To investigate the relationship between homelessness and domestic violence in the Lancaster District.
- 5) To make evidence based recommendations as may be appropriate regarding the above.

Membership of the Task Group

The Task Group comprises of Councillors Peter Robinson (Chairman), Ken Brown, Rebekah Gerrard, Mike Greenall, Joyce Pritchard, Sylvia Rogerson, John Whitelegg and Rob Smith who replaced John Gilbert from the fourth meeting onwards. The Group was supported by Suzanne Lodge, Head of Health and Strategic Housing Services, Patricia Preston, Principal Homelessness Officer and Jon Stark, Democratic Support Officer.

The group gratefully acknowledges the contributions and evidence freely given by:

- Suzanne Lodge, Head of Health and Strategic Housing, Lancaster City Council
- Patricia Preston Principal Homelessness Officer, Health and Strategic Housing Services, Lancaster City Council
- Sheelagh O'Brien, Housing Policy Officer, Neighbourhood Task Force
- Peter Loker, Corporate Director (Community Services), Lancaster City Council
- Stephen Matthews, Project Director, Neighbourhood Task Force, Lancaster City Council
- Richard Mason, Head of Revenues Services, Lancaster City Council

- Viv Lamb, Benefits and Customer Services Manager, Lancaster City Council
- Richard Tulej, Head of Corporate Strategy, Lancaster City Council
- Michael Dagger, Principal Private Housing Officer, Lancaster City Council
- Mike Fisher, Lancaster & District Chamber of Trade and Commerce
- Phil McGrath, General Secretary of Lancaster and District YMCA
- Andrew Farrell, YMCA England
- Catherine Layfield, Project Manager, 2A High Street Project, Adactus Housing Association
- Alistair Sinclair, Project Manager, Inward House Project
- Sarah Edwards, Project Manager, Inward House Project
- Simon Drummond-Hay, Northern Affordable Homes Limited
- Dr Ruthanna Barnett, Co-ordinator, Lancaster & District Women's Aid
- Antonia Halloran-Lavelle, Manager, Lancaster & District Women's Aid
- Sue Edwards, Project Manager, Signposts
- Father Paul Payton, Assistant Curate, Lancaster Priory with St. George
- Jo Drew, Project Worker, The Mustard Seed, Priory Hall

Timetable of Meetings

Date of Meeting	Evidence Provider	Issues scrutinised
5 th June 2006	Patricia Preston	Briefing on current situation of the Council's Homeless Services and Performance
29 th June 2006	Patricia Preston	Consideration of Homelessness Statistics throughout England
4 th September 2006	Phil McGrath Stephen Matthews	Presentation on the work of Lancaster and District YMCA and the issues affecting young people across the District Briefing on Regeneration, the Private Rented Sector and tackling homelessness in the Lancaster District
10 th October 2006	Alistair Sinclair Sarah Edwards	Presentation on resources available for drug and alcohol dependency across the Lancaster District
19 th December 2006	Simon Drummond-Hay	Presentation on affordable housing issues and homelessness Consideration of recommendations made to be included in the final report
11 th January 2007	Dr Ruthanna Barnett Richard Mason and Viv Lamb	Presentation on the relationship between Domestic Violence and Homelessness in the Lancaster District. Briefing note detailing the provisions of Housing Benefit for under 25-year olds, Discretionary Housing Payments and direct payments to Landlords.
8 th February 2007	Richard Tulej	Briefing Note summarising details of the 2 nd Homes Fund and it current uses.

Liaison Meetings

The following 'Site visits' were arranged in connection with the work of the Task Group:

Date of visit	Place of visit/ in conjunction with	Purpose of visit
30 th March 2006	Strategic Housing Offices, Euston Road, Morecambe Suzanne Lodge, Michael Dagger, Patricia Preston, James Doble, Jon Stark	Fact finding briefing with Officers of the City Council's Homeless Unit
25 th May 2006	The Oxford Centre, Oxford Jon Stark	Preventing Homelessness: practical approaches and solutions for local authorities and the voluntary sector conference
30 th October 2006	2A High Street Project Catherine Layfield, Councillors Peter Robinson and Joyce Pritchard	To see the work of a Housing Association project and meet service users to hear their experiences and views
16 th November 2006	YMCA, Cable Street, Councillor Rebekah Gerrard	Meeting with staff at Lancaster & District YMCA to discuss services and difficulties in their role
5 th December 2006	Mustard Seed Project, Priory Hall Father Paul Payton, Jo Drew, Councillors Mike Greenall and Joyce Pritchard	Visit to an evening shelter that provides meals on a weekly basis for the homeless to discuss their work and meet service users
13 th December 2006	Signposts, Morecambe Sue Edwards, and Councillor John Whitelegg	Liaison meeting with staff at Signposts to assess their views and the homeless situation in Morecambe
27 th January 2007	Homelessness Awareness Day, Priory Hall	Homeless Event day bringing a variety of Homeless Agencies and support groups from across the District together

Documentary Evidence Considered

- Department for Communities and Local Government Policy Briefing 15 (June 2006) *Homelessness Prevention – A Guide to Good Practice: Summary*
- Lancaster City Council (2002) - *Lancaster District Homelessness Strategy 2003 - 2007*

Internet Sites:

- Homeless Link – Frontline Agencies in Partnership:
www.homeless.org.uk
- Homeless Pages:
www.homelesspages.org.uk
- Homelessness in Lancashire:
http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/office_of_the_chief_executive/lancashireprofile/monitors/homelessness.asp
- National Statistics
<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>
- BBC Website
www.bbc.co.uk
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
www.odpm.gov.uk
- Department for Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk

Newspaper and Magazine articles including:

- Local Government Chronicle (23rd November 2006) *Being cruel to be kind?*
- Lancaster Guardian (3rd November 2006) *116 Homeless youngsters in Lancaster*

5. Status of the Report

This report is the work of the Homelessness Task Group, on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and where opinions are expressed it should be pointed out that they are not necessarily those of Lancaster City Council.

While we have sought to draw on this review to make recommendations and suggestions that are helpful to the Council, our work has been designed solely for the purpose of discharging our terms of reference agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Accordingly, our work cannot be relied upon to identify every area of strength, weakness or opportunity for improvement.

This report is addressed to the Cabinet of Lancaster City Council for whom it has been prepared. The Task Group take no responsibility for any Member or Officer acting in their individual capacities or to other third parties acting on it.

6. Background & Context

This report is the culmination of a long and detailed look into Homelessness across the Lancaster District. The subject was selected as a case for investigation as the District was highlighted for having an alarming rate of homelessness, particular in comparison with other districts across Lancashire.

It was noted in particular that the Lancaster District has a significant problem with the level of youth homelessness. There are conflicting figures regarding this although the YMCA was quoted in the Lancaster Guardian Edition of 3rd November 2006 as claiming that “116 under 19-year-olds in Lancaster have serious housing needs, including three who are sleeping rough”, and this is compounded as “emergency accommodation in Lancaster is nonexistent following the closure of the Portland Street shelter more than two years ago”.

It is also thought by many that the figure for youth homeless, and homelessness in general, could be even higher when considering the likelihood of the ‘hidden homeless’, that is to say those individuals that had no fixed abode and yet were staying with friends or family on temporary basis’ and not presenting to any form of authority as being homeless.

There is much confusion when discussing the definition of what being homeless actually is. For example, the definition as given in section 175 of the Housing Act 1996 states:

- (1) A person is homeless if he/she has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, which he:
 - (a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court
 - (b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or
 - (c) occupies as a residence by virtue of an enactment or rule of law giving him/her the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.
- (2) A person is also homeless if he/she has accommodation but:
 - (a) he/she cannot secure entry to it, or
 - (b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he/she is entitled or permitted both to place it and reside in it.
- (3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him/her to continue to occupy.
- (4) A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he/she will become homeless within 28 days.

In relation to being deemed homeless under circumstances of domestic violence, section 177 of the Act reads:

- (1) It is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to domestic violence against him/her, or against:
 - (a) a person who normally resides with him/her as a member of his family, or
 - (b) any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him/her.

For this purpose “domestic violence”, in relation to a person, means violence from a person with whom he/she is associated, or threats of violence from such a person which are likely to be carried out.

- (2) In determining whether it would be, or would have been, reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation, regard may be had to the general circumstances prevailing in relation to housing in the district of the local housing authority to whom he/she has applied for accommodation or for assistance in obtaining accommodation.

Local Authorities have an obligation to help those in need of satisfactory housing which is contained within legislation under section 184 of the Housing Act 1996 which reads:

- (1) If the local housing authority have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, they shall make such inquiries as are necessary to satisfy themselves:
 - (a) whether he/she is eligible for assistance, and
 - (b) if so, whether any duty, and if so what duty, is owed to him/her under the following provisions of this Part.
- (2) They may also make inquiries whether he/has has a local connection with the district of another local housing authority in England, Wales or Scotland.
- (3) On completing their inquiries the authority shall notify the applicant of their decision and, so far as any issue is decided against his/her interests inform him/her of the reasons for their decision.
- (4) If the authority have notified or intend to notify another local housing authority under section 198 (referral of cases), they shall at the same time notify the applicant of that decision and inform him/her of the reasons for it.
- (5) A notice under subsection (3) or (4) shall also inform the applicant of his/her right to request a review of the decision and of the time within which such a request must be made.
- (6) Notice required to be given to a person under this section shall be given in writing and, if not received by him, shall be treated as having been given to him/her if it is available at the authority’s office for a reasonable period for collection by him/her or on his/her behalf.

Homelessness in the 21st Century

Until December 2003 the responsibility for delivering the Council's statutory duties towards homelessness laid with Council Housing Services.

Prior to this date, securing accommodation for families accepted as homeless was not problematic, as they represented a fairly small proportion of the total allocation of Council owned properties. However, since 2000/01, patterns of supply and demand had changed significantly, and it became increasingly difficult to discharge the Council's statutory duties from within our own stock alone.

Details illustrating the increasing levels of homelessness were as follows:

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05 *(up to 31.12.04)
New Applications Made	438	551	734	759	518*
Number of Acceptances	222	268	364	431	238*
Average time spent in B & B (Bed & Breakfast) Accommodation	14 days	16 days	28 days	56 days	56 days*

These figures illustrated a 94% increase in the number of statutory homeless within just three years. The three main causes of homelessness had remained fairly consistent throughout – loss of shorthold tenancy (27%), relationship breakdown/violence (20%) and parents no longer willing to accommodate (19%). The remaining 34% covered a wide range of other causes. Inevitably, because of the increase in volume, more families had to be placed in temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation and for longer periods.

The Council's ability to respond directly to the increase in homelessness had been hampered by a significant reduction in the turnover of our own properties together with a substantial increase in Right to Buy sales in recent years. For example, the number of Council properties available for re-letting had dropped 42% in the three years from 2000/01 to 2003/04 (down from 564 to 329).

The combined consequences of both these trends meant that the percentage of allocations being made to homeless households had increased (from 25% to 60% in the two years 2000/01 to 2002/03).

Inevitably, this situation meant that the Council was no longer able to offer any family accommodation to housing applicants and the waiting list was therefore steadily increasing.

It was clear therefore that the Council, as a housing provider, could no longer discharge its statutory responsibilities via its own properties (plus nomination rights to housing associations).

New Legislation

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a requirement for all local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness within their area and, by the end of July 2003, to have published a Homelessness Strategy. The review and strategy was based on the following objectives:

- preventing homelessness;
- securing accommodation for those who are or may become homeless;
- providing support for people who are or may become homeless, or who have previously been homeless and need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The Council commissioned the Housing Quality Network to assist in undertaking the homelessness review and the Strategy was approved by Cabinet in August 2003. The Review itself identified a number of key issues that needed to be addressed by the Strategy:

- the Council needed to be more proactive in undertaking preventative actions to support potentially homeless households.
- there was wide spread dissatisfaction with the type of accommodation used by the Council for temporary purposes (i.e. B & B).
- there were difficulties in accessing housing advice services and there are gaps in provision. (The location of the function, with Council Housing, could act as a barrier in accessing the service).
- greater dialogue needed to take place with private sector landlords in order to help sustain existing tenancies and to identify new and alternative forms of provision.

An executive summary of the Council's Strategy can be found as an appendix A to this report.

The Government also made a commitment to end the use of B & B as temporary accommodation for any homeless family with children by March 2004 (except in an emergency, and even then for no longer than six weeks). In instances where B & B accommodation was used, the Government issued draft standards for the accommodation.

In order to respond effectively to the new challenges being faced it became increasingly apparent that the Council had to work in partnership with a wide range of other agencies and housing providers. In order to achieve this the Homelessness function was transferred into Strategic Housing Services in December, 2003. In summary, the rationale for undertaking this transfer was in recognition of the following issues:

- Council housing is not the only solution to homelessness.
- A decrease in the availability of Council houses.

- An increase in the number of homeless presentations and an increase in the number of acceptances due to changes in the legislation.
- A legislative requirement in the Homelessness Act 2002 to produce a Homeless Strategy based on preventing homelessness and providing support.
- Strategic Housing's enabling role in accessing a range of alternative housing options and the links with home support and housing standards.

The Homelessness Act 2002 also made a new order that extended the 'priority need' criteria with effect from July 2002. From this date, applicants presenting as homeless and falling into one of the following categories, were classified as being in 'priority need'; 16-17 year olds, care leavers aged 18-21, persons vulnerable because of time spent in care, the armed forces or prison and people vulnerable due to violence.

This change in the legislation led to a dramatic increase in homeless declarations, and was largely responsible for the 33% increase in new applications made in 2002/03 when compared with 2001/02. (See table above). A further effect this new legislation had was to increase the number of instances where the Council has a duty to secure temporary accommodation pending enquiries on homeless applications.

The Position in January 2005

The increasing pressure on Local Authority homeless services is a national problem. During the five years from 1999/00 to 2003/04 the statutory homeless numbers increased by 30%. The problem could be shown to be even greater in the North West region, where there was a 41% increase during the same period. Full details of figures between April 2004 and March 2005 are displayed in Table 1 below.

During the early months of the financial year 2004/05 a combination of staff vacancies and illnesses resulted in the Service becoming crisis led. The pressure to deal swiftly with homeless applicants to whom the Council had a duty led to a rapid growth in Bed and Breakfast placements. In some cases applicants were placed and then left to stay in the accommodation whilst their applications were being processed. Priority was given to making sure that families did not stay in B&B for more than six weeks and this target was achieved and recognised in a congratulatory letter from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

However, the pressures experienced by the Homeless Team led to the annual expenditure budget of £120,000 being exhausted within six months, by the end of September 2004. The expenditure against this budget was £158,000 at the end of November and rose to £180,000 by 31st March 2005.

There was and remains a shortage of available accommodation in the District both in the social rented and private rented sector. The situation in the private rented sector has been exacerbated in recent times due to the circumstances in the Housing Market. A number of private landlords have taken advantage of inflated house prices and chosen to sell their properties. This in turn resulted in an increased level of possession orders being served causing tenants to lose both their assured shorthold tenancies and settled accommodation. In such cases the Homelessness Team experienced serious difficulties in securing suitable alternative accommodation.

In addition, the Council aims to avoid placing vulnerable people in areas already under stress, but what little accommodation is available tends to be in these areas.

Table 1 Households Accepted as Homeless, April 2004 to March 2005

Rank in 354 Authorities in England (by number)	Local Authority	Number of Households Accepted as Homeless	Homeless Acceptances as a Percentage of Total Households on the Housing Register	Percentage Yearly Change 2000/01 to 2004/05
182	Burnley	204	14.8	-27.9
204	Chorley	235	13.3	79.4
43	Fylde	78	2.8	290.0
220	Hyndburn	257	7.9	71.3
254	Lancaster	339	20.6	52.7
127	Pendle	148	9.3	279.5
260	Preston	355	12.6	159.1
16	Ribble Valley	45	5.5	4.7
126	Rossendale	147	5.4	-36.1
225	South Ribble	267	20.0	7.7
135	West Lancashire	153	7.3	77.9
176	Wyre	176	8.5	53.0
—	Lancashire NUTS-3 Area	2,404	—	41.1
269	Blackburn with Darwen UA	404	6.5	74.1
196	Blackpool UA	221	4.1	67.4
—	Lancashire NUTS-2 Area	3,029	—	46.5
—	North West	17,214	8.6	32.1
—	England	121,179	7.8	5.1

The Position in January 2007

The number of Homeless Presentations is now showing signs of decreasing across the Lancaster District and the number of Homeless Acceptances has been decreasing since 2003/04 as illustrated in the table below:

Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07 (up to 31.01.2007)
Homeless Presentations	530	616	758	778	491
Homeless Acceptances	276	362	339	317	198

Furthermore, the success of the Homeless Prevention initiatives in the short time they have been implemented by the City Council has seen and increase in the number of cases prevented from becoming homeless and this has successfully contributed to the decrease in homeless acceptances detailed above. The figures for the homeless prevention profile are detailed below and illustrate the rapidly increasing success of such initiatives:

Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07 (up to 31.01.2007)
Successful Prevention			Figures not registered on database	85	133

These figures are extremely difficult to show accurately however as many homelessness prevention methods actually seek to educate youths on the potential pitfalls that may lead to homelessness and so it is anticipated by the Government that the true benefits of prevention work will not become evident for a number of years.

Although the figures show improvements in the levels of homelessness across the District, particularly in the last 2 years, and the excellent measures the Council has implemented to massively reduce the use of B and B provision, there are still a great number of issues to address in dealing with homelessness. The statistics for the Lancaster District are still higher than those recorded by many other Lancashire Authorities and the pressing need for an increase in emergency accommodation is plainly evident.

7. Findings

HOMELESS PREVENTION, YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Homeless Prevention

Due mainly to serious staffing problems that stretched back into 2003/04 the budget for Bed and Breakfast accommodation in 2004/05 was exhausted by the end of September 2004. The combination of staff vacancies and illnesses resulted in elevated pressure levels to deal swiftly with homeless applicants to whom the Council had a duty, with little time for preventative work. This in turn led to the rapid growth in Bed and Breakfast placements.

A major factor in reducing the number of Bed and Breakfast placements is homeless prevention work. During the second half of 2004/05, through the determined efforts of the Homeless Team, many preventative initiatives were either deployed or put into development. Such initiatives include:

- Family accommodation owned and managed by Adactus. There are 18 of these properties dispersed across the district. Placements into these properties have no financial implications for the Council.
- Early intervention where private tenants are under threat of eviction following service of a notice to quit or to seek repossession. Housing Standards officers liaise with landlords in an attempt to achieve a reversal of the actions proposed against their tenants. This initiative has shown a real and positive impact on reducing the number of private tenants becoming homeless.
- Outreach Services offered by a variety of external voluntary agencies (i.e. YMCA / Homeless Action / Signposts) by which, via the use of advertised drop-in centres, both young people and adults / families are given a full range of advice empowering them to make their own housing decisions and choices.
- Client action plans are developed for single young people with the aim of securing supported accommodation (hostels). All such establishments are out of the district.
- The YMCA operate a family mediation service with the aim of making young people more responsible for their actions and parents more accountable. This prevention measure is recognised by the ODPM as an example of good practice.
- Presentations / Workshops in schools run in conjunction with the YMCA. These meetings make young people aware of all the different options available.
- Liaison is currently in progress with The Foyer (Thornton Road, Morecambe) to devise a nomination agreement for young homeless people that will allow direct access to this supported accommodation.
- Domestic violence cases are now referred to Women's Refuges in either Preston or Blackpool where the victims want to move away.

- Young single mothers are now referred to Mother and Baby units located outside the district if local specialist provision is not appropriate.
- People from other areas of the country who have no local connections are issued with travel warrants enabling them to return to their own locality. This is a considerably cheaper option than making placements into Bed and Breakfast establishments.
- Lists of available Private Landlords and Caravan Sites who will accept homeless people are issued where relevant.
- The Home Support Team is now liaising with Homeless Officers in order to develop new initiatives and prevention strategies.

The total expenditure on Bed and Breakfast accommodation for the 2004/05 year was £180,108. By the end of September 2004 (half year) the total spend was already at £129,272, representing nearly 72% of the total expenditure for the year. This means that only 28% of the year's expenditure was incurred during the second half of the year. This illustrates the effectiveness of preventative measures and the use of alternative housing options for applicants who would previously have been placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

During the last quarter of 2005 the service was re-modelled in order to focus more staff resources in prevention work and less on processing applications. The key to resolving homelessness is to work "upstream" of the problem and prevent people becoming homeless. This approach is endorsed as best practice by the DCLG.

The original Bed and Breakfast budget for 2005/06 was set at £85,000. In November 2005, due to the continuing success of prevention work, the estimated total expenditure for the year was reduced to £45,000. In 2006/07 the B & B budget was again reduced to £25,000. Approximately 70% of B & B costs are recovered via Housing Benefit or re-charging individuals. The further saving of £20,000 was requested by Strategic Housing to be diverted back into their service provision, such as the board and lodgings scheme for young people, however this did not materialise.

It is strongly believed that this level of saving should be channelled back into Homelessness in order to help sustain and expand upon preventative initiatives. The newly launched Homeless Prevention Fund, alternatively referred to as the 'Spend to Save' initiative, would be the ideal benefactor of this additional funding.

These funds enable Local Authorities to spend relatively small amounts of money to prevent homelessness occurring. This has the effect of saving large amounts of money that would otherwise be wasted on Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

The City Council's budget for this fund was set at £5,000 for 2005/06 and £7,000 for 2006/07. However, despite the vast savings made by the Service to date in the financial year 2006/07 of £20,000 as described above the allocation has again been reduced to a sum of £5,000 due to a lack of funding in Strategic Housing. This level of funding is not sufficient for the scheme to achieve its full potential in preventing homelessness.

However, notwithstanding this, Housing Advice officers have access to a fund of money via a clear and simple process that will ensure innovative ideas can be

speedily approved and funded. In turn, the funding will generate real solutions for those households facing homelessness and provide real alternatives to the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

It is anticipated that an increased fund would allow Housing Advice Officers to assess a household's current situation and through a series of discussions enable consideration of cost effective solutions to meet their housing needs.

The main benefits of the scheme can be summarised as follows:

- Reduction of the number of homeless applications
- Reduction in households in Bed and Breakfast / Emergency Accommodation
- Providing real and cost effective solutions
- Minimises "fire fighting" / crisis led management
- Pro-active solution based service

Recommendation 1

That the allocation to the Homeless Prevention Fund be increased to a minimum of £15,000 for 2007/08 to ensure the positive initiatives and savings made thus far are expanded upon for the future.

Recommendation 2

- (a) That negotiation takes place with local secondary schools and homeless agencies to establish a schools' road show scheme to educate children on the need to maintain family cohesion, educate on life skills and highlight the pitfalls that can lead to homelessness
- (b) That this initiative be reviewed periodically.

Youth Homelessness

The Task Group engaged with staff and volunteers from the Lancaster and District YMCA and staff and service users from the 2A High Street Project. As detailed earlier it was believed that over 100 under 19 year olds were in severe housing need across the Lancaster District at the beginning of September 2006, a figure that could have been even higher if taking into account those youths that were hopping between places of accommodation of relatives or friends, the so-called 'hidden homeless'. The breakdown fell into the following categories:

- 3 were rough sleeping
- 72 were living away from family
- 41 had no settled accommodation

From the homeless applications made to the City Council, it was noted that the greatest cause of youth homeless is the result of relationship breakdown with family, and most notably exclusion by close family or relatives. There are a variety of complex issues affecting young people under 25 years old which Phil McGrath,

General Secretary of Lancaster and District YMCA, addressed the Task Group on, such as:

- Family/Relationship breakdown
- Anecdotally from deprived areas
- Lack of skills for independent living/immaturity
- Poor self esteem and a lack of social skills
- Inadequate support networks
- Unrealistic expectations & misinformation
- Neighbour nuisance
- Rent arrears, debt and poor financial literacy

The Task Group learned that a particular problem lay in the Housing Benefit Provision for under 25s, which prevented many from being able to find suitable housing if they had no alternative place to go. Mr McGrath estimated the shortfall in Housing Benefit provision could be as much as £145 per month for the average priced single bedroom accommodation. In evaluating this however, it was clear to the Task Group that the 'Single Room Rent' that was available to single under 25s was a directive under Government legislation and they would be unable to have any influence over this.

Task Group Members made a site visit to the 2A High Street Project, run by Adactus Housing Association, which accommodates seven under 25s at any one time. The accommodation includes a support network of project workers who attempt to guide the youths into their own sustainable accommodation. Residents are limited to 2 years at project and when Members visited all but one were in education or full time employment. The Project Manager, Catherine Layfield, outlined the success the project had enjoyed but warned that such accommodation provisions were in severe shortage as they had an extensive waiting list, with would-be residents waiting as long as 18 months to 2 years to secure a place in the building.

Members noted the success of initiatives such as 2A High Street, and a similar scheme called 'The Foyer' in Morecambe that had a further 25 units, and felt further similar project should be encouraged, however the City Council does not have the resources to fund such initiatives itself and so further work would need to be carried out in conjunction with Housing Associations. The Council's Housing Strategy had prioritised the needs of young and single homeless people with multiple and complex problems for new Housing Corporation funded schemes over the coming years, and the Portland Street shelter and a plan for a 25 unit scheme for single homeless have been clarified to Supporting People and the Housing Corporation for new provisions

As mentioned above, there is currently no temporary emergency accommodation in the form of a hostel across Lancaster District. This has been the case since the closure of the Portland Street Shelter in 2004 and the YMCA stressed this as a major factor in their difficulty for finding young people accommodation. Funding had been secured to open the premises but the YMCA is unable to meet the revenue costs for the staffing of the shelter.

The Task Group agreed that the City Council should take some responsibility towards provision of an emergency accommodation shelter in the District and with young people being a particular growing concern in relation to homelessness the re-opening of the Portland Street shelter should be included in the 2007/2008 Council Business Plans.

Recommendation 3

That the availability of a funding source to provide staffing resources at the Portland Street emergency shelter facility be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Domestic Violence and Homelessness in the Lancaster District

The Task Group were informed that The Lancaster District had the second highest incidence of domestic violence in Lancashire, after Blackpool. It was also noted that in the last national homelessness review the percentage of households whose reason for their loss of home was related to domestic violence was between 10% and 34%.

Victims of domestic violence are deemed 'priority need' in terms of requiring accommodation if they have dependent children as part of the household or are pregnant. Many victims are also deemed priority need if they are deemed vulnerable as a result of being exposed to 'violence from a person with whom he/she is associated, or threats of violence from such a person, which are likely to be carried out' (Section 177, Housing Act 1996).

The domestic violence refuge in the Lancaster District was closed in 2001, due to staffing issues and lack of funding, however, the use of 'dispersed accommodation' co-ordinated by housing associations had been introduced to compensate for the lack of this facility. Project workers from Lancaster & District Women's Aid believed the District would benefit greatly from a new refuge facility being established, however, it was clear that all homeless agencies in the District had a preference for an increase in accommodation.

It was noted that the City Council's Domestic Violence Strategy contains a commitment to look at the development of a refuge in 2010 as the current Housing Strategy runs from 2006 – 09 and includes other types of provision for domestic violence victims, such as dispersed housing.

Recommendation 4

That the Task Group endorses the City Council's Domestic Violence Strategy, and the proposed measures contained within, and supports the continuing development of the Sanctuary Scheme by Strategic Housing.

MULTI AGENCY WORKING AND MONITORING IN THE HOMELESS SECTOR

Throughout the course of the Homelessness Task Group's investigation, a wide variety of agencies have been engaged with across the District, as well as National bodies, such as:

- Lancaster & District YMCA
- YMCA England
- 2A High Street Project (Adactus Housing Association)
- Lancaster & District Women's Aid
- Inward House Project Ltd
- Homeless Action
- Connexions
- Signposts, Morecambe
- The Mustard Seed Project
- The Department for Communities and Local Government (Formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)

Such is the complexity of the issues surrounding homelessness as a whole a significant number of agencies exist dealing with different issues related to the causes, prevention and methods of dealing with homelessness.

Having worked so closely with these agencies it has become apparent to the Task Group that a lack of co-ordination and cohesion of these agencies is having a detrimental effect on them working together as effectively as they could. It has been highlighted by several agencies themselves that intrinsic 'cultural differences' between their subject areas often leads to ineffective joint working.

This is not to say that joint working does not exist amongst homeless agencies across the District, as it clearly does. However, the differing responsibilities and goals of each agency often result in some levels of support, advice and guidance not being provided where it may have been if co-ordination and communication was being applied with greater success.

A particular problem across the District is the designation of Social Services as a Lancashire County Council function whereas day-to-day service provision for homeless households was the responsibility of the City Council. Many agencies were of the opinion that the City Council, the Social Services function of Lancashire County Council, Housing Associations and Voluntary Sector organisations could be far better organised to deliver clearer advice on which agencies to approach to provide the most suitable resources for a specific case.

It was also suggested that a simplified 'Directory of Homeless Agencies' be created to give simplified guidance to potential service users. The Task group noted that the

City Council had recently introduced a universal 'flow chart' of questions to ask an individual presenting as homeless that had been adopted by a number of agencies.

The Task Group agreed that the incorporation of Social Services and the Education elements of County Council functions, in particular, under the City Council's authority through a system of Unitary Government would make homeless services' co-ordination a far more manageable and effective task.

The Task Group acknowledges the work carried out by the Homelessness Forum in bringing a number of agencies together for discussion on a regular basis but it became evident that many agencies held reservations of the effectiveness of this body in addressing the wider issues across the District, whilst also addressing the needs and desires of those that each agency sought to help, i.e. homeless service users. It was agreed that the forum should regularly hear the voice of the homeless service users through the creation of a sub-group that could feed its opinions into the forum.

Recommendation 5

That the possibility of establishing a permanent sub-group to the local Homelessness Forum, consisting entirely of service users, be investigated with a view to developing further homeless prevention strategies.

The faith groups of the Lancaster District are not referred to as official homeless agencies, however, they provide a source of food, warmth and emotional support that many homeless people require. The Homeless Strategy seeks to move away from the use of 'soup kitchens' as the directives from the DCLG highlight this provision as potentially exacerbating the problem of street homelessness, and the Council also provides significant funding to Lancaster District Homeless Action who provide a permanent afternoon facility with the services that the faith groups seek to provide.

The faith groups feel their work is still necessary and in the Lancaster District the 'Mustard Seed Project', through the work of Father Paul Payton and Project Worker Jo Drew in particular, have sought to unite all faith groups such as 'The Olive Branch', The Salvation Army, The Baptist Church and 'The Ark' to continue working with the street homeless and bring together as many agencies as possible.

The Mustard Seed Project also devised a Homelessness Awareness day that brought together a number of agencies, organisations and members of the public to run in conjunction with the national initiative 'Homelessness Sunday 2007'. In this respect the Project has taken a step towards bringing all associated agencies across the District together and provide some co-ordination to the provisions available to the homeless and seeks to have greater involvement with the official bodies to develop more formal systems for guiding people back into sustainable accommodation.

The City Council currently holds Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the agencies that it provides funding to, namely:

- Lancaster & District YMCA
- Signposts
- Lancaster District Homeless Action
- Lancaster % District Women's Aid

- Morecambe Homeless Action

It was noted by the Task Group that these SLAs would be under review in the near future to ensure that the Council was receiving value for money from the support it was providing and ensure that the agencies were working in line with the vision and priorities of the Council. It was agreed that monitoring systems of associated agencies needed to be put in place to enhance joint working, increase efficiency and improve the network of services available to those presenting as homeless.

Recommendation 6

That improvement in multi-agency monitoring systems to ensure homeless statistics are recorded more accurately and avoid the occurrence of individuals being recorded more than once be sought as a priority.

It was also noted that a further Overview & Scrutiny Task Group had been set up to scrutinise the Council's Grants Procedures and this would also incorporate a review of the use of SLAs which would impact on the homeless SLAs. It was agreed that the work of the Homelessness Task Group's findings should feed into the work of the Grants Task Group and vice versa.

Recommendation 7

That the Homelessness Task Group recommends the Grants Task Group note their work, with particular reference to the theme of prevention, when reviewing Service Level Agreements and that subsequently the findings of the Grants Task Group be incorporated into future monitoring of Homeless Service Level Agreements with associated agencies.

FUNDING, SUPPORT AND ACCOMMODATION

Funding

The Task Group has noted great difficulty in sourcing additional funding for developing homeless prevention initiatives and supporting further emergency accommodation across the District. The Government restriction on the authority's ability to increase social housing provision leaves the responsibility down to Housing Associations and the District's homeless agencies.

Through engagement with the City Council's Head of Corporate Strategy it came to light that there could be potential for funding to be obtained from those funds generated by the Second Homes Fund, generated by Council Tax on second homes in the District. As these monies are generated from Housing the Task Group felt it to be important that it be used to address further housing issues across the District.

The portion of Second Homes' funding that is directed to both the City Council and Lancashire County Council, of approximately £300,000, is channelled directly back into the Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP has responsibility for 7 separate building blocks across the District that tackle specific subjects for investigation and development such as:

- Sustainability Partnership
- Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Equality and Diversity Building Block
- Children and Young People Group
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Safety
- Economic Development

Under its Terms of Reference, responsibilities of the LSP include:

- 1) Promote the social, economic and environmental well being of the people and communities of the Lancaster District whilst taking into account the needs of future generations.
- 2) Enable local communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities and to listen to what they say.
- 3) Set the overall strategic vision for the Lancaster District and to secure the commitment and action of the partners to work towards achieving the vision.
- 4) Develop, implement and deliver the Lancaster District Community Strategy.
- 5) Improve joined up working between public, private, voluntary and community organisations to improve the quality of life to the communities of the Lancaster District.
- 6) Oversee projects, programmes and funding bids, where this is required by government and its agencies.

The LSP has previously received representations from the YMCA and Strategic Housing with regard to young people's issues and this is an issue both parties wish to pursue as a partnership. Clearly the terms of reference above, most notably 1) and

5) relate directly to the issues raised in this report and so the Task Group feel there is grounds for a bid to be submitted by the City Council in conjunction with its partners.

It has been noted that the current funding round closed in January 2007 and these allocations will be finally decided in March for distribution over 2007/08. Further bids can be made from September to January for funding in 2008/09 however it has been noted that there is still a fund available for allocation of welfare grants of up to £2000 and the Task Group believe this option should be investigated further by the City Council's Homelessness Unit.

Recommendation 8

That the City Council engage with the Local Strategic Partnership to establish how Second Homes Funding can be more effectively used to support issues surrounding homelessness in the District, such as preventative initiatives and projects addressing issues of youth homelessness.

As detailed earlier in the report the B & B budget for 2006/07 was revised from £45,000 to £25,000 in light of huge efficiency savings made by Strategic Housing. It was requested at the time that these savings be redirected into further homeless services however this was not granted. It is noted by the Task Group that the use of B & B accommodation has almost been completely phased out and so the projected savings that could be made further by the service are likely to be nominal.

The Task Group still felt that any further savings made by Health and Strategic Housing, relevant to homelessness services provided should be redirected back into the improved provision of those services. The successful implementation of preventative initiatives and perhaps more importantly, support for temporary accommodation within the District, could have been provided to limit the use of other supported housing providers outside of the District.

Recommendation 9

That all savings relevant to homeless services made by Health and Strategic Housing be diverted back into homeless prevention initiatives.

The Task Group noted that despite the emphasis of the investigation being predominantly on single youth homelessness and victims of domestic violence it was important to build on the continuing success of the Homelessness Unit in dealing with families, over 25s and vulnerable individuals with complex problems. Many of the homeless agencies that were engaged with provided services and support for these groups.

Most notably, preventative methods such as support services provided to help people maintain their tenancies through education on handling of finances and enhancing engagement with local communities. The Council's statistics show that approximately 40% of homelessness is caused through loss of private tenancy.

Such services are supported by agencies such as Signposts that also address wider issues of 'Housing Poverty'. This term relates to issues of overcrowding, monetary problems experienced by tenants and quality of accommodation, which features under section 175, part 3 of the Housing Act 1996 which reads: 'A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.'

Recommendation 10

That additional funding of £25,000 be made available for support services covering tenancy retention and support for vulnerable people who may be at risk of eviction to help them engage with their communities through training and employment.

Accommodation across the Lancaster District

There are low levels of social housing across the Lancaster District, particularly when compared with other North West areas. Less than 10% of the housing stock in the District is owned by either a housing association or the Council compared with more than 20% in many other authorities. The length of time people stay in social housing is also increasing and the Council has seen a substantial increase in Right to Buy purchases over recent years and that has further reduced the availability of social housing.

There is currently a high demand for housing in most parts of the District but a clear over-supply of poor quality, privately rented accommodation in the central areas of Morecambe, particularly in the West End. Private rented accommodation in Lancaster is predominantly occupied by students, and Housing Benefit payments are often insufficient to enable households or individuals on low incomes to access that market. The housing market therefore effectively drives individuals and families who can't afford to buy or rent anywhere else into the deprived areas of Morecambe.

As described above, the Council's statistics show that approximately 40% of homelessness is caused by loss of private tenancy. As most of the available rented accommodation is found in the deprived areas of the District, a substantial proportion of homelessness in the District has derived from these areas.

All these dynamics have been in place for a prolonged period of time but the consequences of becoming homeless has become more acute over the previous 3-4 years. This is particularly due to the availability of social housing being dramatically reduced during this time but also because the over-supply of poor rented accommodation is reducing.

In previous years these issues of homelessness were less noticeable because when people lost their homes other options were available, either through Council Housing or in the private rented sector. This meant that they could find somewhere else to live but the underlying issues were sometimes left unresolved. Also as a result of rented accommodation in Morecambe, it was not always necessary to seek help from the Council to find somewhere to live.

It is now widely recognised that homelessness is not just a housing issue. People lose their homes for many reasons and homelessness itself is often a symptom of

other influences that are impacting on people's lives. Housing stock in the West End of Morecambe was not designed to accommodate many people as their principal home and houses in multiple occupation provide inappropriate housing for families. The housing itself is often the cause of homelessness because of its unsuitability but also the high concentration of poor quality private rented stock is the root cause of unstable communities in these areas.

The Council looks to achieve a balanced housing market where people have choice about where they live and are not disadvantaged by where they live. In order to achieve this, the Council's strategy is to:

- i) Increase the supply of affordable housing options in areas outside the deprived parts of Morecambe.
- ii) Tackle the supply of sub-standard privately rented accommodation in Morecambe and provide a wider range of housing options aimed at increasing owner occupation in these areas.
- iii) Seek to ensure that effective support services were made available to help vulnerable people overcome the problems that isolated them and then help them to engage with their communities through training and employment.

Here, affordable housing issues are a key area that the City Council is seeking to address. In a presentation by Simon Drummond-Hay of Northern Affordable Homes Limited, it was reported that the developer had experienced some difficulty in ascertaining the requirements of the City Council when seeking to create affordable housing developments. It is agreed that improved communication from both Planning Services and Strategic Housing, as such applications affect the vision and priorities of both services, with potential developers could aid the Council in achieving the desired and balanced levels of affordable housing across the District.

Recommendation 11

That clear and concise advice be delivered to prospective affordable housing developers on the strategic context for location and volume and that strict 'affordability' criteria be adhered to within the context of the Housing Strategy.

Through engagement with a number of homeless agencies and support groups across the District, it became clear to the Task Group that the most pressing issue was the lack of emergency (or temporary) accommodation available to all groups. This had evidently been compounded by the closure of the refuge for victims of domestic violence in 2001, the closure of the Portland Street shelter in 2004 and the more recent closure of the Christ Church shelter, which opened during the winter months. The Task Group raised concern that there were only 2 recognised shelters across the Lancaster District compared to 47 in the Blackpool area, and the Council relied too heavily on emergency accommodation outside of the District.

The Lancaster & District YMCA has recently generated funding to reopen the Portland Street shelter, however this would require input from a further funding source to assist in proving staffing costs as they had only acquired sufficient funding

to manage the running costs of the actual building. The City Council had indicated that improved provision would be made towards homelessness in budget proposals in February 2007 and part of this was likely to go towards the Portland Street shelter project.

Recommendation 12

That the provision of temporary supported accommodation for young people and single adults be made a top housing priority and options for establishing additional units be thoroughly investigated.

It was brought to the attention of the Task Group, by Andrew Farrell of YMCA England and Mike Fisher of Lancaster & District Chamber of Trade and Commerce, that the uses of Section 106 agreements were being widened to establish Commuted Sums from developers that could be used for the benefit of communities as the Local Authority saw fit. It was also reported that many authorities employ specific Section 106 Officers to generate significant funds from developers and assess the most pressing needs of a community so that any such funds generated were used to address those issues.

Andrew Farrell had suggested that commuted sums had been used by other authorities to support the establishment of temporary and 'move-on' accommodation that was subsequently managed by YMCA England in the capacity of a registered social landlord. It was agreed by the Task Group that such possibilities should be further investigated by the relevant Council Officers.

Recommendation 13

That the Task Group endorse a meeting between Andrew Farrell of YMCA England, Andrew Dobson, the City Council's Head of Planning Services and Stephen Matthews, Project Director for the Neighbourhoods Task Force, in order to discuss the potential use of Section 106 agreements to secure funds to increase 'move-on' accommodation across the District, in context of the City Council's Housing Strategy.

8. Conclusion

The Task Group recognises that the issue of Homelessness is a key area to be tackled across the District. This is reflected not only in the Government's drive to tackle the issue nationally through the passing of the Homelessness Act 2002 but also the inclusion of homelessness in Cabinet's High Priorities for the Budget and Policy Framework 2007/08. Priority 2.10 reads to 'Continue to work with Housing Associations and other partners to reduce homelessness with a particular emphasis on reducing homelessness in young people, domestic violence and emergency accommodation.

The purpose of this report has been to establish an understanding of the current situation in the District regarding homelessness focusing on the priority groups of young people and single adults, often with complex problems such as mental health issues and alcohol and substance dependency. It is hoped that the City Council's contribution towards housing needs and implementation of further homeless prevention initiatives can be improved as a result of the work of the Task Group.

9. Appendices

Appendix A

LANCASTER DISTRICT HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2003-2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to review the current homelessness situation in this district and then to publish a Homelessness Strategy that sets out its plans to:

- Prevent Homelessness
- Secure Sufficient accommodation for people who are or may become homeless
- Secure satisfactory provision of support services for homeless people

There is also an expectation placed on local authorities that they will work in partnership with other agencies in both development and implementation of the strategy.

Objectives

The City Council commissioned the Housing Quality Network to assist in undertaking a review of homelessness in the district. The review identified a number of key issues to be addressed in the strategy:-

- Need to improve the range of activity to help prevent people from becoming homeless
- Need to develop the range of emergency accommodation and to reduce the use of B&Bs.
- Need to improve access to permanent accommodation
- Need to improve homelessness services integration and partnership working of existing services

All local authorities are expected to meet the Governments targets to achieve:

- An end of the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children, except in emergencies, and even then for no longer than six weeks; and
- Levels of rough sleeping that are two thirds below the levels recorded in 1998, or lower,

The most pressing issue facing the Lancaster district however is the lack of temporary accommodation for homelessness people. For this reason the Council has undertaken to commit to an additional outcome to achieve:

- A reduction in the inappropriate use of emergency accommodation

The Council has been working closely with a multi-agency writing group to develop the Lancaster District Homelessness Strategy, and now proposes to implement it

through a newly created Homelessness Forum. The forum now has effective representation from the Voluntary Sector and significant sections of the statutory agencies. It is however recognised that more needs to be done to improve engagement with Probation, YOT's, Connexions and the Family and Children Teams of the Social Services.

The Strategy

The Strategy proposes several step changes to improve the range of accommodation and services available to people who are or are at risk of becoming homeless. These are summarised below:-

To prevent homelessness:

- Increase the supply of floating support and advocacy services targeted for people at risk of becoming homeless and those who are in emergency accommodation.
- Provide resources to improve integration and co-ordination of existing homelessness services
- Establish Lancaster District Homelessness Forum and include Elected Member representation.
- Bring forward proposals at the earliest opportunity to relocate the Council's Homelessness and Advice Service
- Ensure that independent expert housing advice is readily accessible
- Develop a family mediation service to help young people at risk of exclusion from the family home.

To provide a range of emergency accommodation:

- Ensure that a supply of furnished houses are available for families who are homeless, including those fleeing from domestic violence
- Develop emergency and short medium term accommodation with families young people experiencing homelessness
- To seek to develop new emergency accommodation for single people

To improve access to permanent accommodation

- Launch of a new Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to help households access privately owned rented accommodation
- Increase the supply of affordable housing for rent through subsidised purchase of houses in high demand areas.
- Seek to increase the Council's nomination rights to housing association properties

Conclusion

The Lancaster District Homelessness strategy addresses all of these areas of work in detail, with an action plan that proposes specific projects, together with identified lead agencies for each proposal. The main theme throughout the document is that of partnership working, which is crucial to the effective management of homelessness, since the varied and inter-related issues affecting homeless people cut across all areas of local authority and voluntary sector work.

The other related main issue that arose through the review and strategy process is the difficulty of locating the various services, in a way that they address holistically

the needs of individuals in housing need. It is the aim of the multi-agency group that has worked on the review and strategy that homelessness remains clearly on the agenda of local authority and voluntary organisations, so that the proposed developments will take place, and that when this strategy is reviewed in three years time, we will be able to see significant improvements in the service provided in the district to homeless people and those in housing need.

The Decision of Cabinet on the Homelessness Task Group on 20th March 2007

(In accordance with Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.6 (Right of Members to Address Cabinet) Councillor Peter Robinson addressed the meeting on this item).

Cabinet considered a report of the Homelessness Task Group. The final report contained a number of recommendations based on the Group's investigations, which it requested Cabinet to consider. The recommendations of the Task Group were set out in the report as follows:

Recommendation 1:

That the allocation to the Homeless Prevention Fund be increased to a minimum of £15,000 for 2007/08 to ensure the positive initiatives and savings made thus far are expanded upon for the future.

Recommendation 2:

(a) That negotiation takes place with local secondary schools and homeless agencies to establish a schools' road show scheme to educate children on the need to maintain family cohesion, educate on life skills and highlight the pitfalls that can lead to homelessness

(b) That this initiative be reviewed periodically.

Recommendation 3:

That the availability of a funding source to provide staffing resources at the Portland Street emergency shelter facility be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 4:

That the Task Group endorses the City Council's Domestic Violence Strategy, and the proposed measures contained within, and supports the continuing development of the Sanctuary Scheme by Strategic Housing.

Recommendation 5:

That the possibility of establishing a permanent sub-group to the local Homelessness Forum, consisting entirely of service users, be investigated with a view to developing further homeless prevention strategies.

Recommendation 6:

That improvement in multi-agency monitoring systems to ensure homeless statistics are recorded more accurately and avoid the occurrence of individuals being recorded more than once be sought as a priority.

Recommendation 7:

That the Homelessness Task Group recommends the Grants Task Group note their work, with particular reference to the theme of prevention, when reviewing Service Level Agreements and that subsequently the findings of the Grants Task Group be

incorporated into future monitoring of Homeless Service Level Agreements with associated agencies.

Recommendation 8:

That the City Council engage with the Local Strategic Partnership to establish how Second Homes Funding can be more effectively used to support issues surrounding homelessness in the District, such as preventative initiatives and projects addressing issues of youth homelessness.

Recommendation 9:

That all savings relevant to homeless services made by Health and Strategic Housing be diverted back into homeless prevention initiatives.

Recommendation 10:

That additional funding of £25,000 be made available for support services covering tenancy retention and support for vulnerable people who may be at risk of eviction to help them engage with their communities through training and employment.

Recommendation 11:

That clear and concise advice be delivered to prospective affordable housing developers on the strategic context for location and volume and that strict 'affordability' criteria be adhered to within the context of the Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 12:

That the provision of temporary supported accommodation for young people and single adults be made a top housing priority and options for establishing additional units be thoroughly investigated.

Recommendation 13:

That the Task Group endorse a meeting between Andrew Farrell of YMCA England, Andrew Dobson, the City Council's Head of Planning Services and Stephen Matthews, Project Director for the Neighbourhoods Task Force, in order to discuss the potential use of Section 106 agreements to secure funds to increase 'move-on' accommodation across the District, in context of the City Council's Housing Strategy.

It was moved by Councillor John Gilbert and seconded by Councillor Ian Barker: -

"That the recommendations, as amended and set out below, be approved."

Members then voted as follows.

Resolved unanimously:

- (1) That Cabinet welcomes the report of the Homelessness Task Group as a valuable contribution.
- (2) That Cabinet supports the Task Group's Recommendation (1) and notes that it is proposed that the Homeless Prevention Fund be increased to £15,000 in 2007/08.

- (3) Although no specific funding was identified in the budget for the Task Group's Recommendation (2), Cabinet would encourage the YMCA and other agencies to participate in educational work.
- (4) That Cabinet supports the Task Group's Recommendation (3) and notes that funding was provided in the 2007/08 budget for Portland Street, Lancaster.
- (5) That Cabinet supports the Task Group's Recommendation (4) including the examination of a business case for a Refuge in the coming year and notes that a sanctuary scheme is included in the proposed use of the DCLG Homelessness Grant. It further notes that the number of secure dispersed dwellings for victims of domestic violence is shortly to increase from 2 to 5.
- (6) That Cabinet supports the Task Group's Recommendations (5) and (6).
- (7) That Cabinet supports the Task Group's Recommendation (7). It asks the Budget and Performance Panel to increase its monitoring role with regard to homeless SLAs, both in relation to support and prevention, and also asks the appropriate Cabinet Performance Review Team to consider the outputs from key SLAs relating to homelessness.
- (8) That Cabinet refers the Task Group's Recommendation (8) to the Local Strategic Partnership.
- (9) That with regard to the Task Group's Recommendation (9), Cabinet notes that the increase in funding for homelessness in this year's budget is greater than the anticipated reduction in net bed and breakfast budgets. It resolves to draw this to the attention of the DCLG and asks them to reconsider the level of the homelessness grant.
- (10) That with respect to the Task Group's Recommendation (10), Cabinet notes that additional support of £20,700 was identified in the budget process to support people in danger of losing their tenancies.
- (11) That Cabinet refers the Task Group's Recommendation (11) to the Planning Policy Cabinet Liaison Group for consideration. It notes that such advice can be given as pre-planning advice.
- (12) That with respect to the Task Group's Recommendation (12), Cabinet notes that the current Homeless Strategy recognises young people and single people as key priorities, and that the Strategy is currently under review and recommends that the Task Group's findings be considered as part of that review.
- (13) That Cabinet examines the provision of affordable housing for rent as part of the review of both the Homelessness and Housing Strategy, including when it disposes of its land for housing.
- (14) That Cabinet supports the principle that future Section 106 funds from housing developers could be used to support its Homelessness Strategy. However, it notes that the scope for this is limited as Section 106 is often used to provide co-located affordable housing.

Officer responsible for effecting the decision:

Corporate Director (Community Services).

Reason for making the decision:

The decision enables each recommendation to be scoped and developed further with all relevant services consulted as to what can be realistically achieved within resources that are available.