

Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2011

**Rochdale Metropolitan
Borough Council**

Draft

July 2008

Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2011

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1. Introduction

This is Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council's second Homelessness Strategy following the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002.

The development of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council's first Homelessness Strategy signalled a cultural shift in the Council's response to homelessness. Rochdale now places a higher priority on tackling and responding to homelessness, where every case is viewed as potentially preventable.

This strategy will build on the successes attained throughout the lifespan of the first strategy 2003 – 2007, and seeks to further develop and enhance existing services and initiatives.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with partner agencies and service users. Rochdale recognises that homelessness cannot be tackled by the Local Authority working in isolation; rather it is dependent upon effective joint working between the Local Authority and all organisations who are working to prevent and respond to homelessness.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires Homelessness Strategies to include actions that:

- a) Prevent homelessness;
- b) Ensure there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are or may become homeless;
- c) Ensure there is satisfactory support for people who are, or may become homeless, or need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

This strategy has been developed in response to the findings of the Homelessness Review 2007, which provides a comprehensive understanding of Homelessness in Rochdale. The Review has identified gaps and needs which this Strategy will seek to address.

2. Rochdale's Vision

Rochdale's vision for homelessness is that every homeless case will be treated as preventable. The Council will respond in a timely and supportive fashion and work with households to ensure that homelessness is prevented or that other appropriate and sustainable accommodation is found.

By 2010 Rochdale aims to:

- Halve the number of households in temporary accommodation from its baseline figure of 57.
- Eradicate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all homeless households.
- Not place 16 & 17 year olds in bed & breakfast accommodation.
- Ensure that no one has to sleep rough.
- Sustain low levels of homeless presentations and acceptances.
- Continue to ensure that homelessness is prevented wherever possible, and to prevent it recurring.
- Create clear pathways to housing, support and prevention services across all tenures.

Prevention and Options

The culture surrounding homelessness in Rochdale is changing from one where “nothing can be done to prevent homelessness” to one where “every case is preventable”. In Rochdale the Council will work with households to enable them to remain in their current home or assist with planned and timely moves into suitable and sustainable accommodation. This will be done through the delivery of housing options and appropriate referrals to support organisations. Housing options will be provided to all households regardless of priority or intentionality.

Securing of Accommodation – The Council will ensure that the use of bed & breakfast accommodation is ended except in an emergency. Where a homeless household is placed into bed and breakfast it will be for the minimum amount of time and no family with children or any 16 or 17 year olds will spend over 6 weeks in bed and breakfast.

The Council will also seek to minimise the length of time that households spend in temporary accommodation, and actively work with households in temporary accommodation to continue to review their housing options and plan their move on into settled accommodation. Work will be pursued to reduce both the number of households placed in temporary accommodation and the length of stay.

The homelessness and advice service will continue to work with Rochdale Boroughwide Housing to maximise the number of affordable housing units available in Rochdale for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness through nominations to Housing Associations. The Allocations policy is being reviewed for RBH and for CBL and the Housing Partnership is currently reviewing nomination agreements with a view to establishing effective protocols with Housing Associations. Provision of housing to statutory homeless applicants by partner Housing Associations is below the regional average which is in itself below the national average. We are expanding into the private sector through the Family Choice Bond scheme and through this work building capacity in the private sector.

Support – The Council will seek to ensure that all homeless households have access to support. It will ensure that support needs are identified as part of the housing options assessment process and that referrals are made to relevant partner agencies as appropriate. Support requirements will continue to be monitored through regular case conferencing and temporary accommodation meetings. We are moving towards a

case management approach based upon identifying peoples needs that will form individual and person centred support plans that will assist people to access the type of services or support and address issues that will sustain them in the longer term. Support should not be about maintaining people in a perpetual state of vulnerability, we will work with partners to ensure that support is aimed at promoting empowerment and independence that will enable people to move on.

Government's Priorities

In addition to the Review findings, the Government's priorities and targets around homelessness will determine the key priorities that this Strategy will seek to address.

In 2005 the government published a national strategy for tackling homelessness *Sustainable Communities – Settled Homes, Changing Lives*. The report highlighted action in the following areas

- Encouraging homelessness prevention
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Tackling its wider causes and symptoms
- Helping more people to move away from rough sleeping
- Providing more settled homes

The government identified a specific requirement to halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010.

On 14 November 2006 the government announced a package of measures to tackle youth homelessness. These included

- A commitment to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds
- Improved access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a general expectation of such services
- The creation of a new national supported lodgings development scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home

The Housing Corporation's strategy *Tackling Homelessness* (2006) highlighted the key role that Registered Social Landlords should play in supporting Councils to address homelessness and importantly adopting homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment as a strategic and operational priority. This objective is to be supported by the Homelessness Action Team that has been set up by the Housing Corporation and the government.

The provision of housing related support services for vulnerable and excluded people through the Supporting People programme is crucial in helping people to live independently and to reduce homelessness. The national Supporting People Strategy *Independence and Opportunity* (2007) places the service user at the centre of its

activities, seeks to build on successful local voluntary and community partnerships, and looks to future delivery of the programme through Local Area Agreements.

Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England (2007), the Hills report examined how housing needs can be met and highlighted the importance of integrating housing and employment advice to increase the options for tenants and contribute to a reduction in the need for temporary accommodation.

The key national targets that this strategy seeks to meet are to;

- Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation by half by 2010.
- Ensure that no 16 & 17 yr olds or families are placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation, except in an emergency, and for no more than 6 weeks.
- Ensure that homelessness is prevented wherever possible.

These actions will need to be delivered at a local level through the Homelessness Strategy if Rochdale is to meet the temporary accommodation target.

Through the development of a housing options approach we will work with partners in training, education and employment services to create clear pathways to appropriate support and services that will help people improve life skills and employability. Where ever possible we will promote empowerment and independence, through helping people into training, improving self confidence, accessing support and self help services in their local community.

Partnership Working

Working in partnership is absolutely fundamental if homelessness is to be effectively prevented. The Homelessness Strategy has been developed in partnership with key statutory and voluntary agencies and service users and these organisations have helped to both identify priorities and develop actions. If homelessness is to be successfully responded to and prevented in Rochdale then it is essential for all key partners to sign up to the strategy and become actively involved in the delivery of the action plan.

Although across the borough, agencies have an understanding of the benefits and shared outcomes of partnership working, this has not been developed as effectively as it could have been done. However, the council has recognised that in order to respond to the challenges set on behalf of the people of Rochdale it will need a wider and more effective commitment. As a result Homelessness Prevention and the reduction in Temporary Accommodation have been identified as key performance areas in our Local Area Agreement.

3. Strategic Priorities

The Homelessness Review and Government's priorities have informed the following five strategic priorities, which will underpin this strategy; The order of priorities was agreed through extensive consultation and feedback from stakeholders and service users at a number of events held throughout May. A full report from the consultation can be requested from the Homelessness Advice Service.

- 1. Reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation and Bed & Breakfast.**
- 2. Prevention of homelessness against the main causes.**
- 3. Supported and move on accommodation.**
- 4. Developing the homelessness and advice service**
- 5. Reducing homelessness amongst young people.**

All of the actions contained within this strategy sit under one of the above strategic priorities. This Strategy is broken down into five key areas detailing current performance and gaps in service highlighted from the Review against each strategic priority heading.

Under each strategic priority heading actions are detailed that will meet the identified gap. Whilst actions are identified throughout the Strategy under the relevant section, a more detailed action plan can be found at the end of this document that pulls together all of the actions that Rochdale will deliver over the next three years.

In order to make this Strategy a live document that actually delivers against its action plan actions are outcome based and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound). The action plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant and revisions will be made to take account of new priorities and targets.

The Homelessness Steering Group will monitor the implementation of the Strategy action plan, whilst a number of subgroups will be developed to assist in the operational delivery of the action plan.

The action plan has been developed in consultation with the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, a range of stakeholders and partners and service users and the full Strategy document will be sent to all consultees and the wider public for consultation prior to formal adoption.

The Strategy and how we achieve the outcomes will reflect not only the over arching themes of prevention and reduction in homelessness but also combine the shared aspirations of service users and the wider community. It will create partnerships between services and service users to enable and empower people to contribute and take personal responsibility to resolve and sustain their housing situation. The strategy recognises that Homelessness is generally a symptom of some other unmet need or set of circumstances that may have been prevented if earlier interventions had been sought or available. The Strategy action plan aims to contribute to the developing

wider strategies aimed at developing a more holistic approach to supporting people that need help.

4. Achievements

The Council's first Homelessness Strategy was published in 2003. This provided the strategic direction for the homeless prevention approach that was subsequently adopted. Since 2003 there have been many significant achievements in Rochdale through the delivery of this strategy including:

- ✓ Development of a medium stay unit for 16-17 year olds
- ✓ Increased provision for homeless drug users
- ✓ Provision of two part time refugee support workers
- ✓ Provision of two community link workers
- ✓ Development of a supported placement scheme for young people
- ✓ Raised awareness of homelessness services particularly to those experiencing domestic violence from ethnic minority groups
- ✓ Introduction of a quick response translation service
- ✓ Provision of support to dysfunctional excluded households
- ✓ Implementation of a Choice Based Lettings System
- ✓ Achievement Charter Mark and Beacon status
- ✓ Relocation of the homelessness advice service.

5. Homelessness Review 2007

A very detailed and comprehensive review of homelessness in Rochdale was carried out in 2007. This Review has enabled a full understanding of the picture and causes of homelessness in Rochdale and provides the basis for the development of this strategy. This Strategy will not seek to repeat the data contained within the Review, rather the strategy is a response to the Review findings and the two documents should be read in conjunction with one another. The Homelessness Review is available from Strategic Housing Services, Homelessness Advice Centre, Whitworth Road Depot Haynes Street Rochdale OL16 0EX or via email at housing.homelessness@rochdale.gov.uk

Main Findings of the Homelessness Review – key facts

This chapter seeks to present a summary of the key facts highlighted by the review process. Further detail behind these findings can be found in the Homelessness Review document itself.

The Scale of Homelessness in Rochdale

Homeless Presentations and Acceptances

The number of homeless presentations and acceptances increased from 2004/05 up until 2005/06. However, 2006/2007 saw a significant 34% reduction in homeless presentations from the previous year. Acceptances have reduced by 3% from

2005/2006. The reduction in homelessness presentations is attributed to the service focussing on the prevention agenda.

The majority of decisions made in 06/07 are for eligible households with no priority need. This continues to be comparable with previous financial years, and would suggest that the prevention agenda and 'housing options' approach are not being deployed as effectively or early as they could be to prevent time consuming investigations

Main causes of homelessness

The main causes of homelessness in Rochdale are domestic violence, parental/family friends eviction and the end of assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs).

Over the 3 year period 2004/05-2006/07 the following reasons for homelessness have been identified

- 26.5% (502) due to a violent relationship breakdown with a partner
- 26% (494) was due to parent/family and friends no longer willing to accommodate
- 7% (135) loss due to termination of an assured shorthold tenancy

Nationally domestic violence accounts for 13% of all accepted homeless cases; notably in Rochdale it accounts for 23% (06/07), which is extremely high. This partially reflects the inclusive approach that services have to supporting this very vulnerable client group.

There are also a considerable number of cases recorded as 'other reasons for homelessness'. This equates to 10% of all cases in 06/07.

The three main causes of homelessness nationally are parental eviction, relationship breakdown and end of assured shorthold tenancies. Parental eviction, and family and friends no longer willing to accommodate are reflected as one of the three main causes for homelessness in Rochdale.

The largest priority need category for the last two financial years were those with dependent children, and represented 54.3% of all accepted cases for 06/07 and 50.9% for 05/06. The other main priority need groups were fleeing threats of violence (18.1% for 05/06 and 10% for 06/07), applicant aged 16 or 17 (10.1% in 05/06 and 10.6 % in 06/07, and mental health/learning disability (7% for 05/06 and 9.91% for 06/07).

From 05/06 the P1E statistical returns began to record the age of accepted households; at the end of the financial year 06/07, 41% of all accepted households were under the age of 24.

Vulnerability

Youth homelessness is a problem in Rochdale. The Review has identified that young people (under the age of 25) are significantly over represented in the homeless population when compared to census figures. Information at a local level suggests that many of these young people have slept rough or sofa surfed

Identified Future Needs

An analysis of the Housing Register indicates that 35% of applicants require flat type accommodation followed by 24% requiring family type accommodation. This contrasts with the annually reducing number of voids (16% or 234 properties in 06/07). The current high level of homelessness amongst young single people is likely to continue unless there is an increase in the number of affordable units for single people.

Tackling anti-social behaviour is high on the national and local agenda. It is conceivable that the introduction of the Government's RESPECT agenda may lead to increased action against anti-social behaviour by landlords leading to an increased level of evictions from social tenancies.

Erosion of available family homes through Right to Buy will have a further impact on numbers on the Housing Register who are not being rehoused which could impact on homeless levels, particularly parental evictions.

Further increases in house prices and private rent levels will result in an increased number unable to afford to live in the private sector, which will lead to increased pressure on social housing which cannot be met. There is a very real risk that this will result in an increase in homelessness, particularly amongst under 30s.

Increased borrowing due to high house prices and the risk of increased interest rates is likely to result in further mortgage repossessions leading to higher levels of homelessness. There has been a slight increase in the number of households made homeless through mortgage debt in the financial year 2007/08.

There is a significant risk that the changes to the Housing Benefit payment system could lead to a rise in homelessness. The introduction of local housing allowance will mean that housing benefit recipients will be paid directly rather than the landlord. There is a risk that some individuals may spend this money on things other than rent. It is likely that there will be an increase in evictions in the private rented sector due to rent arrears.

It is likely that there may be an increase in homelessness as a result of domestic violence due to an increased awareness of options as a result of these referrals. However it is hoped that repeat victimisation will be reduced.

Social Services advise that there are 30 clients with learning disabilities who are currently residing in the family home but will require accommodation in Rochdale. As such, there is an unmet housing need that will have to be planned for if we are to prevent homelessness increasing amongst this client group.

Housing Options

The Council's homelessness and advice team has begun to make an impact on homeless levels through proactive homeless prevention measures. The development of Housing Options is becoming a key area for Rochdale and we have already identified the need to develop a housing options approach across all services in the Borough that are likely to come into contact with vulnerable people and people looking for a place to live. We aim to work with existing services, statutory, voluntary and job centres to increase the knowledge of frontline staff that will be able to offer general guidance and advice, sign posting and early intervention.

Housing assessments are carried out with individuals in housing need or threatened with homelessness. This enables the adviser to find a suitable and sustainable housing option. The introduction of the following preventative mechanisms; mediation, rent deposit scheme, home visits and Sanctuary scheme have ensured that the level of both homeless presentations and acceptances has declined.

Improved partnership working with local agencies, facilitated through the Homelessness Forum and the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, has also assisted in encouraging a joined up approach to prevention.

More work needs to be done with private sector landlords to provide suitable and settled accommodation to those that need it, and more support needs to be given to landlords with more vulnerable tenants.

The review process has also highlighted that the length of time to make homeless decisions, continued use of Bed & Breakfast and long stays in temporary accommodation all need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. A higher proportion of more complex cases do contribute to time spent in temporary accommodation. There are also outside pressures such as length of time it takes for other agencies to get information. It is a tangible indication of the need for Homelessness Prevention to be a shared responsibility across many services in the Borough.

Advice & Information

The provision of advice and information enables an individual to make informed decisions and take appropriate action to improve their housing situation. The provision of information and advice can include signposting to other agencies, information to enable personal decisions to be made, or specialist advice and action taken on behalf of an individual.

The homelessness and advice service provides practical housing advice, through appointments, drop in and home visits.

In addition to the advice delivered by the Council's homelessness and advice team, there are many other agencies working across the Borough providing generic and specialist housing advice and assisting in homeless prevention. These include

Shelter, Citizens Advice Bureau and other floating support services. There is a significant opportunity to extend the role of community and third sector based services in the delivery of good quality and timely advice. The development of a Housing options approach that includes advice on access to housing, training, employment and support will enhance and promote a proactive approach to a customer focused service delivery across the Borough.

Bed & Breakfast and Temporary Accommodation

The use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation has worryingly increased despite the decrease in homeless presentations and acceptances. Expenditure on Bed & Breakfast has continued to rise, as have the length of placements.

Temporary accommodation provision has been increased since the last Homelessness Strategy in order to try to address the use of Bed & Breakfast.

The total number of placements into all accommodation has increased by 21% since 2004/2005. The homelessness and advice service need to be able to interrogate the breakdown of placements into temporary accommodation by household make up. At a time when acceptances are falling this would indicate a shortage of suitable available affordable accommodation.

At the time of the announcement of the CLG's target to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50%, Rochdale had 57 households in temporary accommodation. The Council therefore aims to have less than 28 households in temporary accommodation by March 2010. This will be a key priority that will underpin this Homelessness Strategy.

Customer feedback has confirmed what many involved in provision of supported accommodation have suspected; that the length of time people stay and the level of support some people receive breeds a dependency culture. The cost of temporary accommodation is prohibitive for people seeking work or already in work and provides a strong disincentive for people to seek employment. This conflicts with the role that employment and meaningful occupation can have in enabling people to resettle successfully in the community.

Permanent Accommodation

Demand for affordable housing in Rochdale is exceptionally high and clearly outweighs the supply. In recent years Rochdale has seen significant increases in house prices, which have impacted on the demand for social housing.

There are currently 5371 applicants on the Housing Register; of which 1146 are in housing need. The number of social houses is decreasing through Right to Buy, as is the number of void properties due to successful tenancy sustainment. The demand for both single and family accommodation remains high. This demand for accommodation needs to be met if future increases in homelessness are to be prevented.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the perception that a social tenancy is the only route into permanent accommodation remains the norm amongst customers and the wider community. There needs to be an almost cultural shift amongst the community that promotes the benefits of the full range of housing options that are now available for people. Statutory, non-statutory and third sector agencies that advise and support vulnerable people also need to be educated about the role of the private sector as a vital tool of preventing homelessness.

The transition for many people out of homelessness into other social housing is also made more difficult by the lack of an effective Move On strategy and the type of joined up support packages that will enable people to sustain their homes. People with former rent arrears are excluded from accessing social housing and social housing providers operate inconsistent rates and standards of to exclusion. In addition, social landlords tend to be risk averse and whilst it would be unfair to suggest that they deliberately prioritise allocations to people that are considered 'low risk' and economically viable, they are reluctant to offer housing to people with known support needs because there is a shared experience that support tails off or that people do not engage with support once rehoused. There are also issues relating to sharing of information between agencies and potential housing providers with apocryphal evidence that support agencies have been reluctant to provide appropriate information housing providers for fear that they would automatically exclude the applicant. There clearly needs to be developed a proper Move on strategy that creates pathways to housing that will include the development of protocols, a review of exclusions and allocations systems and how to build confidence and capacity in the relationship between housing providers and support agencies and an understanding of the shared responsibility in supporting people to sustain their home and go on to make a positive contribution to the community.

The private rented sector is a key area to providing homes in all parts of the Borough. The rent deposit scheme and the Family Choice Bond scheme enables people to access accommodation in the private rented sector. There is a major opportunity to build upon the work done by the Private Rented Housing Service in their development of the landlord accreditation scheme and their joint work with the Bury Bolton and Rochdale Bond board that has piloted the Family Choice Bond scheme in Rochdale. There is scope to increase the access to accommodation for people in receipt of housing benefit with a wider range of private landlords and to build confidence in this sector, however more needs to be done. The extension of floating support to people living in private rented accommodation could help to develop this resource.

Support

Since the launch of Supporting People there is greater provision of support available within the Borough. There are a number of agencies that provide support specifically to homeless people and to other vulnerable client groups. This support clearly assists the Council in meeting its homeless prevention agenda. However, gaps have been identified for people living with dual or complex needs and young women. There is also a need for a generic and cross tenure floating support service that is accessible to all people across the Borough. This strategy will seek to inform Supporting People service development for homelessness related provision.

Although the Supporting People ethos is embedded amongst service providers, the role that it could play in the wider community in preventing homelessness is not fully recognised. Potential service users and some key stakeholders such as housing providers are not fully aware of services that are available and the full range of support is not generally advertised.

In addition the provision of support for homeless or potentially homeless people is considered to be too narrow in focus and should be extended to cover employment education and training. There is an opportunity for service providers to combine resources and utilise partnerships in both the voluntary and economic partnership sector including job centres and similar agencies to develop a greater range of educational and training opportunities. As well as promoting vocational activities and activities designed to improve confidence and employability, there are other under utilised pathways into meaningful activity and employment such as voluntary work, creative arts and sports.

Strategic Links

There are a number of strategies both locally, sub regionally, regionally and nationally that seek to respond to the needs of homeless client groups.

The homelessness review, including links to the wider strategic context, has informed the five strategic priorities detailed in the following chapters, which underpin this strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and the Homelessness Forum link into a number of other local and sub- regional groups and ensure that housing and homelessness issues are raised and addressed by all relevant parties.

6. Reducing the use of Temporary Accommodation and Bed and Breakfast

Temporary Accommodation

Actions

1a – What we will do to help reduce the use of and length of stay in Temporary Accommodation
Reduce number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010. (Milestones – 53 families at March 07, 47 families at March 08, 40 families at March 09, 28 families at March 10)
Reconfigure provision of temporary accommodation for couples and single females
Carry out case conferences with households in temporary accommodation every three months
Work with key partners to identify specialist temporary accommodation for singles and couples
Develop a temporary accommodation reduction action plan
Seek to provide specialist-disabled facilities in temporary accommodation
Provide an information pack to all new households placed into temporary accommodation covering key issues such as local amenities, access to education and health, access to support services, local organisations and general information
Review the future of Emergency Direct Access Accommodation provision

Government Priorities

Reducing the use of temporary accommodation is a national and local priority. The Government's Homelessness Strategy 'Sustainable Communities: settled home; changing lives' requires every local authority to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation by half by 2010.

Ceasing to use Bed & Breakfast accommodation is also a recognised government priority. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2003 considers the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation as temporary accommodation to be unsuitable. Article 4 states that families with dependent children or with a pregnant woman should not be placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation except in an emergency and, where they are, it should not be for more than six weeks. In January 2007 it was announced that the same legislation will be applicable to 16 & 17 year olds and will be enacted by 2010.

Current Situation in Rochdale

In recent years Rochdale has extended its provision of temporary accommodation to meet the ongoing demand and minimise the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

RMBC's baseline figure for the temporary accommodation target is 57 households. Rochdale therefore needs to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation to 28 or less by March 2010. Following the announcement of the target the number of households in temporary accommodation initially rose however more recently a reduction has been witnessed. At March 07 the average number of nights spent by households in temporary accommodation had increased to 72. The table below illustrates current performance against targets

Year	Quarter	Target	Number of households in TA
05/06	Q1		59
05/06	Q2		67
05/06	Q3		52
05/06	Q4	57	58
06/07	Q1		69
06/07	Q2		65
06/07	Q3		49
06/07	Q4	52	53
07/08	Q1		60
07/08	Q2		53
07/08	Q3		50
07/08	Q4	47	47

Former Best Value Performance Indicator 203 measures the percentage change in the average number of families, which include dependent children or a pregnant woman, placed in temporary accommodation under the homeless legislation compared with the average from the previous year.

Between 2005 and 2007 the number of families placed in temporary accommodation has increased slightly on a yearly basis. However, current performance is now travelling in the right direction. The corporate recognition of this tough challenge and our desire to achieve this target has been embraced and included as one of our key priorities in the new LAA Stretch targets.

Rochdale's temporary accommodation is managed by the homelessness and advice service and generally is of a good standard; although limited in provision for those with a disability. All households have self-contained accommodation either within a hostel setting or within dispersed properties. On occasion, some households will reside in other forms of temporary accommodation such as a refuge or another form of supported accommodation where the household may be required to share facilities.

In order to ensure that the temporary accommodation target is met it will be necessary to continue to work to proactively prevent homelessness. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7. It will also be necessary to work with partners to develop a temporary

accommodation reduction strategy to ensure that the number of dispersed properties is reduced strategically in line with yearly targets.

The Review identified that the length of time that households spend in temporary accommodation is considerable. It will be a key target to minimise any length of stay in temporary accommodation. Not only will this assist Rochdale in meeting the Government's temporary accommodation target but it will also mean that homeless households are able to move into settled accommodation in a more timely manner and begin their new lives in their new homes.

The Review also identified the lack in some instances of ongoing communication and support from the homelessness and advice team once a household was placed in temporary accommodation. The Council will seek to introduce regular case conferencing with homeless households in temporary accommodation every three months. A housing adviser will meet with the household along with their support worker and temporary accommodation manager. The case conferencing will enable the housing adviser to update them on their position, to discuss their other housing options, including private rented accommodation, and address any issues that may be preventing move on i.e. rent arrears.

The Review identified that there is no temporary accommodation specifically for couples or single females.

RMBC transferred its housing stock to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) an Arms Length Management Organisation in 2002 and as such is reliant upon nominations to RSLs. It has been identified that the long stay in temporary accommodation can sometimes be attributed to the eligibility criteria or allocations policies of some RSLs. Homeless households with a history of anti-social behaviour or who owe former rent arrears are sometimes unable to move on from temporary accommodation as the RSL will not accept the nomination. It is important that this is addressed if the Government's temporary accommodation target is to be met. The success of the Rochdale Borough Family Intervention Project and the Shelter Inclusion Project that provides Level 1 and 2 support for households at risk of losing their homes through non compliance, anti social behaviour and other management issues.

Consideration has also been given to the other forms of supported accommodation in Rochdale. Historically households living in supported accommodation needing to move on would present as homeless if they were likely to fall into a priority need category.

Bed & Breakfast

Actions

1b – What we will do to reduce the use of and length of stay in Bed & Breakfast accommodation

Reduce annually the number of households placed into B&B accommodation

Introduce a LPI to measure the number of households placed into B&B accommodation

Introduce a LPI to measure the length of stay in B&B for families, couples and singles

Ensure that there is alternative emergency accommodation available for 16 and 17 year olds

Ensure that all households in B&B are referred to floating support

In 06/07, 72 households were placed into Bed & Breakfast accommodation. It is a key priority of this strategy to reduce this figure annually, and to introduce a local performance indicator to monitor this.

Rochdale 16 & 17 year olds are not placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation. By working in partnership with social services, 16 & 17 year olds presenting as homeless are jointly assessed by the homelessness and advice team and Social Services and are placed in a supported lodgings scheme or placed with emergency night stop. However it will be essential that consideration is given to the Government's target for 16 & 17 year olds and that a range of options are available to homeless young people. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

Whilst the Review notes the worryingly high use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation its use has reduced from 2005 onwards.

The Review identified that homeless households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation do not receive floating support. This is essential to ensure that the household has access to a support network, whilst living in unsuitable accommodation out of the area.

Current Situation in Rochdale

The Review identified the continued use of Bed & Breakfast as a major concern for all household types. It has been identified in the previous section that securing suitable temporary accommodation for singles and couples is a priority action.

Former Best Value Performance Indicator 183a measures the average length of stay in Bed & Breakfast accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need and where the s193 duty has ended at some point during the year. In 06/07 the target for this was 3 weeks and the outturn was 3.29 weeks. It is of note that due to the long stays some households have in temporary accommodation this BVPI often records periods of stay

in Bed & Breakfast up to two years ago, as such this is not illustrative of current performance. It is therefore planned to introduce a local Performance Indicator, which will demonstrate current performance.

7. Prevention of Homelessness against the Main Causes

Actions

2 – What we will do to ensure homelessness is prevented against the main causes
Prevent homelessness for 825 households by Mar 2010.
Reduce the number of repeat homeless presentations to 75% over the life span of the strategy
Ensure that homelessness prevention is embedded in housing service plans for all four divisions
Prevent care leavers from becoming homeless and ensure tenancy sustainment - Develop a joint protocol with children's services to tackle and prevent youth homelessness
Improve access to accommodation for ex-offenders through the development of a joint protocol between local authorities and NOMS (National Offender Management Service)
Develop a monitoring mechanism to identify reasons for parents, family and friends evicting
Research in detail the reasons for eviction by parents, family and friends for 75% of all cases for 2008/09
Introduce a LPI to measure the number of home visits carried out for cases of parents, family and friends evicting, and outcomes
Home visits to be carried out for all cases of eviction by parents, family and friends and outcomes recorded
Develop a Homeless Prevention Toolkit for parents, family and friends evicting, to include home visits, mediation, joint visits and referrals to support
Review the effectiveness of the allocation of CLG prevention grant to different services
Work with partners at RBH to review allocations policy to reflect homelessness circumstances
Complete an annual analysis of homelessness database intelligence
Complete an analysis of how effectively the use of DHP is being deployed on homeless prevention.
Liaise with the Housing Benefit section to establish what actions to improve service performance exist and how the homeless and advice service could contribute towards this.
Develop an early intervention protocol with partners for the identification of homelessness
Establish an early intervention protocol for those people leaving NASS

accommodation
Explore the further development of Shelter Rochdale Borough Family Intervention Project support scheme for families with ASB who are threatened with eviction
Use the landlord forum to develop partnerships with private landlords and deliver good practice alternatives to accessing housing

Government Priorities

The Homelessness Act 2002 provided a cultural shift for traditional homelessness services by introducing the concept of homeless prevention as a key requirement of the statutory homeless service. The requirement to carry out a detailed review of homelessness within the Borough and to use the findings to develop a Homelessness Strategy has resulted in housing needs services becoming strategically driven, resulting in improved operational performance.

Current Situation in Rochdale

The development of Rochdale’s first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 has been slow to result in a transformation of what was a traditional homelessness service to a forward looking housing prevention and options service. Social landlords have all responded to the need to develop a preventative approach to supporting their tenants and have played an important role to helping people keep their home. However, this has been to some extent in isolation and there is an opportunity for much more effective working between wider preventative and support services and landlords.

The achievements outlined in Chapter 4 of this strategy would indicate that the homelessness and advice service in Rochdale has begun to embrace the prevention agenda, however, performance measures would suggest that further actions are required if prevention is to become embedded in the ethos of all stakeholders and partner agencies.

8. Supported and Move On Accommodation

Actions

3 – What we will do to improve access to supported accommodation and move on
Develop an allocations plan and move on strategy to address the problem of move on from supported accommodation projects
Monitor the impact of support services on homelessness needs
Complete an analysis in partnership with SP of numbers waiting to access services or refused access to services due to lack of capacity
Identify funding resources to provide supported accommodation for people

with complex/ chaotic lifestyles
Consider resource availability to provide supported housing for young women including those with substance misuse issues
Ensure that a lack of generic cross-tenure floating support service is recognised and prioritised as part of SP 3 year Interim Strategy
Work together with social services and SP to identify housing solutions for individuals with learning disabilities
Agree criteria for furnished property provision by RSLs – Explore development of furnished property scheme
Develop floating support services for older people in general needs housing which would enable them to be supported in the community
Increase adaptations services for those with learning disabilities
Analyse service provision for mentally disordered offenders
Lack of provision for 16-19 year olds leaving residential care/foster care need a semi – independence unit and look at addressing the causes of tenancy failure amongst young people.
Increase capacity for refugee services
Improve choice in the provision of lower level support within the borough
Complete a needs analysis for physical disabilities and sensory impairment groups
Establish targets for achieving sustainable and suitable accommodation for offenders, both those leaving prison and those in the community

Government Priorities

The introduction of the Supporting People funding regime in 2003 signalled commitment from the Government towards tackling socially excluded groups, including homeless households. The Homelessness Act 2002 recognises that more needs to be done for single homeless people in relation to both housing and accessing other statutory services.

Current Situation in Rochdale

The Homelessness Review identified that there was a significant demand for supported accommodation in Rochdale that cannot be met within existing supply. As part of the new Supporting People Strategic Plan we are undertaking a complete review of all SP funded services for Single Homeless People. There is evidence that a high proportion of accommodation based provision is taken up by non host or out of area people and this is likely to be a contributory factor to shortages. The review has also highlighted that although there is a relatively high provision of supported accommodation based schemes, there are still particular client groups that have difficulty in accessing accommodation or that there is no adequate accommodation or floating support scheme to meet their needs.

It has also been identified that the lack of move on accommodation exacerbates this problem, whereby supported units are occupied by individuals no longer in need of the level of support offered. It will be essential to tackle the problems underlying the move

on issue to ensure that supported accommodation projects are available to those in need. However, tackling the issue of move on alone will not meet the significant demand for supported accommodation in Rochdale. It will be essential that the findings of the Homelessness Review inform the Supporting People Strategy and it will be essential that the section lobbies for funding to ensure that this need is recognised and met.

It is clear that a failure to meet this need will result in individuals with high needs living in unsuitable accommodation, sofa surfing or being forced to sleep rough.

It has also been identified through the Review that there is no supported accommodation available locally for individuals with complex and chaotic lifestyles; this is a picture that is mirrored across the North West.

Chapter 6 recognises the increased reliance upon the private rented sector in meeting the housing need in Rochdale and ensuring that homelessness can be prevented. The Homelessness Review identified that there is no generic floating support service that is available to households living in the private rented sector. It is essential that this need is met if the private rented sector is to be fully utilised and to be accessible to more vulnerable households with identified support needs. Such a service would also have a positive impact on levels of repeat homelessness and homelessness in general from the private rented sector.

The Review also identified that there will be 30 individuals with learning disabilities who will require accommodation in Rochdale in the coming years and a range of sustainable housing solutions need to be identified to meet this client group.

9. Developing the Homelessness and Advice Service

Actions

4 – What we will do to improve and develop the Housing Options Service
Review homelessness procedures and implement a system of random case file checks
Deliver homelessness and housing training to partner agencies including Day Centres –develop the Day Centres as primary service or first port of call for single homeless
Identify accurate levels of rough sleeping data in the Borough
Carry out an awareness raising campaign of the Homelessness and advice service including feedback on the location of the office and accessibility
Develop an outreach housing service
Revise website information on housing advice and homelessness
Review all homelessness and advice performance targets and establish individual staff targets and monitoring procedures
Develop greater engagement with private rented sector in developing further housing options
Improve nomination monitoring to ensure that full use is being made of nomination agreements, ensuring homeless households have maximum access to social housing
Raise awareness of the homelessness and advice service with BME communities in Rochdale
Carry out staff training in all aspects of homeless legislation and prevention measures and updates
Develop a Homefinder pack of forms for home visits and a leaflet regarding prevention services provided
Analyse how many users access homelessness and support services from out of the area. Monitor - non host applications and work with partner agencies to support people coming in to access services in their home location.
Update homelessness decision letters
Introduce contact cards for Homelessness and Prevention officers, and posters to be displayed in other offices
Monitor ex-armed forces activity based upon local homelessness and rehousing intelligence
Programme mental health awareness training for frontline housing staff
Restructure the Homelessness Advice Service
Ensure that homelessness and homelessness issues are part of the cross cutting response to delivering the Local Area Agreement

Government Priorities

The CLG has advocated the transformation of traditional homelessness services, which process homeless applications, to housing options services, whereby every case of homelessness is seen to be potentially preventable. Such services are client focused and outcome based.

As part of the Government's choice and empowerment agenda there is a requirement for every local authority to implement a choice based lettings scheme by 2010.

Current Situation in Rochdale

Promoting choice and empowering people to find housing solutions are fundamental to the Homelessness Strategy.

The provision of good quality housing advice is integral to an effective Homelessness Strategy. Timely advice and information is key to preventing homelessness. The Homelessness and Advice Service saw 4594 individuals in 2006/07. There have been considerable staffing issues within the team including additional members of staff, this coupled with changing roles means that access to regular and appropriate training is essential if they are to effectively advise clients.

The Homelessness Review identified that some partners and many members of the general public were concerned about the location of the service in terms of accessibility across the Borough. An awareness raising campaign is needed to raise the profile of the service internally within the Council, with partners and the wider public. The Council should also consider providing outreach based service provision for homelessness and housing advice and homelessness services should be included in the development of Housing Options and neighbourhood based services.

The relationship and close working between the Homelessness service and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing is extremely effective and there is a good understanding of the role and aim of each of the services. As the Prevention agenda is extended, it is important that this relationship is maintained and there is a role for Housing Advisors to work with front line Housing Officers to improve access and effectiveness of the prevention service.

The Homelessness Service is in a process of re-profiling to reflect the change in emphasis from a reactive to a pro-active preventative service. In order to achieve the changes we will restructure the service to reflect the change in nature of the service that we will deliver.

Understanding of the range and extent of the Homelessness service and the role it plays in contributing to local and national strategic targets is superficial. It is considered by both stakeholders and customers as mainly a pathway to temporary accommodation and possibly housing. As well as publicising the service across the Borough to the community, we intend to continue to create better understanding and partnership working with key statutory agencies. This will developed in part via the

opportunities being presented through the thematic partnerships of the Local area Agreement and with the support of the Local Strategic Partnership.

10. Reducing Homelessness amongst Young People

Actions

5 – What we will do to prevent homelessness amongst and develop services for young people
Reduce the number of young people accepted as homeless by 75%
Ensure all 16 and 17 year olds presenting themselves as homeless are dealt with under the joint agreement with Social Services and placed in Supported Lodging accommodation or other appropriate accommodation
Analyse the effectiveness of single homeless support services to assess value for money in terms of preventing repeat homelessness.
Implement an assessment process to be completed within 24 hours of presenting as homeless for young people at risk with comprehensive data sheets being made available by referring agencies including development of a homelessness information pack that could travel with the client

Government Priorities

Tackling youth homelessness is a key Government priority, and in November 2007 the CLG announced a package of measures to tackle and prevent youth homelessness through:

- A commitment that by 2010, no 16/17 year olds should be placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, except in an emergency;
- Improving access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people) so that there is a universal expectation of such services;
- Establishing supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.

Every Child Matters – issues for young people leaving care

Working Together to Safeguard Children sets out how individuals and organisations should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. For young people leaving care, there are still gaps in local authority planning which mean that almost one in six young people leaving care are placed in unsuitable – sometimes unsafe – accommodation. There need to be much closer links between leaving care and housing services within local authorities, to avoid the confusion that sometimes arises around young people’s needs and the support they are entitled to.

Current Situation in Rochdale

The Review has identified that 41% of people who were accepted as homeless in the period 2006/2007 were under 24 years. Whilst currently supported provision for single homeless in Rochdale accounts for 24.83% of the total supporting people budget, alternative support mechanisms and housing options are needed to assist young people who become homeless.

The review of the Homelessness Strategy has shown how we have successfully sought to address the needs of young people that become homeless, but the challenge is to develop effective ways of preventing homelessness. There needs to be some work done in establishing effective early warning mechanisms that identify at an earlier stage that a young person is vulnerable to becoming homeless. We need to work with parents and families to offer practical support and mediation to prevent parental eviction. We should seek to ensure that housing and homelessness are issues that should be considered as part of the citizenship curriculum in schools that links with wider aspirations around education and employment.

As detailed throughout this document the Homelessness Review identified that young people are significantly over represented in the homeless population of Rochdale.

Joint assessments with social services mean that young people are able to access supported lodgings, however this type of accommodation can have a high cost associated with it. There is an increasing need to establish emergency accommodation specifically for young homeless people.

Rochdale is developing integrated services and applying a Common Assessment Framework when working with children and young people.

Currently under 18's are unable to access social housing tenancies with most housing providers. This impacts on the ability to move young households on from temporary accommodation.

11. Resources

Ian - See comments in email

12. Tackling Homelessness in the North West

Ian - on this section of the regional homelessness strategy, it would be good if you could give some examples of how Rochdale is contributing to each of the three priorities.

North West Regional Homelessness Strategy 2008

The North West Regional Homelessness Strategy has been designed to tackle the underlying cause of homelessness, to prevent homelessness and to ensure that the North West as a region provide excellent services to support people to access warm, secure and affordable homes.

The strategy has been developed with all key stakeholders in the region with clear links to the individual LA homelessness strategy development processes. Involvement will continue through the Regional Homelessness Forum.

The strategy sets out three groups of priorities for action. These priorities are expanded upon within the full strategy document, however, there is clearly a common thread in the actions identified by the Rochdale MBC review.

Priority one: prevent homelessness

1. Increase early identification and intervention to reduce the number of households who present as homeless
2. Provide timely and high quality advice and information that enables households to resolve their housing issues
3. Prevent evictions and loss of existing homes from social housing and the private sector
4. Prevent repeat homelessness to reduce the impact of this on individuals, families and Communities
5. Reduce the level of rough sleeping

Priority two: increase access to a choice of settled homes

1. Inform activity to increase the supply of social rented stock in the region
2. Increase the role of the private rented sector in providing a choice of settled and affordable homes
3. Increase access to social housing for homeless and vulnerable households
4. Increase the rate of successful and sustainable move-on from temporary accommodation (supported housing, hospital, etc)
5. Increase the number of homeless and vulnerable people receiving basic skills training and/or entering into employment, education, and training, addressing worklessness and increasing household income
6. Support improvements in temporary accommodation to develop into 'places of change', enabling households to move into – and sustain – settled housing
7. Offer a range of supported housing options for households who are vulnerable to homelessness and may not have their needs met by other statutory service provision

Priority three: develop plans and activity based on a robust understanding of homelessness and housing need

1. Increase regional understanding of the:

- Causes of homelessness
- Housing needs of homeless and vulnerable households
- Nature of rough sleeping in the region
- Impact of the housing market, and housing market interventions e.g. tackling overcrowding

2. Develop an understanding of the supply of temporary and supported housing

3. Develop a region-wide minimum standard for collecting data about the needs of non-priority and priority homeless applicants

4. Develop an understanding of resources currently used to prevent homelessness and increase access to housing

5. Develop a regional standard for engaging service users

Good Practice

The Government has issued a Good Practice Guide as part of the North West Regional Homelessness Strategy to assist local authorities develop services that will meet the challenges across the region. Services that have been developed and delivered locally are cited as areas of good practice and encourage and support us that we are moving in the right direction.

We achieved status in delivering good practice in

- Resettlement for Offenders from BME communities
- Safer Home Sanctuary Scheme to enable people experiencing domestic abuse to remain safely in their own home
- Providing Housing Options to homeless households in the private sector through the Family Choice Bond Scheme.
- Shelter Inclusion Project and Family Intervention Scheme that supports households at risk of being evicted due to anti social behaviour.

13. Next Steps

The actions detailed throughout the body of this document have been compiled into a detailed action plan, which can be found in Chapter 14. The action plan details the timescale for the delivery of the Strategy over the next three years, lead responsibility, key partners and milestones. Following formal consultation and the adoption of Rochdale's Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011, work will begin to ensure that the actions are delivered.

The Homelessness Steering Group will monitor the delivery of the action plan against its targets, and progress will also be reported to the Homelessness Forum, Strategic Housing Management, Performance Board, Members and via links to thematic partners.

The Homelessness Steering Group will establish five new subgroups to recognise the Strategy's five strategic priorities;

- **Temporary accommodation and Bed & Breakfast**
- **Prevention of Homelessness**
- **Supported accommodation and move on**
- **Housing Options**
- **Young People**

Each subgroup will be made up of a range of representatives from all key partner agencies, and each subgroup will have a responsibility in working to ensure that the actions are delivered jointly.

It is anticipated that this delivery mechanism will ensure that the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011 remains a live document, which delivers outcomes to assist some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged households in Rochdale.