

Tendring
District Council



*A Homelessness
Strategy
for
Tendring*

2009-2014

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FOREWORD

Welcome to our Homelessness Strategy for the next 5 years. Our aim is for fewer people in Tendring to experience homelessness and to ensure that for those households for whom homelessness cannot be prevented, they are assisted to find a settled home as quickly as possible.

Tackling homelessness effectively involves strong partnerships with housing associations and other agencies in both the voluntary and statutory sectors. As a result of the first 5 year strategy we have achieved many of our objectives through adopting a more proactive housing options approach, which has achieved significant reductions in homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

Our new Homelessness Strategy for Tendring aims to build on this success and sets out a vision for tackling homelessness over coming years, based on a detailed review of the current position and an analysis of future trends.

I hope you find this document interesting and useful. If you would like to know more about the services covered in this strategy or would like to discuss any of the issues raised, please contact:

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. This strategy defines our strategic approach for the period 2008-2013 and replaces our previous Homelessness Strategy, published in 2003.

OUR REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN TENDRING

To inform the development of our strategy we have undertaken a thorough homelessness review to gather together a wide range of evidence to establish the current levels of homelessness in the District, the main causes of that homelessness and what more could be done to prevent homelessness.

Key Findings from the Review

Levels of Homelessness in Tendring: There has been a 35.3% reduction in the number of homelessness acceptances by the Council in the 5 years since 2003. This is due primarily to increased and more effective activity in preventing homelessness, rather than a reduction in households in housing need.

However, the number of requests for housing advice has increased from 1621 in 2003-04 to 1862 in 2007-08 (an increase of 14.9%). Of particular concern is the increase in the number of approaches from households with mortgage arrears. From the 1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008, 41 approaches were made, whereas for the same period in 2007 only 13 approaches were received.

Additionally, the slowdown in the housing market and the 'credit crunch' have implications for our strategy in terms of repossessions, availability of mortgages and developers' willingness to build and deliver affordable housing.

Reasons for Homelessness: The three most common causes of homelessness during 2007-08 were:

1. Having to leave the homes of family or friends (37.4%);
2. Loss of privately rented (assured shorthold tenancies) not related to rent arrears (23.7%);
3. Relationship breakdown (13%).

Use of Temporary Accommodation: There has been a 59% reduction in the number of households staying in temporary accommodation since 2003. There were 167 households at the end of March 2008, compared to 408 in 2003. Use of bed & breakfast accommodation for families has been reduced but progress in meeting the Government's 2010 target to end its use for 16 and 17 year olds will require other forms of supported accommodation to be provided.

Rough Sleeping: There is little evidence that rough sleeping is a significant problem in the District, although it clearly occurs. The review has identified that more could be done to publicise what to do when coming across a rough sleeper who wants help.

Housing Advice and Homelessness Services: The use of our Deposit Guarantee and Rent in Advance and Homelessness Prevention Fund schemes have proved effective in improving access to rented homes in the private sector.

Vulnerable Groups: There has been an increase in the provision of floating support to assist vulnerable people to sustain their tenancy. New initiatives will need to be introduced to

particularly counter homelessness amongst young people, women suffering domestic violence and ex-offenders.

High Housing Need and Low Supply of Affordable Housing

Tendring is an area of very high and increasing levels of housing need as demonstrated through successive Housing Needs Surveys and also the number of applicants on the Council's Housing Register who are seeking affordable accommodation.

The current estimate shows an annual net affordable housing shortfall, if all needs are to be met, of 1,579 units. There are many contributory factors:

- ❖ Low historical levels of social housing
- ❖ Low provision of new affordable housing
- ❖ Affordability of market housing
- ❖ Lack of alternative tenures
- ❖ Low income levels
- ❖ High levels of unemployment
- ❖ Increasing number of households in unsatisfactory housing
- ❖ Emerging and concealed households in housing need
- ❖ Population growth
- ❖ Inward migration of households in need

The Council has sought to address this problem by successfully seeking significant increases in the supply of affordable housing to be delivered through planning obligations as set out in the Local Plan 2007. However, the effects of the global economic situation experienced in 2008 are likely to impact on the delivery of all new housing in the short and medium terms and housing need will continue to increase.

National, Regional and Local Agenda

The development of our strategy has also been informed by consideration of the Government's national performance priorities and expectations for tackling homelessness:

- ❖ Bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities is not to be used for families with children or a pregnant woman except in emergencies and then only for a maximum of 6 weeks.
- ❖ The same restriction on bed and breakfast accommodation to be applied to homeless 16 and 17 year old young people by 2010.
- ❖ Year on year increase in the number of households prevented from becoming homeless.
- ❖ A halving of the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010. For Tendring this means halving the December 2004 figure of 349 households to 150).

The Homelessness Strategy also links to the regional and county priorities, including the Local Area Agreement, local priorities for the District, particularly the Sustainable Community Strategy and the key themes of the Council's own Corporate Strategy - especially the emphasis on customer service.

PRIORITIES AND KEY ACTIONS OF OUR HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Our review of homelessness and homelessness services in Tendring, together with consideration of the central Government agenda and the Council's broader vision, has identified five strategic objectives to be addressed over the next 5 years.

1. Preventing Homelessness

Preventing homelessness remains as the primary aim of our strategy. Our work in this area will centre upon:

- ❖ Ensuring that the maximum number of households are assisted to rent privately through our Rent in Advance/Deposit Guarantee schemes
- ❖ Work closely with the Council's Benefits Team to ensure that people dependent on Benefit who are threatened with homelessness are identified at an early stage.
- ❖ Enable minors to access affordable housing and reduce time in temporary accommodation by encouraging social housing providers to follow best practice on granting tenancies held in trust to minors.
- ❖ Develop a Partnership Plan to ensure the Council's Homelessness and Advice Team engages with other agencies to share best practice and build trust with others who are working to prevent homelessness in the district
- ❖ In collaboration with Benefits and Revenues ensure that effective use is made of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in preventing homelessness.
- ❖ Develop the current Court Desk facility to assist those facing homelessness through the repossession of their homes
- ❖ Develop closer working with Job Centre Plus to address the link between homelessness and unemployment

2. Improving Customer Services

Our homelessness prevention strategy relies on good levels of customer service from our Housing Advice and Homelessness Service. The main actions in this area include:

- ❖ Improve the content of the housing advice and homelessness pages of the Council's web-site to make advice on preventing homelessness more accessible to the public and other interested agencies.
- ❖ We will continue to place great emphasis on the provision of training to our Housing Advice and Homelessness staff, particularly in the latest case law, to ensure a quality advice service. Additional training will also be provided to the Council's main reception staff.

3. Support for Vulnerable Groups

We need to ensure that we are working effectively with our partners in dealing with the needs of all of the vulnerable groups facing homelessness and signposting the support available to them. Particular emphasis will be placed upon dealing with the needs of young people, women suffering domestic violence, ex-offenders and rough sleepers. The main actions will include:

- ❖ Developing a new Housing Options booklet specifically for young people.

- ❖ Develop effective education programmes within schools on the issues to be considered when planning to leave home.
- ❖ Undertake a review of the mediation scheme to assist both parents and young people in their relationships
- ❖ Work with Essex County Council and voluntary agencies to develop a supported lodgings scheme to provide short term 'cooling-off' accommodation for young people whilst mediation is tried.
- ❖ Ensure that young people are provided with support in their first tenancy until they are able to manage independently.
- ❖ Encourage more social housing providers to be involved in the development of the "Safe at Home Scheme" which enables women who are subject to domestic violence to safely remain in their homes if they wish to.
- ❖ Participate in the countywide Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which will consider how individual domestic violence cases can best be managed.
- ❖ Provide advice and guidance to other organisations about how rough sleepers can be assisted.
- ❖ Visiting all 16/17 year olds at home who are threatened with homelessness, where this is appropriate.

Specific joint working protocols are being developed in partnership with other Essex Housing Authority's and Essex Social Services covering:

1. Vulnerable and homeless 16 &17 year olds approaching either the Council or Social Services for assistance
2. Homeless households with dependant children found to be intentionally homeless
3. Care Leaver accommodation issues with Essex County Council's Schools, Children and Families Directorate

It is essential that these protocols are progressed during the first year of the revised strategy.

4. Improving Standards in the Provision of Temporary Accommodation.

Where we do need to use temporary accommodation, it should have regard to quality, location and cost, together with the particular targets to halve the numbers of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 and eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities. As well as pursuing these targets, the main actions will include:

- ❖ Ensuring where possible that people are not placed in temporary accommodation a long way from their support, schooling and employment.
- ❖ Review the use of existing temporary accommodation in terms of quality, location and cost.
- ❖ Ensure that the Council meets the Government's target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

5. Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing.

A lack of affordable housing is one of the key underlying causes of homelessness in Tendring. Initiatives in this area will concentrate upon:

- ❖ Meet general housing need by enabling affordable housing on new developments through developer contributions in line with the Council's Local Plan policies.

- ❖ Recognise the problem of rural homelessness and support the development of affordable housing schemes for local people on rural exception sites.
- ❖ Develop proposals for the effective use of the accumulated developer financial contributions for affordable housing
- ❖ Continue to identify surplus sites for transfer to housing associations to develop affordable housing
- ❖ Make best use of existing stock, including bringing empty homes back into use and encouraging those who are under-occupying their homes to move
- ❖ Investigating the options for delivering intermediate tenure housing options including intermediate rent and shared ownership
- ❖ Investigate the options for supporting the acquisition of stock or sites for affordable housing from developers who are looking to “offload” in a falling market
- ❖ Prioritise support for new housing developments that achieve regeneration and increase employment opportunities

RESOURCES

Much of the delivery of this strategy is dependent upon working in effective partnerships such as multi-agency working with Registered Social Landlords, Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, Probation and other voluntary and community service partners.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) provides a grant direct to the Council to fund homelessness prevention. This is set for the next three years at £60k per year. Funding also comes from the Essex Supporting People programme, including financing of the Floating Support service.

The main source of revenue funding for our homelessness and housing advice activities comes from the Council’s General Fund Revenue budget. For 2008-09 this amounts to £459,300.

It has been identified that additional resources will be required to enable the Council to explore and implement new accommodation initiatives to tackle youth homelessness as a result of the Government’s commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

Funding for a new post on a fixed term contract could be funded from within the existing grant allocation that is currently being received from Communities and Local Government. The progression of this initiative forms one of the priorities under the revised strategy.

Any growth funding required from the Council’s own resources will be determined in accordance with the Council’s Financial Strategy.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

Recently received statutory guidance states that the local authority should recognise that the overall strategic vision for their area should take full and proper account of housing and should therefore incorporate its Housing Strategy and revised Homelessness Strategy within their Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The draft Homelessness Strategy and Review will therefore be presented to the Local Strategic Partnership for their consideration.

Following consultation, a detailed Homelessness Delivery Plan will be prepared to cover the life of the strategy and this will be monitored through the Council's performance management and service planning systems.

It is intended that progress on the Homelessness Delivery Plan should be reported periodically through the Local Strategic Partnership and the Council's Service Development and Delivery Committee

2.0 HOMELESSNESS IN A STRATEGIC CONTEXT

National Policy and Guidance

The homelessness legislation – Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 - was introduced to provide the statutory under-pinning to help local authorities tackle homelessness.

In 2002, the Government amended the homelessness legislation through the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. This required a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness and extended the priority need categories.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all local authorities are required to produce a homelessness strategy, which must be reviewed every five years.

The Government's strategy for tackling homelessness is outlined in *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (2005)*. The summary document *Settled Homes; Changing Lives*, outlines the main priorities and actions. These include increasing funding, providing more settled homes, and helping more people out of rough sleeping.

Specific targets have been set for local authorities:

- ❖ To end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, other than in an emergency.
- ❖ To end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010, other than in an emergency
- ❖ To keep levels of rough sleeping as close to zero as possible.
- ❖ To reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 50%, by 2010.

In December 2006, the former Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper, announced additional funding for 2007/08 to support local authorities in preventing and tackling homelessness.

A new package of measures to help prevent youth homelessness has also recently been announced. More than a third of new cases of homelessness nationally in 2005/06 were young people aged under 25. The new measures will include a National Youth Homelessness Scheme, a Centre of Excellence in every region, and a new National Homelessness Advice Service.

New National Guidance: *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*

During July 2008, Government also published their final statutory guidance 'Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities'.

The guidance provides advice about establishing a strategic vision for local areas through Sustainable Community Strategies, and sets out the importance of the local authority

strategic housing role in shaping places. It also allows local authorities discretion on how, when and in what format they document their housing strategy and the expectation that where possible housing and homelessness strategies will be incorporated within the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The Regional Approach

The Regional Housing Strategy produced by the East of England Regional Assembly (ERRA) recognises that the rising levels of homelessness and the associated use of temporary accommodation is a feature across the East of England.

Additionally it has been recognised that an emerging issue across the region is the housing and homeless problems experienced by younger people, particularly the 16–17 year old age group.

Homelessness is often as a result of other problems, financial, health or social and it is recognised as important that these other problems are tackled. The regional approach to alleviating homelessness therefore seeks to provide assistance by linking with other regional strategies such as the health strategy, social strategy, rehabilitation and resettlement strategy as well as regional initiatives on drug action, asylum support and domestic violence.

Key stakeholders across the East of England have worked together to develop a list of priorities for tackling homelessness and action to progress the East of England Homelessness Action Plan 2007-2010 will be taken forward by the Regional Homeless Advisory Panel (RHAP).

The 3 priority areas in the regional action plan are:

- ❖ Effective influencing communication and co-ordination
- ❖ Homelessness prevention and support for people at risk of homelessness
- ❖ Access to permanent housing for homeless people

Further details about the Regional Homeless Advisory Panel are available on their dedicated website www.eerhap.org.uk

One of the most important roles ERRA has is the allocation from the single regional capital pot for investment for new affordable housing to enable the accommodation needs of homeless households to be met through an overall increase in stock.

Local Strategic Context

The Tendring Sustainable Community Strategy addresses the key strategic issues likely to affect the future of the district over the next ten years looks ahead to what the district could be like in 2016 through the actions of the key organisations represented on the Local Strategic Partnership.

- ❖ Community planning involves a joined up approach to the cross cutting issues across the District such as crime, health, the environment and deprivation which no one organisation can solve on its own.
- ❖ The Tendring Local Strategic Partnership was formed in 1998 and has recently reviewed its organisation and ways of working to ensure that it is fit for purpose. It is the “partnership of partnerships” in the eyes of the government.
- ❖ The Sustainable Community Strategy is based on a number of key inputs including:
 - The views of the public;

- Evidence about the key characteristics of the District;
 - Government policies and guidance against which the key organisations have to deliver either individually or working together;
 - The shape of things to come – external influences, most notably climate change, will influence and shape the future policy agenda;
 - Ensuring that the partners have a shared understanding of the dynamics of change locally and the direction of travel we want to follow; and
 - Focusing on key issues and outcomes
 - Taking actions which will make a real difference to the quality of life of local residents.
- ❖ In the future there will be a greater need for community leadership reflecting the different needs of individuals and communities. A “one size fits all” approach will not be appropriate.
 - ❖ Some of the key interventions will need to recognise that prevention is better than cure and changing attitudes and personal behaviour requires new ways of engaging with the public and actions at an early stage for those at risk of crime, family breakdown or substance abuse.
 - ❖ The Vision has taken into account the opportunities to bring about change in different settings with different audiences and new ways of working together with new sources of finance.
 - ❖ The Sustainable Community Strategy paints a picture of what Tendring could be like in 2016. The steps necessary to achieve the Partnership’s aspirations and appropriate milestones have been identified in the proposals.

The six strategic themes are:

Health: The population of the district is able to live longer, healthier lives, less limited by long-term illness.

Economic Development: Tendring has a stronger and more dynamic local economy together with a skilled workforce.

Children and Young People have an equal opportunity for a good start in life.

Crime and Disorder: Keeping the district one of the safest parts of the country.

Deprivation: Narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged areas and elsewhere.

Environment – the attractive environment of the district is safeguarded for future generations.

For each theme, a lead co-ordinating organisation will be identified to develop a three year Action and Delivery Plan with annual delivery plans which will be regularly monitored by the Executive Board of the Local Strategic Partnership and the results reported annually at a Stakeholders and Community Conference.

The Council’s Corporate Strategy sets out four key priority themes:

A Strong Local Economy

- ❖ Ensuring that sufficient land is available in the right places through the District Local Plan
- ❖ Creating jobs

- ❖ Exploiting development opportunities through planning decisions
- ❖ Increasing inward investment
- ❖ Regenerating the rural economy through appropriate diversification and improved access.

Focussing on the creation of a strong local economy will make it easier for the Council to achieve their other priorities:

A Cleaner District

- ❖ Improving customer satisfaction
- ❖ Improving cleanliness as measured by the Audit Commission's cleanliness indicator
- ❖ Increasing recycling
- ❖ Reducing the impact of fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles

A Safer Community

- ❖ Reducing fear of crime and crime levels in the district through the use of CCTV and other crime reduction initiatives
- ❖ Being well prepared for civil emergencies

Affordable and Decent Housing

- ❖ Working to increase the supply of decent affordable homes in towns and villages
- ❖ Improving the quality of housing in the district
- ❖ Providing support and advice to those who are homeless
- ❖ Providing an efficient benefits system

The Homelessness Strategy should also be read in conjunction with the Council's Housing Strategy, *People, Partners, Properties 2005-2010*, a partner document, which sets out our overall priorities for housing in the district.

3.0 REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN TENDRING 2007/08

A Homelessness Review has been undertaken to gather a wide range of evidence to establish:

- ❖ Levels of homelessness in Tendring
- ❖ The reasons that people become homeless
- ❖ Which groups are most likely to become homeless
- ❖ What resources currently exist to help homeless households
- ❖ What more needs to be done to prevent homelessness
- ❖ How homeless households can be helped to find and maintain a suitable and settled home.

This information has been used to identify gaps in services and to develop a Homelessness Strategy to address these gaps.

3.1 HOW THE REVIEW WAS UNDERTAKEN

The review included an information gathering exercise with our key partner agencies, housing provider's service users and our own Housing Services staff. This has identified some key priorities that have been included in the new strategy. We have also used the Department for Communities and Local Government document "Preventing Homelessness, a Strategy Checklist" as a way of structuring an assessment of the results of the review under the following headings:

- ❖ Strategic Assessment
- ❖ Prevention of homelessness
- ❖ Tackling the wider causes of homelessness
- ❖ Administering homelessness more efficiently

The main findings of the review were as follows:-

3.2 LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS IN TENDRING

- ❖ There has been a steady reduction in the number of formal homelessness applications to the Council since 2003. This is due primarily to increased activity in preventing homelessness through a more pro-active housing options approach, rather than a reduction in households in housing need.
- ❖ The number of requests for housing advice has increased from 1621 in 2003-04 to 1862 in 2007-08 (an increase of 14.9%).
- ❖ We have seen a 35.3% reduction in homelessness acceptances by the Council in the last 5 years from 306 in 2003/04 to 198 in 2007/08.

Number of housing advice and homelessness cases seen over the last five years					
Activity	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Housing advice enquiries to the Council	1,621	1,656	1,785	1,947	1,862
(of which led to homeless applications)	638	499	453	496	397
(of which led to homeless acceptances)	306	296	234	284	198

3.3 REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS APPLICATIONS

- ❖ The highest number of applicants that have become homeless is as a result of having to leave the homes of their parents, relatives or friends. Overcrowding, relationship problems and lack of alternative housing are all factors in triggering this category of homelessness. This category primarily involves young people. It is a fluctuating picture and in 2007-08 there were 74 applications as opposed to 88 in 2003-04 (37.4% of all applications).
- ❖ The Loss of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector is the second most common cause of homelessness applications. However, this category has reduced by 55.7% from 106 applications in 2003-04 to 47 in 2007-08 (23.7% of all applications)
- ❖ The breakdown of relationships (non-violent and violent) is the third most common cause of homelessness, although the numbers associated with violent breakdown

have improved from an average of 12 cases over the life of the previous strategy to 7 cases in 2007-08.

- ❖ Other reasons for loss of rented accommodation have also shown a reduction over the life of the strategy, reducing from 38 applications in 2003-04 to 21 in 2007-08, a reduction of 44.7%.
- ❖ Although there has not been a significant number of homelessness applications received due to mortgage arrears over the life of the strategy. The number received has increased from 2 applications in 2003-04 to 8 applications in 2007-08.

Homelessness Acceptances					
Reasons for Homelessness	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
Unable to remain with parent, relative or friend	88	95	69	90	74
Non violent breakdown of relationship with partner	15	17	16	19	19
Violent breakdown of relationship with partner	9	19	11	15	7
Violent breakdown associated person	0	0	0	0	0
Racially motivated violence	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of violence	12	9	8	9	7
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of harassment	4	0	2	1	0
Mortgage arrears	2	4	8	5	8
Rent arrears LA/RSL	0	0	0	0	0
Rent Arrears private sector	2	6	0	0	0
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	106	84	71	80	47
Other reasons for loss of rented/tied housing	38	46	21	35	21
Discharged from institution	13	8	18	0	0
Left prison	0	0	0	9	3
Left hospital	0	0	0	8	0
Left other institution	0	0	0	5	8
Left HM forces	0	0	2	3	0
Other	17	8	8	5	4
Total Homelessness Acceptances	306	296	234	284	198

3.4 USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Government's target to reduce the numbers of households living in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010 used information from each local authority that was provided as at the end of December 2004. The Council's initial target was to reduce the

numbers of households from 349 to 174 which has been achieved. Further reductions will need to be made during the life of the new strategy.

- ❖ There has been a 52% reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation in the 5 years to March 2008.
- ❖ The Council has access to specially designated self-contained temporary accommodation owned by Family Mosaic Housing Association, Colne Housing Society and Salvation Army Housing Association.
- ❖ The Council uses some privately owned bed & breakfast type accommodation with shared use of bathing, cooking and toilet facilities.
- ❖ Young people especially need to be accommodated in temporary accommodation close to their support networks.

Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation						
Type	Mar 03	Dec 04	Mar 05	Mar 06	Mar 07	Mar 08
Bed and Breakfast	31	16	25	9	20	10
Annexe	0	1	1	0	0	0
Refuge	1	3	1	0	0	0
Private Rented	69	36	34	0	0	0
Private sector Leasing	0	5	5	0	0	0
Council accommodation	275	257	250	236	185	146
Housing Association	32	31	36	22	23	11
Total	408	349	352	267	228	167

3.5 ADMINISTERING HOMELESSNESS MORE EFFECTIVELY

The Communities and Local Government document, *Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check*, has been used in reviewing the homelessness service that is currently being provided.

Conducting Options Interviews

The structure, content and length of interviews are essential components of a successful options approach, as are the referral links between the interviews and more intensive options and prevention initiatives.

The decision to move to a housing options approach was taken as a measure to improve services and reduce the reliance on accepting homelessness applications as the sole way of dealing with homelessness issues.

The Council's Homelessness and Advice team deal with both the prevention of homelessness and the assessment of homelessness applications. Officers are able to advise on general housing matters as well as providing assistance to applicants through the Council's Rent Guarantee and Deposit Scheme on how to obtain accommodation the private rented sector they may also act as an advocate, on a person's behalf to prevent them from losing their home. This may mean negotiating with their landlord or it may mean advising how they can be represented in court.

It is important that persons who are threatened with homelessness should be able to obtain an interview when approaching the Council and procedures need to be in place to ensure that applicants in need of temporary accommodation can be seen immediately when they present as homeless.

It is also recommended that authorities review how long applicants have to wait for an interview. How long interviews are scheduled to last whether there is a clear list of the areas that must be covered during an options interview.

Pre-arranged interview slots are available for persons threatened with homelessness or needing housing advice. Emergency appointments for those persons requiring temporary accommodation are available each day. On arrival callers will be allocated the next available appointment.

Applicants that are actually homeless are seen the same day. Other applicants receive an appointment within 10 working days. Interviews usually last from 30 to 45 minutes.

The Council also operates a service for emergencies that occur out of normal office hours during week days, weekends and public holidays.

To ensure that best practice is followed during an options interview, we intend to undertake a review of the option interview process within the first year of the new strategy.

Staffing

To assess whether an authority has changed its focus sufficiently to be effective in homelessness prevention, the *Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check* suggests that authorities assess whether they have sufficient resources for prevention and casework assessment or whether there are plans to increase resources still further.

Over the period of the last strategy, staffing resources were increased through the recruitment of a Young Persons Homelessness Officer and, following approval by the Human Resources Committee, this post is now part of the permanent establishment.

It has been identified that additional resources will be required to enable the Council to explore and implement new accommodation initiatives to tackle youth homelessness as a result of the Government's commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

Homelessness grant funding is available to fund a new post on a fixed term contract and this will form one of the key action points under the revised strategy.

3.6 PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

Communities and Local Government (CLG) advocate a homeless prevention ethos. Central to this ethos is a pro-active rather than a reactive approach. Prevention is defined as "activities that enable a household to remain in their current home, where appropriate, or that provides options to enable a planned and timely move and help to sustain independent living. This could involve early intervention, pre-crisis intervention and preventing recurring homelessness or tenancy rescue".

Housing Advice

Currently housing and homelessness advice is provided at the Town Hall Clacton on a daily basis and a weekly surgery at the Council's Harwich Cash Office. Advice is also available

through Citizens Advice Bureau at Clacton and Harwich. Specialist outreach advice is also provided by Fisher Jones Greenwood on a daily basis at the Clacton offices of Citizens Advice Bureau.

The recent advice and information in respect of court desks is very timely in view of the recent upward trend in mortgage repossessions due to such factors as the credit crunch and rising mortgage interest rates. More and more households are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up their mortgage repayments.

Although there is not a homelessness prevention court advocacy service specifically in place for Tendring, persons are able to access a limited service in conjunction with Colchester CAB through Colchester County Court. The Development of Court Desks is regarded as a positive move because there has been an overall increase in repossessions since 2004. A court desk will provide invaluable support to homeowners who are faced with the threat of eviction due to mortgage arrears. The service of a housing specialist is available in the Court on the day of repossession hearings, free of charge, and could make the difference to a family keeping their home or losing the roof over their head.

Shelter, the independent housing aid centre, in a recent briefing paper has said that the increase in repossessions is linked to the changing nature of the mortgage lending sector. High house prices have made home ownership unachievable for many, and increased the likelihood of others engaging in risky borrowing and lending.

Although the level of repossessions is still far lower than in the early 1990s, there are contributory factors present now, that was not so significant then.

- ❖ Household debt has become an increasing burden and the way in which debts are managed by lenders has changed.
- ❖ Now, it is increasingly common for non-housing debts to be secured on the borrower's home, whether as a condition of taking out the loan, or as an enforcement measure imposed by the courts when payments fall into arrears.
- ❖ Both arrears and repossessions are higher among sub-prime mortgage customers than among customers of mainstream, or prime, mortgage lenders.

Shelter has commented that the sub-prime sector is a comparatively new and rapidly expanding part of the mortgage market, and a recent Financial Services Authority (FSA) investigation into lending practices in the sector showed serious cause for concern. When homeowners do fall into arrears, the safety net, both in terms of state welfare support and private insurance schemes, is inadequate. Borrowers who are struggling to keep up with payments face pressure to enter into further loans, second mortgages, or sale and rent back schemes, in an attempt to solve their problems.

There is insufficient access to independent advice, and lenders' practices around dealing with arrears and helping borrowers to get back on track, are highly variable, especially in the sub-prime sector.

Although there has not been a significant increase in the number of homelessness applications in Tendring that have been received due to mortgage arrears over the life of the previous strategy. The number received has increased from 2 applications in 2003-03 to 8 in 2007-08. The development of a Court Desk in Colchester County Court in collaboration with the Citizens Advice Bureau will therefore be investigated further and form a strategy action point in the revised strategy.

Mediation

The Council is currently funding a mediation service aimed specifically at homelessness prevention. The service is provided by Suffolk Community Mediation Service and a service level agreement covering the service's aims, outcomes, monitoring arrangements and review mechanisms has been in place since October 2007.

Suffolk Community Mediation Service is a part of Crime Concern. It is a countywide project delivering community mediation across Suffolk and Essex. The mediation service works to establish processes for resolving neighbourhood disputes and disagreements, in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps them to find a mutually acceptable resolution. Disputes where mediation may be appropriate include:

- ❖ Young person at risk of homelessness.
- ❖ Anti-social behaviour
- ❖ Family relationships.
- ❖ Neighbour disputes

Unfortunately, not all cases are suitable for mediation. Cases that are regarded to be inappropriate include:

- ❖ Those where views have become entrenched
- ❖ Those already subject to criminal investigation
- ❖ Those where participants feel coerced to take part

Mediation success in the initial stages has been very limited this is partly due to the difficulty in distinguishing which cases are appropriate for mediation and which are not. This has identified that there is a need for staff mediation awareness training and this will be addressed in the first year of the revised strategy.

Outreach Support

The Council's Rent Guarantee and Deposit Scheme and Homelessness Prevention fund has been pivotal in the prevention of homelessness over the last five years.

The Rent Guarantee and Deposit scheme assists households to access the private rented sector. It has long proved popular with applicants and has provided an alternative housing option for those who, without the Council's assistance, would otherwise be prevented from accessing the private rented sector because of the relatively high initial outlay required by most private landlords. Our scheme is available to anyone facing homelessness who has a local connection with the district and who cannot afford the advance payments landlords often require. Importantly, it is also available to non-statutory households without a priority need and to those who have become intentionally homeless.

- ❖ Over 1,300 households have been assisted to move into a privately rented home through the use of our Deposit Guarantee and Rent in Advance scheme over the last five years.
- ❖ Our Housing Options booklet series contains both a guide to the Council's scheme and a guide to finding somewhere to rent privately. We will be aiming to further develop the use of this scheme, with at least 200 households per year assisted to rent in the private sector.

From 6 April 2007, a new national tenancy deposit protection scheme was introduced. All deposits taken by landlords and letting agents now have to be protected by a government-authorised tenancy deposit protection scheme. If a landlord has not protected a tenant's

deposit they can be ordered to repay three times the amount to the tenant and lose their automatic right to regain possession of their property at the end of the tenancy. As the Council's Deposit Guarantee Scheme involves a bond, rather than a cash deposit, it is exempt from the new legislation. We see this as an opportunity to encourage private landlords to let to our clients and avoid the bureaucracy involved with the Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme.

The Homelessness Prevention Fund, developed with the provision of CLG funding, has further enabled a pro-active rather than a reactive approach. The prevention fund has enabled households to remain in their current by early intervention, pre-crisis intervention and preventing recurring homelessness as well as tenancy rescue.

- ❖ 66 households have been prevented from becoming homeless in the last 2 years as a result of intervention by the homelessness team through the use of the prevention fund.

3.7 TACKLING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.

The review has identified that the highest number of applicants became homeless as a result of being required to leave the homes of their parents, relatives or friends. This category primarily involves young people. It is a fluctuating picture and in 2007-08 there were 74 applications (37.4% of applications) as opposed to 88 in 2003-04 (28.8% of applications). The reason for the percentage increase is that because overall number of homelessness applications in 2007-08 has reduced, when the number of applications for 16 & 17 year olds in 2007-08 is compared against the overall position it forms a higher proportion than in 2003-04.

Despite the reduction in the number of applications in 2007-08, youth homelessness remains a major issue for the Council.

The Government's homelessness strategy *Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives* was published in March 2005. Among other things, it recognised that young people become homeless for a wide range of, often complex, reasons.

The number of young people aged 16 and 17 seeking housing assistance nationally from local authorities in England because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness is relatively high, compared to other groups. In 2005/6, 8,350 young people aged 16 and 17 (together with 18-20 year old care leavers) were accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need specifically because of their age, and therefore owed a main homelessness duty. This represents 9% of all homeless acceptances by local authorities in England. The situation in Tendring for the same period was 9.4% of all acceptances.

The Government is committed to reducing homelessness amongst all groups, including young people by:

- ❖ Preventing vulnerable young people becoming homeless, through early identification and intervention
- ❖ Supporting homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider support needs are met;
- ❖ Manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled accommodation to ensure continued access to the service they need.

In 2006 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced a package of measures to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness, through:

- ❖ A commitment that, by 2010, no 16 or 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 their family home.

Ending Bed & Breakfast Usage for Young Homeless People

The main provider of supported accommodation for homeless vulnerable single people in our district is NACRO Tendring who has 12 units in Clacton and 9 units in Harwich. The Council also assists young persons through the use of its Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to obtain accommodation in the private sector and by arranging Floating Support which is provided by Swan Housing. Mediation is also used where possible to assist with preventing homelessness.

However, by far the biggest challenge facing the Council is the ending of bed and breakfast (B&B) usage for 16 and 17 year olds other than in an emergency. When the original announcement in November 2006 was made by Government it did not include guidance on whether a time limit would additionally be imposed similar to the B&B Order covering the restriction on the use of B&B for family households. However, as a result of attending meetings with the Homelessness Directorate the Governments approach now appears to want to apply time limits that restrict usage for no longer than 6 weeks on individual cases.

During 2006-07 the average time spent in bed and breakfast for 16 and 17 year olds was 6.8 weeks. For 2007-08 the average period had reduced to around 5.6 weeks. However, there were a number of individual cases in excess of the six week limit.

To reduce the use of bed & breakfast one of the initiatives being recommended by Government is the introduction of supported lodging schemes.

Supported Lodgings

Supported lodging schemes provide accommodation for a young person within a family home. The young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder, or "host". Hosts can be families, couples or single people.

Supported lodgings schemes that offer shorter term or emergency accommodation may also be called:

❖ Nightstop Schemes

These offer young people a bed in a room of their own for one night at a time. To use the name Nightstop, the scheme must be affiliated to Nightstop UK.

❖ Crash Pads

These are short term, emergency accommodation schemes. Accommodation can be a bed space that is held in a hostel or housing project, as well as in the homes of hosts.

The length of stay can be available to the young person from 1 night to 2 years depending on the circumstances and the type of scheme. Typically, Nightstop and

Crash Pads will offer up to 7 night's accommodation whilst supported lodgings schemes will offer up to 2 years.

Supported lodgings are only one accommodation option for young people. The provision is suitable for young people who are not ready to live independently and require support to develop independent living skills.

The issues that need to be addressed in the revised strategy include the following.

- ❖ The adoption of separate protocols with Essex Social Services covering 16 & 17 year olds and persons leaving care,
- ❖ Extend the provision of supported accommodation for young people.
- ❖ Ensure that support is available for young people during the initial stages of any tenancy to ensure a sustained move to independence
- ❖ Working with schools and *Connexions* on the provision of advice on housing issues particularly for the schools in the Clacton area.
- ❖ As a result of the Government's commitment to end the use of bed & breakfast usage for 16 and 17 year olds, the development of supported lodging and "cooling off" schemes for young people are required.
- ❖ Evidence has also shown that targeted mediation services are particularly important in preventing young people leaving the family home.

3.8 TACKLING THE WIDER CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Victims of Domestic Violence

- ❖ The Council supports the Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge and also provides additional financial support for an outreach service.
- ❖ The Council has also signed up to participate in the sharing of information within the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) initiative. The protocol aims to encourage greater confidence in sharing information and, as a consequence, stimulate improved engagement between partners involved in the initiative. Specifically, this agreement has been developed to ensure that the highest risk victims of domestic abuse are protected within a multi-partner area
- ❖ However, it is also recognised that extending the practical help for women suffering domestic violence to enable them to stay in their home securely, rather than relying on refuge accommodation and the upheaval that can cause, needs to be addressed over the life of the new strategy.
- ❖ The Police also have initiatives to reduce repeat incidents of domestic violence (DV) that include:
 - Increasing the number of successful prosecutions of perpetrators of domestic violence.
 - The roll out of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences across Essex
 - Developing the pilot specialist DV court
 - Expanding the availability of independent DV advisors
 - Increasing the volume and quality of training and awareness raising activities to increase knowledge of DV issues.

Offenders and Ex-offenders

- ❖ The availability of the Rent Guarantee and Deposit scheme to all homeless persons has assisted ex- offenders to access private sector accommodation.
- ❖ However, protocols have yet to be agreed with the Probation Service and Regional Offender Manager on ways of working together to prevent homelessness among offenders serving custodial sentences who are due for release. This issue will be addressed in the revised strategy

Non-statutory Homeless Groups – Single People and Couples

- ❖ The Council's Housing Advice service is available and well used by non-statutory homeless households such as non-vulnerable single people and childless couples.
- ❖ The Council's Rent in Advance and Deposit Guarantee Scheme has always been available to non-statutory groups since its inception in the previous strategy to enable affordable access to the private rented sector.
- ❖ Non statutory households have made up approximately 25% of the households who have been assisted through our Rent in Advance and Deposit Guarantee Scheme since 2004.

Rough Sleeping

Although there is evidence of rough sleeping in the district this is not considered as a significant problem.

The Council has been monitoring the extent of any rough sleeping problem in the district over recent years. On 30th April 2001, the Council conducted its first rough sleeping head count. The process for the head count complied with the guidance issued by central government and was conducted in the towns of Clacton and Harwich. On the night in question, there was no evidence of any rough sleeping in the areas that were covered.

A second, more extensive headcount was carried out on 31 March 2005. The headcount covered not only Clacton and Harwich, but also Frinton, Walton, Brightlingsea, and Manningtree. There were more people involved in the count and it meant that a greater area could be covered. Again, on the night in question, there was no evidence of any rough sleeping in the district.

Since the last headcount, the Council has organised rough sleeping monitoring days with our partners from statutory and voluntary sectors who attend the homelessness forum. The purpose of the exercise was for each agency to record if a person attended their premises on the day and claimed they were sleeping rough. The information was then passed to Housing Services for evaluation.

The first rough sleeping monitoring day was carried out on 15 March 2006 and, on the day, there was no indication of any person sleeping rough in the district. The second monitoring day was carried out on 21 March 2007 and, on the day, one person attended the Housing Services Reception and stated he was sleeping in a car. This person was offered assistance through the Council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme and moved into private rented accommodation shortly thereafter.

There is however a need to better publicise arrangements to other organisations about what to do when coming across a rough sleeper and what help is available.

Health Issues

Within the sustainable communities strategy for Tendring, it is stated that there is a tangible link between deprivation and poor health evidenced by mortality rates, emergency hospital admissions and serious illness rates. For Tendring this is as follows:

- ❖ Male life expectancy significantly below average, and below average increases in life expectancy for both sexes 1991-2003.
- ❖ There are significant differences of life expectancy between the family group and Tendring. For males in Tendring, at 76.1 years, this is 2.5 years below the best in the family and 2.1 years behind Babergh and for females 0.8 years behind the best in the family.
- ❖ Within the District the difference in life expectancy overall is over 13 years between the best and the worst areas reflected by long term limiting illness rates twice as high.
- ❖ 29% of wards with rates of poor health are significantly above the regional average.
- ❖ Tendring has the highest proportion of those with long term limiting illness in the family group and a relatively high level of teenage pregnancies.
- ❖ Infant mortality (under the age of 1) is 50% above the national average.
- ❖ The other main health issues are obesity, smoking and diet. 16% of 9-10 year olds are obese, whilst 1 in 4 of the population smokes.
- ❖ Over 10% of residents are providing unpaid informal care.

However, there are no procedures in place for multidisciplinary assessment and ongoing review of a client with complex and multiple needs, such as a mental health difficulty.

High Housing Need and Low Supply of Affordable Housing

Tendring is an area of very high and increasing levels of housing need as demonstrated through successive Housing Needs Surveys and also the numbers of applicants on the Council's Housing Register who are seeking affordable accommodation.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for Tendring undertaken by Fordham Research in 2008 identifies that, if all needs are to be met, there is a net affordable housing shortfall of 1,579 units.

There were 3,902 households on the housing register as at 31 March 2008, which shows an increasing trend of people seeking social housing.

For the purposes of comparing our position with other areas, this shortfall is converted into a Housing Needs Index (affordable housing shortfall per 1,000 households). The table below shows that housing need in Tendring at an HNI of 25 is only slightly less than that experienced by the outer London boroughs and is considerably higher than the averages for all England, the regions and our Essex neighbours.

Area	Housing Needs Index Score
Inner London	35
Outer London	27
Tendring	25
South West	17
All England	16
Colchester	16
South East Region	16
Chelmsford	13

East of England	12
Braintree	12
West Midlands	9
North of England	8
East Midlands	8

There are many contributory factors to the acutely high levels of housing need in Tendring:

- ❖ Low historical levels of social housing supply
- ❖ Low provision of new affordable housing
- ❖ Affordability of market housing
- ❖ Lack of alternatives tenures
- ❖ Low income levels
- ❖ High levels of unemployment
- ❖ Increasing number of households in unsatisfactory housing
- ❖ Emerging and concealed households in housing need
- ❖ Population growth
- ❖ Inward migration

Financial Capacity

An important element of the Tendring SHMA was the assessment of the financial situation of households. As there was no comprehensive (secondary) source for such information, data was collected as part of the survey on a range of financial information (including incomes, savings and equity).

Description	Average Annual Income (£)
Owner Occupiers (no mortgage)	14,249
Owner Occupiers (with mortgage)	29,786
Council Tenants	7,781
Registered Social Landlord Tenants	7,822
Private Rent Tenants	10,705
Average	16,478

The information obtained showed some striking results. Both types of owners (with and without mortgage) rely more heavily on equity rather than upon income to provide the financial capacity they require when buying.

Further analysis of household survey data revealed that the majority of tenants (social and market) have to spend much more than 25% of their income on housing. This is ameliorated in many cases by the subsidy represented by Housing Benefit. Guidance suggests that households, especially poorer ones, should not spend more than 25% of their income on housing. The proportions of households in private rented accommodation spending more than 50% of their income on housing in Tendring is significantly higher than is found in other Essex authorities.

A lack of affordable housing is one of the key underlying causes of homelessness in Tendring and having regard to average incomes this means that entry level home ownership is out of reach for many new households.

The Council has sought to address this problem through seeking significant increases in the supply of affordable housing to be delivered through planning obligations as set out in the Local Plan 2007, However, the effects of the global economic situation experienced in 2008 is likely to impact on the delivery of all new housing in the short and medium terms and housing need will continue to increase.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is an important priority within the Homelessness Strategy but it is clear from a numerical position that only a small part of the affordable housing shortfall can be met in this way. It is therefore also important to address the other factors of housing need and to support initiatives that bring economic regeneration to the area and consequently reduce the reliance on subsidised social housing.

4.0 STRATEGIC HOMELESSNESS PRIORITIES

The review of homelessness and homelessness services in Tendring, together with close consideration of the Government's priorities and the Council's broader vision has identified five strategic priorities to be addressed over the next 5 years.

Strategic Priority One: Preventing Homelessness

Strategic Priority Two: Improving Customer Services

Strategic Priority Three: Improving Support for Vulnerable Groups

Strategic Priority Four: Reducing the Reliance on Temporary Accommodation

Strategic Priority Five: Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing

The next section provides more details about these priorities and how we will address the key issues. We have also produced an action plan to show how these will be delivered.

Strategic Priority One: Preventing Homelessness

Achievements from the last strategy.

- ❖ Adopted a Housing Options approach in dealing with homelessness applications.
- ❖ Over the life of the strategy reduced the number of households accepted as homeless by 51% from 403 in 2002/03 to 198 in 2007/08.
- ❖ Improved access to the private rented sector through our rent in advance/deposit guarantee scheme with over 1300 households assisted to rent privately in the last five years.
- ❖ Developed a homelessness prevention fund
- ❖ Created a new post to deal with youth homelessness issues.
- ❖ Provide financial support to the Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge to run a domestic violence outreach service.

Preventing homelessness involves providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs in order to avoid homelessness. Prevention activities include those which enable a household to remain in their current home, where appropriate, or to enable a planned and timely move and help sustain independent living. Our Housing Options approach has proved to be highly successful in preventing the need for formal homelessness applications.

The initiatives to prevent homelessness and access housing can be grouped within the following headings.

- ❖ Housing Advice
- ❖ Effective Tenancy Outreach
- ❖ Home Visiting
- ❖ Mediation
- ❖ Improved Co-ordination with the Local Authority's Housing Benefit Service
- ❖ Rent Deposit Schemes
- ❖ Floating Support Service

It has been identified that there are particular problems with homelessness among young people. Many social landlords refuse to let to 16 and 17-year-olds, either because they are concerned that minors cannot hold a tenancy or they believe that they cannot be held liable for rent. Where landlords do let to 16 and 17-year-olds, they often impose conditions, such as insisting on a guarantor, or where there is an adult partner, granting the tenancy in the sole name of the partner. There are however a number of steps that social landlords can take to ensure that 16 and 17-year-olds' tenancies are successful. We will encourage our social housing partners to follow best practice on granting tenancies held in trust to minors until they are 18. This will enable minors to access affordable housing and reduce time they spend in temporary accommodation.

Overcrowding is often a contributory factor in family breakdown, which is one of the main causes of homelessness in Tendring. The Department for Communities and Local Government has adopted an action plan for tackling overcrowding in England. This includes a number of pathfinder schemes across the country designed to pilot housing options and advice and services targeting overcrowded households. We intend to learn from these schemes in developing our own overcrowding action plan. We already use our allocations scheme to assist those in overcrowded dwellings and encourage those under occupying larger dwellings to downsize and free up larger family homes.

Working with private landlords to improve access to the private rented sector

As well as working with housing associations, the Council works with private sector landlords to access the local private rental market. There are a number of issues with the private sector rented market that we are trying to address:

- ❖ Finding accommodation which is affordable to people on low incomes and within benefit levels
- ❖ Reducing the number of landlords that are reluctant to take people on benefits
- ❖ Clients under 18 years old being unable to hold a tenancy
- ❖ Landlord and tenant disputes leading to eviction of the tenant. The loss of privately rented and tied accommodation not related to rent arrears is the second most common cause of homelessness applications.

Working with Other Agencies

Effective work to prevent homelessness involves the Council working with a wide variety of partners. For example, good practice has identified the importance of signposting to homelessness applicants, the availability of support from other agencies. Especially important is the value of partnership working at an early stage in meeting the needs of vulnerable groups through floating support.

There are a variety of agencies that interact with the Council's Homelessness and Advice Team where a closer relationship may have a positive impact on preventing homelessness. Effective partnership working on a day to day basis is particularly important in the prevention of homelessness. Our Housing Options Team will develop a partnership plan to ensure that the Team reaches out and engages with these partners with the aim of sharing best practice and building trust with others who are working alongside the Council to prevent homelessness in the District.

Effective partnership working also involves improved working with other parts of the Council, particularly Housing Benefit. The efficient administration of Housing Benefit claims is important in preventing homelessness and encouraging private sector landlords to rent to benefit claimants. We already work closely with the Benefits Team. We intend to build on this close working to ensure that people dependent on Benefit who are threatened with homelessness are identified at an early stage and best use is made of Discretionary Housing Payments.

The Government makes a variable annual grant to all local authorities to cover Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), which are used on a discretionary basis to help Housing Benefit claimants who are experiencing a shortfall between their Benefit and the rent they are liable to pay. The administration of (DHP) is undertaken by Benefits and Revenue Services and in liaison with them we aim to ensure that targeted use is made of DHP in preventing homelessness.

One initiative that we are looking to develop over the life of the strategy is the enhancement of the Court Desk service currently provided by the Citizens Advice Bureaux. A Court Desk is a facility within Court premises which can provide advice and representation "on the day" to people who turn up to a hearing without preparation. Court Desks have a good track record in preventing repossessions, achieving adjournments, suspensions and gaining further time to explore the options available to both tenants and owner occupiers.

There is also the need to develop closer working with Jobcentre Plus to address the link between homelessness and unemployment.

Strategic actions to prevent homelessness. We will:

- ❖ Ensure that the maximum number of households are assisted to rent privately through our Rent in Advance/Deposit Guarantee schemes
- ❖ Work closely with the Council's Benefits Team to ensure that people dependent on Benefit who are threatened with homelessness are identified at an early stage.
- ❖ Enable minors to access affordable housing and reduce time in temporary accommodation by encouraging social housing providers to follow best practice on granting tenancies held in trust to minors.
- ❖ Develop a Partnership Plan to ensure the Council's Homelessness and Advice Team engages with other agencies to share best practice and build trust with others who are working to prevent homelessness in the district
- ❖ Ensure that effective use is made of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in preventing homelessness.
- ❖ Develop the current Court Desk facility to assist those facing homelessness through the repossession of their homes
- ❖ Develop closer working with Job Centre Plus to address the link between homelessness and unemployment

Strategic Priority Two: Improving Customer Services

Achievements from the last strategy.

- ❖ Published a series of Housing Options booklets providing local options for people.
- ❖ Reviewed the appointment system to ensure that users of the service have timely access to homelessness advice.
- ❖ Provided a homelessness and advice surgery at our offices at Harwich
- ❖ Developed closer links with a number of agencies identified as first point of contact by homeless people

Provision of Housing Options and Advice

An important element in tackling homelessness is the provision of timely housing advice via the housing options approach. This seeks to move from processing homelessness to prevention, where all applicants approaching the Council for assistance participate in an options interview to assess their particular circumstances. The two issues that are most important to users and potential users of the service are:

- ❖ **Quality of access** - ensuring that customers are able to access the type and level of advice and help that they need
- ❖ **Quality of advice and help given** - having accessed the service, ensuring that customers receive advice and help which is accurate, realistic and appropriate for their needs.

We will continue to place great emphasis on the provision of training to our Housing Advice and Homelessness staff, particularly in the latest case law, to ensure a quality advice service. Additional training will also be provided to the Council's main reception staff.

Access to Information about the Housing Advice and Homelessness Service

To complement our Housing Options approach and the emphasis on giving housing advice to prevent homelessness, we have published a set of Housing Options booklets to provide local advice to people who need it. These are available from the Council offices, and are also downloadable from the housing pages of our website. We will regularly review the content of these booklets to ensure that they are up to date. We are also making good use of the Council's website and links to provide access to housing advice and homelessness information and will be looking to further improve the content of these web pages.

Accessible Service through working with Partners

As well as being available at the Council offices, our Housing Advice staff provides regular surgeries at Harwich. If we are not able to help someone with their particular enquiry, maybe because they need more specialist, independent, or legal advice, then we will suggest who they might contact. This may include one of the two Citizens Advice Bureaux in the district, or Shelter Housing Aid.

Our Housing Advice and Homelessness staff has an important role to play in signposting customers to other Council or external services. We have worked particularly closely with the Benefits Team to ensure that landlords are prepared for the introduction of the new Local Housing Allowance. We will be looking to further develop access to our services, such as visits to schools to target 16 and 17 year olds.

Strategic actions to improve customer service. We will:

- ❖ Improve the content of the housing advice and homelessness pages of the Council's web-site to make advice on preventing homelessness more accessible to the public and other interested agencies.
- ❖ We will continue to place great emphasis on the provision of training to our Housing Advice and Homelessness staff, particularly in the latest case law, to ensure a quality advice service. Additional training will also be provided to the Council's main reception staff.
- ❖ Ensure that our staff receive up to date training

Strategic Priority Three: Improving Support for Vulnerable Groups

Achievements from the last strategy.

- ❖ Supported a domestic violence outreach support service provided by the Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge
- ❖ The Council works with Supporting People and other stakeholders to prevent homelessness amongst vulnerable groups.
- ❖ Floating support service has been enhanced
- ❖ The Rent Guarantee and Deposit scheme eligibility has been extended to include all homeless households.

Youth Homelessness

The Government's Homelessness Strategy of 2005 recognises that young people are at increased risk of homelessness compared to other vulnerable groups and that they can become homeless for a wide range of often complex reasons. Our Strategy sets out some key objectives for addressing youth homelessness in partnership with local authorities and the voluntary sector.

The information below shows the levels of youth homelessness in Tendring for 2007-08 and the numbers residing in temporary accommodation as at the 31 March 2008.

172 young people approached the Council for Housing Advice during 2007-08

78 homelessness applications were accepted in 2007-08

69 individuals were placed in temporary Bed & Breakfast accommodation throughout the year.

31 homelessness applications were accepted.

6 cases remained in Bed & Breakfast as at the 31 March 2008.

The Government announced in November 2006, a package of measures to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness, through:

- ❖ A commitment that by 2010, no 16 or 17 year old should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, except in an emergency and then for a maximum of 6 weeks;

- ❖ 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.

“Unable to remain with parent, relative or friend” was the single largest reason given by people seeking housing advice and the main reason for homelessness where the full housing duty was accepted. This primarily involves young people, many of whom are only aged 16 or 17.

It is becoming increasingly important that young people have access to housing advice in a range of locations other than the Council offices. It is being shown that Housing sessions at school can play a key role in preventing youth homelessness by targeting those who are considering leaving home, without thinking about what this really involves.

It is our intention to work with staff and tutors from the senior schools in Clacton on Sea to introduce a series of presentations and drop in sessions for students. These will be designed to help them develop an awareness of the reality of homelessness and to discuss ways of planning their eventual move out of the parental home, while avoiding the pitfalls of homelessness increasingly seen by a number of agencies working with young people locally.

We will also develop, a new and revised Housing Options booklet designed to help young people avoid homelessness.

Early engagement with mediation services for young people and their families is another method of combating youth homelessness. Mediation can assist 16/17 year olds to remain at or return to the family home. Where this is not possible, mediation can help to improve relationships between the young person and their family, which improves their chances of sustaining a tenancy with the family’s support. We have introduced an effective mediation scheme to assist both parents and young people in their relationships.

We will also ensure that every 16 or 17 year old who contacts the Council because they are threatened with homelessness is visited at home, where this is appropriate.

It is essential that suitable accommodation is provided for young people and that they get the right kind of support in order to sustain their accommodation. However, accommodation for young people in the District is limited. We are working towards the national commitment that by 2010, no 16 or 17 year old should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, except in an emergency.

Supported accommodation is available for young people at a scheme in Clacton on Sea and Harwich owned by Colne Housing Association. At the scheme, NACRO provide support to 19 young people between the ages of 16 and 24

A supported lodgings scheme is also being investigated. The scheme would provide a homeless young person with accommodation in a family environment by placing them with a host family as ‘cooling-off’ accommodation whilst mediation is tried.

Tackling Homelessness Amongst Women Suffering Domestic Violence

Homelessness as a result of violent relationship breakdown is a key cause of homelessness. The Colchester and Tendring Women's refuge provides a valuable resource for those fleeing domestic violence throughout the district and beyond. In many cases however, remaining safely in their own home is the preferred option for many women. The Council is working with Domestic Violence Forum to develop our 'Safe at Home Scheme'. This scheme, in conjunction with the Police, aims to provide additional security features to a home to make it a safer place to live. We will also encourage more RSLs to be involved and look to extend it to those living in the private rented sector and to those owning their own home. We also intend to be closely involved with the new countywide Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which will consider how individual domestic violence cases can best be managed.

Tackling Homelessness amongst Ex-offenders

For some, experience of an institution such as prison may reduce their coping skills, employability and support networks, which mean that on release they may be at risk of homelessness. Addressing accommodation problems can reduce the risk of reoffending. We will work with the Probation Service to meet the accommodation needs of ex-offenders and will be looking to ensure closer links, at quarterly Divisional Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPO) meetings.

Other Vulnerable Groups

We have mentioned specific actions in this strategy to address homelessness amongst young people, women suffering domestic violence and ex-offenders. Information is provided below about ongoing schemes to address the support needs of other vulnerable groups.

Mental Health Needs and Learning Disabilities

People with Mental Health Needs and Learning Disabilities are assisted with their housing needs through Supporting People funded support and the provision of a variety of residential schemes through housing associations. Examples of these schemes include:

Swan Housing Group provides floating support to people moving to more independent living from supported housing and to others who are having problems in their current accommodation.

Interpreting Service

The Council subscribes to a service providing telephone based simultaneous interpreting to those for whom English is not their first language. Our record keeping of the ethnic origin of Housing Advice and Homelessness customers, shows that the profile broadly reflects the profile of the background population of Tendring. Monitoring of the Housing Register also shows that the ethnic origin of housing applicants and those re-housed, broadly reflects the background population in Tendring.

Gypsies and Travellers

Gypsies and Travellers are at risk of homelessness where there is a shortage of suitable sites and accommodation options for them. Although, we are not required to record specific approaches from this client group, there were no approaches during 2007-08.

An updated Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) has been jointly commissioned by Essex County Council and the Essex district and borough councils. The anticipated completion of the GTAA is November 2008.

The GTAA once completed will provide essential information with regard to the amount, type and tenure of gypsy and traveller accommodation that is required.

Rough Sleepers

Whilst rough sleeping is not a serious problem in Tendring, we are aware that some individuals and organisations are unclear about what support is available to those people they come across who are sleeping rough. There is a need to better publicise what support is available for rough sleepers. In some cases the Council may have a legal duty to arrange emergency accommodation. In others advice and assistance may be available on registering a need for social housing and accessing private rented accommodation and support such as rent in advance and deposits.

In extreme cold weather conditions, the Council has the discretionary power to arrange emergency temporary accommodation, even where there is no statutory duty to do so.

Strategic actions to ensure support for vulnerable groups. We will:

- ❖ Develop effective education programmes with schools on the issues to be considered when planning to leave home.
- ❖ Undertake a review of the mediation scheme to assist both parents and young people in their relationships
- ❖ Work with Essex County Council and voluntary agencies to develop a supported lodgings scheme to provide short-term 'cooling-off' accommodation for young people whilst mediation is tried.
- ❖ Ensure that young people are provided with support in their first tenancy until they are able to manage independently.
- ❖ Women suffering domestic violence
- ❖ Encourage more social housing providers to be involved in the development of the "Safe at Home Scheme" which enables women who are subject to domestic violence to safely remain in their homes if they wish to
- ❖ Provide advice and guidance to other organisations about how rough sleepers can be assisted
- ❖ Progress the development in partnership with other Essex Housing Authority's and Essex Social Services joint working protocols covering:
 1. Vulnerable and homeless 16 & 17 year olds
 2. Homeless households with dependant children found to be intentionally homeless
 3. With Essex County Council Schools, Children and Families Directorate a protocol dealing with Care Leaver accommodation issues

Strategic Priority Four: Reducing the Reliance on Temporary Accommodation

Achievements from the last strategy.

- ❖ Reduced to nil the number of families with children placed in bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities.
- ❖ Reduced by 61% the number of households staying in temporary accommodation in the 5 years to March 2008.
- ❖ Commissioned, jointly with Supporting People to make available floating support to all vulnerable households in temporary accommodation.

We have already mentioned the Council's approach to preventing homelessness through the provision of timely housing advice via the housing options approach. There will inevitably be some instances where a period in temporary accommodation is unavoidable. The Council utilises temporary accommodation under two circumstances:

- ❖ Whilst enquiries are carried out to ascertain our duty to households under homelessness legislation. In this situation, households are accommodated under an 'interim duty'.
- ❖ Once the 'full housing duty' has been accepted and until the household obtains longer-term accommodation.

Eliminating the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation with Shared Facilities for Homeless Families and Young People

As mentioned previously, with effect from April 1st 2004, the Government introduced an order banning the use of bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities for families with children, except in emergencies and then for no longer than 6 weeks. Excessive lengths of time spent in cramped bed and breakfast accommodation or hotel rooms are clearly undesirable, especially for families with children having to share facilities with strangers. Bed and breakfast is defined as privately owned, nightly paid accommodation that involves some shared use of bathing, cooking or toilet facilities.

It has always been the Council's policy to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities for homeless people, although we recognise this can be a useful resource in emergencies. It is now very unusual for the Council to place a family with children in bed and breakfast and no family has remained in that accommodation for more than 6 weeks since the ban was introduced.

We are also conscious of the Government's target to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year old homeless young people by 2010.

Instead of bed & breakfast accommodation, where possible, the Council makes use of specifically designed privately owned self-contained guest house units for families with children and pregnant women where there is no sharing of bathing, cooking or toilet facilities. Where we do need to use this accommodation we will ensure that:

- ❖ There are clear standards that proprietors should meet including things like the provision of cooking facilities.
- ❖ These standards should be published and available for residents
- ❖ Our Homelessness and Advice team are aware of and have visited the accommodation that we use, so that they can check standards and competently talk to clients about what to expect.

In addition to nightly paid private accommodation, the Council has access to specially designated self-contained temporary accommodation in Tendring owned by Colne Housing Society and Family Mosaic Housing Association.

Quality and Location of Temporary Accommodation Stock in Tendring

Although much of the temporary accommodation we use is of reasonable quality and self-contained, the experience of living in temporary accommodation can disrupt lives, contribute to a sense of insecurity and make it difficult to access services. Temporary accommodation can also be expensive for the Council to provide. Where possible, the aim is to free up existing temporary accommodation by moving people on to permanent housing quickly. We are reviewing the existing temporary accommodation that we use in the District

in terms of quality, location and cost. Our aim is to ensure that the Council has the right amount of temporary accommodation in the right location of an appropriate standard and level of services. Where possible, people should not be accommodated in temporary accommodation a long way from their support, schooling or employment.

Strategic actions to improve standards of temporary accommodation. We will:

- ❖ Ensure, where possible, people are accommodated in temporary accommodation close to their support, schooling and employment.
- ❖ Review the use of existing temporary accommodation in terms of quality, location and cost.
- ❖ Ensure that the Council meets the Government's target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

Strategic Priority Five: Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing

Achievements from the last strategy.

- ❖ Adoption of a new Local Plan in 2007 to increase the affordable housing target to 40% (previously 25%) on sites of 15 or more dwellings (previously 40 or more dwellings)
- ❖ Appointment of a monitoring officer in Planning to ensure planning obligations in respect of affordable housing and financial contributions are honoured
- ❖ Implemented a Transfer Incentive Scheme to reduce under-occupation of Council tenancies
- ❖ Implemented a Cash Incentive Scheme to free up family homes.
- ❖ Amended the Housing Allocation Scheme to give priority to tenants under-occupying their homes and who wish to move to smaller accommodation.
- ❖ Undertaken a Strategic Housing Market Assessment to ensure that affordable housing needs are addressed in the preparation of Local Development Framework policies
- ❖ Established a Development Team for the formal agreement of developer contributions on major developments
- ❖ Transferred 12 surplus obsolete parcels of land at no cost to a housing association for the development of 29 units of affordable housing for applicants from the Housing Register

National Housing Policy

The lack of supply of all housing and especially affordable housing, is a national problem and the situation is appearing to worsen as a result of the economic effects on the housing market which may take some years for a full recovery to take place.

Previously, housing policy had been based on the significant contribution to affordable housing and infrastructure that was expected of the private sector in a buoyant and profitable market. However, in a property recession, where house prices are falling, the private sector investment will reduce or in some cases cease until market conditions improve. This will result in a change in emphasis whereby it will be public sector investment that will be required to stabilise and stimulate the market.

In July 2008, the Housing Minister, Caroline Flint, through Communities and Local Government, published a further policy paper on housing: *Facing the Housing Challenge:*

Action Today, Innovation for Tomorrow. The objective of this paper is to assist in achieving the Government's objectives by introducing a series of further measures and reforms designed to alleviate the current challenges in an uncertain housing market. The measures set out in the paper include:

- ❖ A new scheme to support first time buyers into affordable home ownership by renting first and buying later
- ❖ New partnerships between the public and private sector that will put local councils back at the centre stage of providing homes
- ❖ New proposals to deliver 75,000 homes in 20 more towns as new growth points
- ❖ Allocating the first tranche of a £510 million funding pot to reward Councils who are working to bring land forward for development
- ❖ Confirming that additional funding to the £200 million already allocated will be made available to buy unsold stock from house builders for affordable homes
- ❖ New plans to work with local authorities and housing associations to develop mortgage rescue schemes and broader support for home owners
- ❖ The National Housing Advisory Service to publish a new debt management advice leaflet for home owners to be distributed by local authorities, Shelter, CAB etc.

Strategic actions to increase the supply of affordable housing. We will:

- ❖ Meet general housing need by enabling affordable housing on new developments through developer contributions in line with the Council's Local Plan policies.
- ❖ Recognise the problem of rural homelessness and support the development of affordable housing schemes for local people on rural exception sites.
- ❖ Develop proposals for the effective use of the accumulated developer financial contributions for affordable housing
- ❖ Continue to identify surplus sites for transfer to housing associations to develop affordable housing
- ❖ Make best use of existing stock, including bringing empty homes back into use and encouraging those who are under-occupying their homes to move
- ❖ Investigating the options for delivering intermediate tenure housing options including intermediate rent and shared ownership
- ❖ Investigate the options for supporting the acquisition of stock or sites for affordable housing from developers who are looking to "offload" in a falling market
- ❖ Prioritise support for new housing developments that achieve regeneration and increase employment opportunities

5.0 DELIVERING THE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Resources

Much of the delivery of this Strategy is dependent upon working in partnership - e.g. multi-agency working with Registered Social Landlords, Social Services, Probation and other voluntary service partners and financing the strategy from within existing revenue and capital budgets.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) provides a grant direct to the Council to fund homelessness prevention. This is set for the next three years at £60k per year. Funding also comes from the Essex Supporting People programme, including financing of the Floating Support service. The main source of revenue funding for our homelessness and housing advice activities comes from the Council's general fund revenue budget.

Expenditure on homelessness over the past 5 years is set out below:

Homeless Budget Detail	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Expenditure:					
Accommodation Costs (e.g. bed and breakfast)	215,404	205,901	231,300	163,188	200,210
Other Homelessness Costs (e.g. homelessness prevention)	17,920	34,237	50,677	81,249	116,980
Homelessness Grants (e.g. women's refuge outreach)	16,984	16,800	17,270	17,615	18,500
Housing Benefit Costs	170,067	123,003	155,993	132,648	179,140
Income:					
Fees & Charges (e.g. from bed and breakfast)	(179,896)	(124,599)	(153,153)	(148,610)	(186,140)
Government Subsidy (e.g. towards benefit costs)	(94,709)	(51,295)	(71,116)	(80,533)	(103,640)
Net Direct Expenditure	145,770	204,047	230,971	165,557	225,040
Service Unit and Central Costs	133,487	154,548	172,438	198,720	199,700
Total Cost of Homelessness	279,257	358,595	403,409	364,277	424,750

Additionally, the Council, in recognition of its homelessness problems, receives Government Grant which is used to fund special projects such as private sector leasing, the homelessness prevention fund and the appointment of a Homeless Young People Projects Officer. Expenditure over the past 5 years on Homelessness Special Projects is set out below:

Homeless Budget Detail	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Special Projects Expenditure	38,096	52,041	72,392	54,712	48,670
Government Grant Applied	38,096	52,041	72,392	54,712	40,550
Net Expenditure	-	-	-	-	8,120

(The net expenditure for 2007/08 represents the Council's contribution to the salary of the Homeless Young Persons Project Officer following approval of Human Resources Committee to make this post permanent)

For 2008/09 the total estimated cost of homelessness excluding special projects is £459,000. For Homelessness Special Projects the estimated gross expenditure for 2008/09 is £118,370 (£28,370 net).

It has been identified that additional resources will be required to enable the Council to explore and implement new accommodation initiatives to tackle youth homelessness as a

result of the Government's commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

Funding for any new position on a fixed term contract can be found from within the existing grant funding that is currently being received from Communities and Local Government. The progression of this initiative forms one of the priorities under the revised strategy.

Any growth funding required from the Council's own resources will be determined in accordance with the Council's Financial Strategy.

Monitoring and Review

Recently received statutory guidance states that the local authority should recognise that the overall strategic vision for their area should take full and proper account of housing and should therefore incorporate its Housing Strategy and revised Homelessness Strategy within their Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The draft Homelessness Strategy and Review will therefore be presented to the Local Strategic Partnership for their consideration.

Following consultation, a detailed Homelessness Delivery Plan and associated performance indicators will be prepared to cover the life of the strategy and this will be monitored through the Council's performance management and service planning systems.

It is intended that progress on the Homelessness Delivery Plan should be reported periodically through the Local Strategic Partnership and the Council's Service Development and Delivery Committee.