

# **Wycombe District Council**

## **Homelessness Strategy 2014 – 2019**

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**APPENDIX 1 – Action Plan 2014 - 19**

## Executive Summary

- i This Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2014-2019 and is published in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.
- ii The background issues, including the demands, pressures and constraints surrounding homelessness are set out in Part 1. The strategic context includes national, sub-regional and local issues within which the homelessness services have to operate. Nationally there are impacts of the Government's focus on Welfare Reform and reducing rough sleeping – the latter established sub regional working with the other local authorities in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.
- iii This section also reviews progress and achievements made during the course of the last Homelessness Strategy. Actions which were not implemented are carried forward into the new Action Plan. In addition, the findings of the homelessness review, carried out by independent housing consultants, Jenkins Duval during 2012-13 are included, as well as analysis of homelessness approaches and acceptances in the district.
- iv Part 2 sets out the strategy for the period 2014 – 2019 - taking forward the actions identified and set out in three main outcomes:
  - a) The Council's proposals in response to the findings of the Homelessness Review;
  - b) The aim of achieving the DCLG Gold Standard for homelessness services;
  - c) Proposed homelessness prevention actions
- v The new Action Plan appears at Appendix 1.

## Part 1 – Background and Review of Homelessness

### 1. Introduction

Homelessness is referred to here in its broadest sense to encompass anyone who is roofless or without decent, safe, affordable and settled accommodation who consider themselves to be homeless.

Statutory Homelessness is defined as households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days and have been accepted for the full homelessness duty.

Non-statutory homelessness is defined as households who are homeless but have not been accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty. This could be for one or more reason including but not limited to having no priority need, being considered not eligible or have been found to be intentionally homeless.

Priority need is defined in the 1996 Housing Act, as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act. Eligibility relates to an applicant's immigration status in the UK and intentional homelessness is defined as a deliberate act which has directly led to the applicant(s) being homeless.

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a Homelessness Strategy based upon a review of homelessness in their area every five years. Strategies must be aimed at providing advice and assistance to prevent homelessness, addressing the needs of customers where it cannot be prevented. Where there is a full duty owed to the homeless household, appropriate temporary and settled accommodation should be provided.

Wycombe District Council published its first Homelessness Review and Strategy in 2003. This was reviewed in 2006 and again in 2008 with the previous Homelessness Strategy in place from 2008-2011 and interim Homelessness Strategy Action Plans in place from 2011 -2013.

Section 153 (7A) of the Localism Act 2011 which came into force on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012; states that:

*“In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, a local housing authority in England shall have regard to –*

*(a) its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996.*

*(b) its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011”*

The process for the strategy has been that we commissioned a review of homelessness in the district – which was carried out by specialist consultants

Jenkins Duval. Their work involved consultation with stakeholders, customers, staff and elected Members. Their report was produced in February 2013.

Following the publication of this report, officers prepared a draft strategy based on the recommendations and further research into the local issues as identified through statistical analysis.

## **2. Homelessness Review by Jenkins Duval**

The Council commissioned an independent review of Homelessness in the district – carried out by consultants Jenkins Duval – who produced their report in February 2013. This section sets out the key issues identified in that Review.

### **2.1 The National Picture**

The number of households living in temporary accommodation has increased. As at the end of April 2013 there were 55,300 households living in temporary accommodation in England, an increase of 10% on the year before – this includes 4,500 households living in bed and breakfast - a 63% increase on the number of households in bed and breakfast at the same point in 2011 and an increase of 14% from the same period in 2012.

The main causes of homelessness nationally as at Q1 2013 are:

- Termination of Assured Short-hold Tenancy (AST) (23%)
- Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate (17%)
- Other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate (14%)
- Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner (12%)
- Nonviolent breakdown of relationship with partner (5%)
- All other reasons (29%)

Since the previous homelessness strategy, a number of important changes have taken place nationally, with new Acts of Parliament introduced and wide ranging reform of the welfare system. These changes have had and will continue to have an impact on homelessness; therefore each area is described below.

### **2.2 Localism Act 2011**

The Localism Act was given Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. The aim of this has been to shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils.

The Localism Act lets Councils decide:

- How best to help homeless people by enabling the use of the private sector where suitable
- How to manage their housing waiting lists – by enabling councils to establish their own qualification criteria and to decide locally whether households who do not attract reasonable preference (*defined below*) should be registered.
- The length of tenancy that best fits a household's needs – by introducing the fixed term tenancy which can be used instead of life time tenancies, should this be more appropriate given the local housing needs of the local authority area.
- The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities a power to bring the homelessness duty to an end with offers of accommodation in the private rented sector, without requiring the applicant's agreement.

<b>The reasonable preference categories in section 167(2) of the Housing Act 1996 are:</b>
People who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the Act);
People who are homeless and in priority need but homeless intentionally;
People who are homeless and in priority need and not intentionally homeless;
People who are not intentionally homeless but not in priority need;
People occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to disability).
People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

### 2.3 Welfare Reform

The Government's welfare reform programme aims to reduce the budget deficit, slow down growing benefit expenditure, increase fairness, increase work incentives and end benefit dependency.

Since April 2011 the following changes were introduced:

- Previously, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rents were calculated on the median (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) of rents in Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA). From April 2011 this changed with rates calculated on 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of the BRMA. The 30th percentile is a mathematical value which represents the level of rent where around 3 in 10 properties are let at or below LHA.

- Removal of 5-bedroom LHA rate. This was effective from April 2011 on new claims and changes of address.
- Introduction of caps for 1 to 4 bedroom LHA rates. As at December 2012 the national weekly caps stood at
  - £250 one bedroom
  - £290 two bedroom
  - £340 three bedroom
  - £400 four bedroom
- Increase in Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding-the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has increased the DHP budget. An extra £10 million was made available in 2011-12 (total allocation is £30 million). An extra £40 million has been made available in 2012-13 (total allocation is £60 million).
- As from January 2012 single people aged between 25 and 34 have only been able to claim LHA at shared accommodation rates- the rates previously allowed for under 25 year olds.
- From April 2013 property size restrictions for working-age people in social housing bringing the same rules in that apply to private sector lettings. This requires under-occupiers of social housing properties to pay a charge for each bedroom in excess of their needs, taken as a reduction in benefit payable
- The introduction of the overall benefits cap of £26,000 per annum for families was introduced in July 2013

Other significant changes that will come into force as a result of the reform to the welfare system at other times (as indicated) include:

- Increase in non-dependant deduction charges (phased in between 2011 and 2014)
- Universal Credit (October 2013 to 2017)

## **2.4 Homelessness Prevention and Relief**

Official statistics on homelessness prevention and relief in England that took place outside the homelessness statutory framework in 2010-11 have been published. The key points from the releases published in August 2013 nationally are:

- In 2012, a total of 202,900 cases of homelessness prevention or relief were reported – of which 90% were preventions and 10% relief.

- This figure was an increase of 2% on the year before

The most common action taken to prevent or relieve homelessness was the use of a landlord incentive scheme to secure accommodation in the private rented sector.

## 2.5 Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping counts and estimates are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas. Local authorities decide whether to carry out a count or an estimate based upon their assessment of whether the level of local rough sleeping in their area justifies a formal count.

The autumn 2012 total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in England was 2,309 up from 2,181 in 2011. All authorities in England provided a figure. The total comprises counts provided by 42 authorities and estimates provided by 284 local authorities.

## 2.6 Repossessions

The Ministry of Justice published landlord and mortgage court possession statistics for April to June 2013 in August 2013. Key headlines from the statistical release:

- Nationally, there were 14,375 mortgage possession claims issued in the first quarter of 2013, 15% lower than the same quarter the previous year.
- Trends in the number of mortgage possession orders are similar to mortgage possession claims – a downward trend has been seen since 2008. At the end of the first quarter in 2013, 10,206 orders were made compared with 12,753 for the same period in 2012 a reduction of 20%.
- There were 42,520 landlord possession claims, seasonally adjusted, issued in the first quarter of 2013, an increase from 38,564 (10%) in the same quarter in 2012.
- In the first quarter of 2013 there were 28,473 landlord possession claims that led to an order being made on the seasonally adjusted basis. This is again an increase from the same period in 2012 with 26,037 landlord possession claims leading to order, an increase of nearly 9%.

There is currently a Government-backed mortgage rescue scheme which aims to help vulnerable homeowners to stay in their home. The scheme has assisted a number of households in the district but is due to close to new applicants in London from 31 December 2013, and in the rest of England from 31 March

2014. The position will therefore need to be monitored and possible alternative options considered when this national scheme comes to an end.

### 3. The Local Picture for Wycombe District

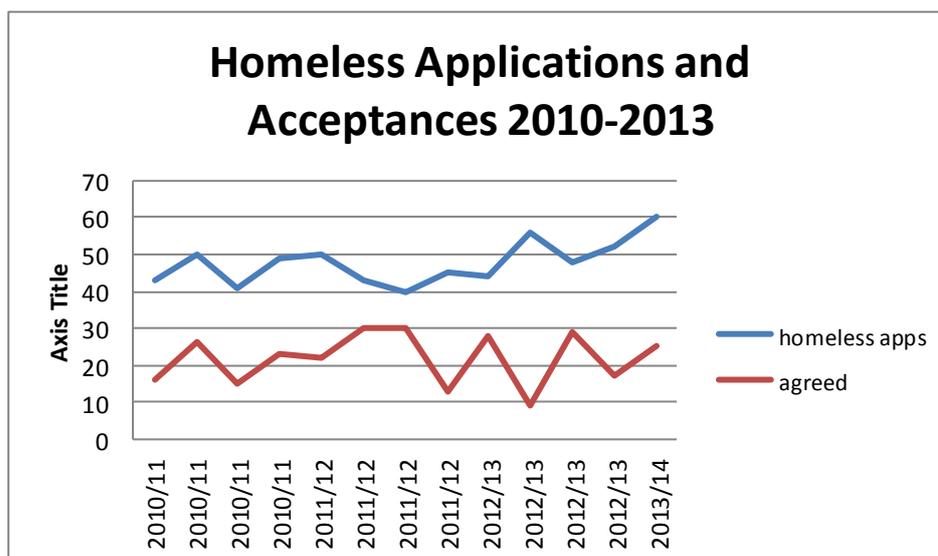
#### 3.1 Demographics

. The 2011 Census put the population at 171,700, almost 7,000 more people than the last pre-Census mid-year estimates. The latest ONS projections for Wycombe (taking account of the 2011 Census) estimates that the district's population will grow to 178,587 people in 2021.

#### 3.2 Homelessness' Approaches and Acceptances

Wycombe has seen an increase in the number of approaches for homelessness assistance, broadly in line with national trends over the past 3 years.

The following chart shows the local position for the number of homelessness applications from 2010/11 to the beginning of 2013/14 and also the number of households accepted for the corresponding period:



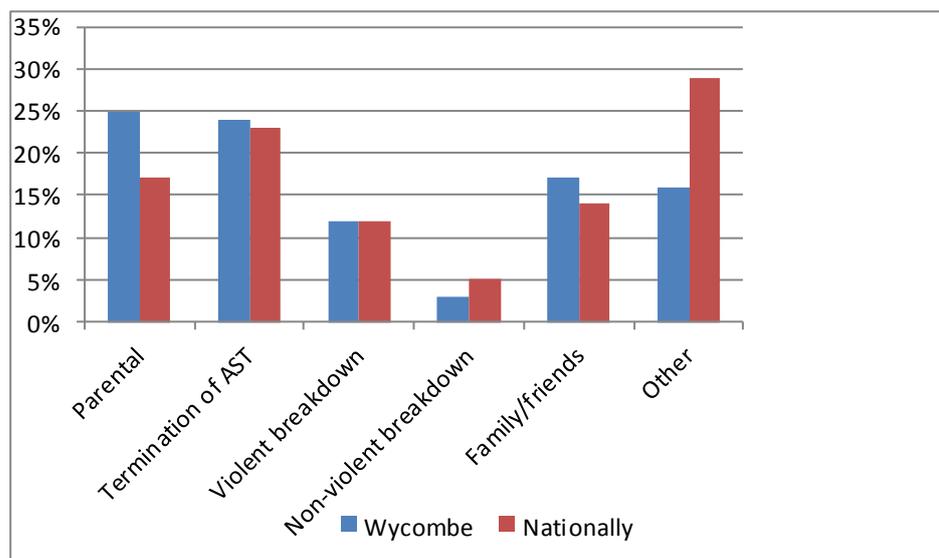
If a household is deemed to be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 28 days; eligible for assistance; and in priority need; a homelessness application can be taken and further inquiries are then carried out to determine whether the Council owes the household the full housing duty. Once these inquiries have been completed, and the Council accepts the full housing duty, a Section 184 decision letter is sent to the household to confirm that the homelessness application has been accepted.

The causes of homelessness in the Wycombe District for those households accepted as owing a full re-housing duty between April 2012 and March 2013 were:

Parents no longer willing to accommodate	25%
Termination of an assured shorthold tenancy	24%
Family or friends no longer willing to accommodate	17%
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	3%
Mortgage repossession	3%
Other reasons	16%
Violent breakdown of relationship with partner	12%

This is set out in the following table and chart:

	Wycombe	Nationally
Parental	25%	17%
Termination of AST	24%	23%
Violent breakdown	12%	12%
Non-violent breakdown	3%	5%
Family/friends	17%	14%
Other	16%	29%

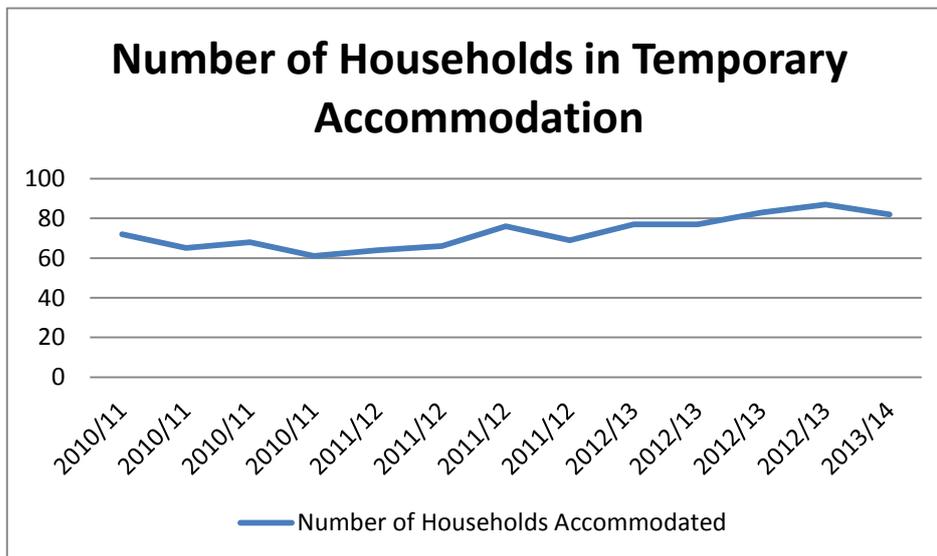


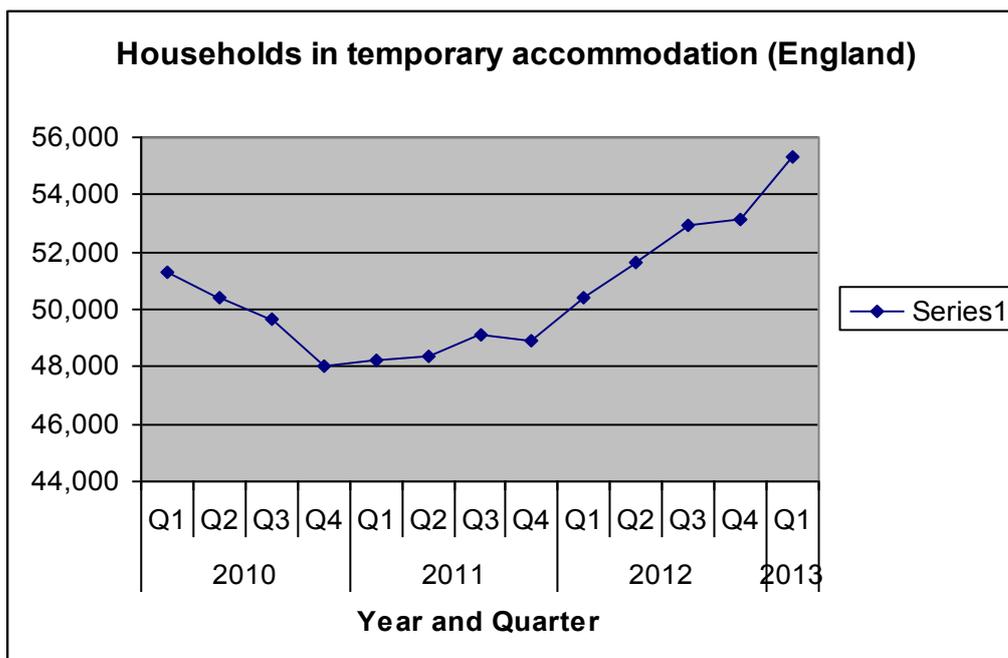
It can be seen that again, Wycombe is broadly in line with the national picture with slightly higher levels of family/parental evictions (when combined) and terminations of Assured Short hold Tenancies.

### 3.3 Households in Temporary Accommodation

Wycombe uses a number of accommodation sources for temporary accommodation, including the council's hostel, Saunderton Lodge, which has 33 mainly bedsit type rooms and accommodates single person households as well as families with children. The Council also has access to up to 50 properties from Red Kite Community Housing and has a small number of its own properties which are used for temporary accommodation. On occasion, due to high levels of demand, households have been placed into bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, usually outside of the district. However, the Council has not placed any families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks, as per the relevant guidance.

The following two charts show the number of households placed in temporary accommodation (a) in Wycombe and (b) nationally - from 2010/11 to the beginning of 2013/14.





### 3.4 Rough Sleeping

The *Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2012* statistical release was published in February 2013. All Local Authorities submitted their count or estimate figures to make up the National Picture. The local position is set out in the table below (estimates except where stated).

*Levels of rough sleeping, England, 2012 (DCLG Stats)*

Location	Rough Sleeping Numbers
Aylesbury Vale	4 (Count)
Cherwell	2
Chiltern	2
Milton Keynes	6
Oxford City	12 (Count)
South Bucks	0
S Oxford	0
Vale of White Horse	0
W Oxford	5
Wycombe	1 (Count)

Rough sleeping in Wycombe has become more evident in recent times as there is a wider national effort placed on it by the current government who are aiming eradicate rough sleeping. The wider emphasis together with new third sector agencies supporting rough sleepers has brought the subject to the forefront.

Although the number returned from the 'Street Count' was 1; services working with rough sleepers say the number is closer to 10. There is sufficient amount of evidence to confidently say that the number is closer to 10 however a yearly

'Street Count' or a formal estimate carried out in accordance with the national guidance provides a snapshot of the position.

The numbers of rough sleepers should continue to be monitored over the next few years and the Strategy will look at potential solutions to assist people in this situation.

### 3.5 Buckinghamshire - Oxfordshire Single Homelessness (BOSH) Project

In January 2012, as part of a national initiative funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Wycombe was asked by the DCLG Specialist Advisor to be the lead authority for the 10 Local Authorities within the sub-region of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes. The sum allocated to the group was £455,000.

This facilitated the launch of the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Single Homelessness (BOSH) project – formed with the aim of rolling out the successful 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) scheme - to help reduce and prevent rough sleeping.

The Local Authorities involved in the BOSH group are:

<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>Oxfordshire</b>
Aylesbury Vale District Council	Cherwell District Council
Chiltern District Council	Oxford City Council
Milton Keynes Council	South Oxfordshire District Council
South Bucks District Council	Vale of white Horse District Council
Wycombe District Council	West Oxfordshire District Council

The 10 Local Authorities jointly worked up an action plan to tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness within the sub-region. The emphasis is on bolstering existing front line services, rolling out the NSNO model, initiatives to mitigate Welfare Reforms and encouraging the rolling out of Private Rented Sector initiatives for Single Homeless individuals.

The BOSH group action plan contains the following main themes:

- Effective Homeless Prevention services to mitigate Welfare and Policy Reform – including specialist training, agreeing a 'Baseline' service offer for when individuals approach Housing Options Service and 'Worklessness schemes' to provide appropriate support to individuals to get back into work or training.
- Introduction of Rough Sleeping initiatives throughout the sub-region – including an Outreach Service, NSNO model using emergency bed spaces in the sub- region, reconnection of individuals back to their home districts and a strategy to assist entrenched rough sleepers through a personalised approach.

- Increase settled accommodation throughout the sub-region - effective roll out of localised PRS initiatives aimed at single homeless individuals who are deemed as 'non-statutory'.

As the BOSH Project has received a one-off grant; it has had to ensure there were viable exit strategies for the initiatives it has funded. Where possible there has been emphasis to link in with other funding streams of local authorities, county councils and funding bodies.

The tasks facing the authorities involved, including Wycombe District Council are to make the best use of the funds to deliver the outcomes identified in the project plan for the BOSH Group and also to continue with the initiatives that are most relevant to the needs presented in their locality, subject to identifying the necessary resources.

A key aspect to tackling rough sleeping is the rough sleeping group which is attended by key stakeholders every fortnight. The group discusses known rough sleepers and those without secure housing ('sofa-surfers' et al) and discuss pathways to end rough sleeping for each individual. The group has seen a reduction in the number of cases discussed since the launch of the outreach service earlier in 2013.

### 3.6 Housing Advice

Under Section 179(1) of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, every Local Housing Authority shall secure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in their District.

Over the past 3 years the Council has seen an increase, year on year, in the number of households requiring advice and assistance. The table below shows the number of new Housing Advice cases taken by the Council over the last 4 financial years:

Financial Year	Number of new Housing Advice cases taken
1/4/09 to 31/3/10	853
1/4/10 to 31/3/11	877
1/4/11 to 31/3/12	906
1/4/12 to 31/3/13	TBC

### 3.7. Homelessness Prevention and Relief

The Council has a number of homelessness prevention tools at its disposal including negotiation with landlords and family and friends, provision of mediation services, home visits, debt and money advice, use of supported housing schemes and hostels.

One of the most successful prevention measures in Wycombe is the use of incentives to encourage private sector landlords to provide accommodation to households threatened with homelessness. This is through the provision of a guarantee, deposits and loans to pay the deposit.

During 2011/12 a total of 90 households were prevented from becoming homeless via the Council's 'in house deposit scheme'. In addition, the Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (WRDGS) an external scheme (grant funded by Wycombe), prevented a total of 89 households from becoming homeless by sourcing rooms and accommodation in the private sector and by the rescuing of tenancies at risk of failure.

Work on the prevention and the relief of homelessness is the main focus of the Council's housing options team. In terms of the balance of outcomes, we know that for 2012/13

- 72% of all prevention outcomes involved helping people to remain in their own home,
- 28% involved helping people to secure alternative accommodation.

### **3.8 Key Forums and Partners**

In addition to the BOSH Group, Wycombe has other key forums where issues that impact upon homelessness are considered in detail and actions agreed are undertaken in partnership as well as by individual organisations.

#### **a. The Wycombe Housing Forum (WHF)**

The WHF enables regular engagement with Registered Providers and other important stakeholders. The WHF operates via three individual subgroups (Development; Management; and Homelessness & Young Persons) which each meet quarter.

There is overview via a Core Group (comprising the three subgroup chairs and managers from the WDC Housing Service, from Red Kite Community Housing and from Bucks CC) which meets on a 6 monthly basis and in turn reports to the Wycombe Partnership Executive Board

#### **b. The Landlords' Forum**

The local Landlords' Forum enables regular engagement between the District Council and a group of landlords who let homes in the private rented sector, an important part of the local housing market. This group has recently been reformed and has met twice in 2013 with regular, quarterly meetings scheduled.

### **3.9 New Affordable Housing Supply**

The delivery of affordable housing by Registered Providers is to a significant extent dependent upon the market for opportunities and has traditionally been

influenced by the availability of grant subsidy from the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA). In recent years the economic downturn has had an impact and the Registered Providers have been faced with the changes brought in via the Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15, with less HCA grant money and with new development linked to charging affordable rents rather than social rents.

In 2011/12 there were 126 new affordable homes completed in the Wycombe District, including 92 homes for social rent (6 of which were supported housing units) and 34 for shared ownership sale.

In 2012/13 the overall total number of additional affordable homes completed in the district had fallen to 55, including 18 for social rent, 20 for affordable rent and 17 for shared ownership sale.

There are prospects for an increase in 2013/14; the overall total for the district is projected to be between 65 - 70 affordable homes, with potentially a similar number the following year.

*NB. The above figures do not include any homes being provided within the major regeneration project by Home Group at the Lance Way estate in High Wycombe*

### **3.10 Housing Allocations and Lettings**

Wycombe District Council has operated a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme since May 2009 and is a member of the Bucks Home Choice partnership. The CBL scheme enables applicants on the housing register to express interest in vacant social rented housing properties. CBL enables existing social housing tenants to move to alternative accommodation as well as households wishing to become new social housing tenants.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013 there were 3417 applicants registered for housing with Wycombe District Council of which 2639 have been assessed as having no housing need. 778 applicants have been assessed as being in housing need of which 56 households have been accepted as a homeless household.

In 2012/13 there were a total of 529 lets to social housing properties compared to 532 in 2011/12 and 633 in 2010/11. Of the 529 lets in 2012/13, 210 were classed as aged persons designated accommodation. In 2011/12 this figure was considerably lower at 158. This figure is significant as it shows the number of general needs properties which are available to homeless households being reduced.

In 2012/13 155 social housing tenants were transferred to alternative accommodation compared with 163 the year before.

In 2012/13 there were 319 general needs properties allocated. 76 homeless households were housed in this period which equates to 25% or a quarter of all general needs housing being allocated to a homeless household.

In the previous year there were 374 general needs lettings of which 78 were homeless households which equates to approximately 20% of all general needs allocations. This shows an increase during the last financial year in the proportion of general needs vacancies being let to homeless households.

### **3.11 Domestic violence (DV)**

In 2012/13, there were 11 cases in which domestic violence was recorded as the reason for homelessness. Not all cases involved a direct partner. This represented 13% of all acceptances and was a 1% increase on the previous year.

Between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 and March 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 around 600 women used services provided by Wycombe Women's Aid a local women's aid agency, seeking assistance due to domestic abuse. Over half the women accessing services were from Wycombe District with over 50 households assisted into refuge in other areas as a result.

Domestic abuse is not limited to Women suffering abuse with an increasing number of men suffering domestic abuse too. Information however, is difficult to obtain in this regard as there is not a specific service for males in the district

### **3.12 Landlord and Mortgage Repossessions**

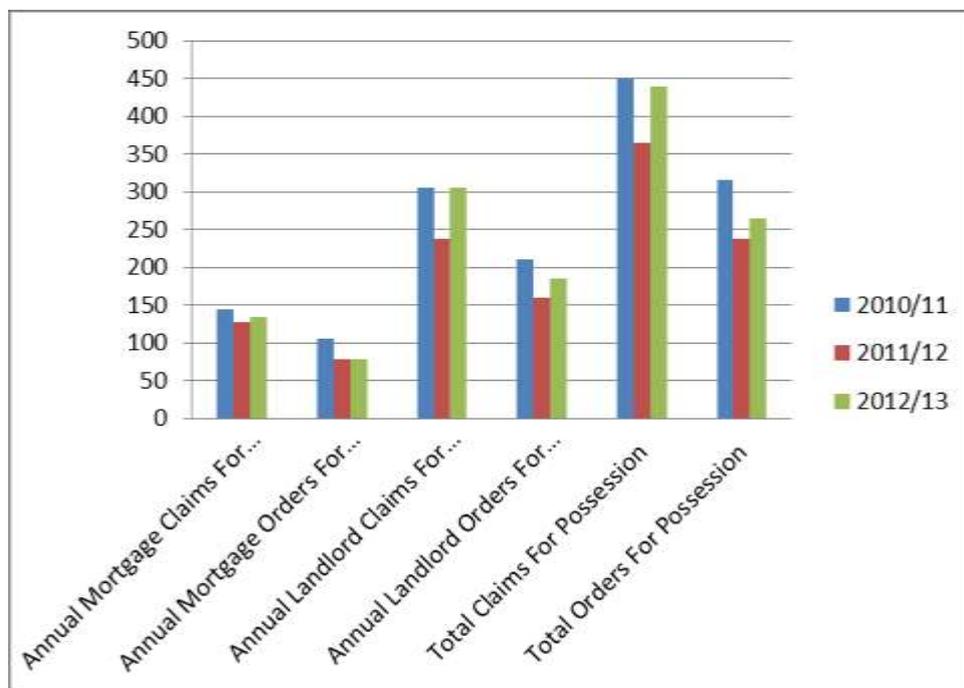
According to figures provided by the Ministry of Justice, the number of claims and orders for possession has fallen since 2010/11 however there appears to have been a small rise in the past 12 months.

For Mortgage claims and orders for possession, there has been an overall reduction of 7% in claims for possession and 25% in orders for possession in Wycombe. However there has been a small increase of 5% and 1% respectively since 2011/12.

For Landlord claims for possession there has been no change in the number of claims for possession between 2010/11 and 2012/13 and a 12% reduction in the number of orders. However, for 2011/12 and 2012/13 there has been a significant increase of 29% and 15% respectfully.

These changes are compare favourably with the overall national picture as (for the same period) there has been only a 1% reduction in claims and only a 3% reduction in orders- compared with 7% and 25% respectively in Wycombe.

Wycombe	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Annual Mortgage Claims For Possession	144	127	134
Annual Mortgage Orders For Possession	106	78	79
Annual Landlord Claims For Possession	306	238	306
Annual Landlord Orders For Possession	210	160	185
Total Claims For Possession	450	365	440
Total Orders For Possession	316	238	264



As loss of Assured Short-hold tenancies is amongst the highest reason for homelessness in the district, we need to ensure we target resources to ensure that the increase in landlord claims and possession orders between 2011/12 and 12/13 is simply a blip.

## 4. Progress from the Homelessness Strategy 2008-11

### 4.1 Actions and Outcomes

There were a number of actions agreed as part of the previous Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2011. The Review carried out by Jenkins Duval outlines the successes achieved during that period.

In addition, a number of positive actions have taken place since the Jenkins Duval review, listed in the following table:

Issues	Actions / Outcomes 2012 & 2013
Closer working of the Council's Housing Options Team and Private Sector Housing Team	All private rented sector properties being let to people via the internal rent deposit scheme are now being inspected by the private sector team
Appointment of extra WDC post to work with private sector landlords - to increase access to private rented sector	Obtained a budget and corporate approval to a 12 month secondment; post advertised internally during July 2013
Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy to be updated – to better meet the current service needs	Carried out consultation on the draft proposals; amendments made following the consultation and revised draft policy to be considered by WDC Cabinet in December 2013
The impacts of the Government's Welfare Reforms	Discussions and training events arranged with stakeholders, including Registered Providers
The number of households in temporary accommodation	The number of households in temporary accommodation has fallen - in contrast to the general position nationally
A Protocol for 16 / 17 year olds	Protocol agreed between the Buckinghamshire District Councils and Bucks County Council Social Services
Rough Sleeping Prevention	Contracts awarded via the BOSH Group for outreach and support to improve services for rough sleepers

The Homelessness Strategy 2014-19 aims to build on these successes and develop a fresh set of comprehensive tasks that will help the Council and its

partners to deliver excellent homelessness prevention services in what will prove to be a very difficult and challenging climate.

## **Part 2 – The Strategy for 2014 – 19**

The aim of this strategy is for Wycombe District to have a homelessness strategy that sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, to be reviewed annually in order to be responsive to emerging needs.

There are three sections to this part of the Strategy:

- a) The Council's proposals in response to the findings of Jenkins Duval in their Homelessness Review;
- b) The aim of achieving the DCLG Gold, Silver or Bronze Standard for homelessness services, and;
- c) Proposals relating to specific client groups

### **5. Recommendations from the Homelessness Review:**

The Homelessness Review by Jenkins Duval has led to a number of recommendations - the following key areas have been identified for action:

#### **5.1 Continue to develop the Council's Housing Options Service**

The Council needs more options available to prevent homelessness. The Council needs to continue the good work currently provided by the service, when faced with increased demand, and also needs to develop its service to ensure it is focussed on maximising prevention opportunities and ensuring the best use of its own, and others resources.

Taking on board feedback from service users captured as part of the Homelessness Review, the Council needs to ensure its services are more customer focussed and there is work to be done to improve integration with the Customer Service Centre.

There is also scope for obtaining more customer feedback and acting on the information received. Partner agencies have a key role in this.

#### **Actions:**

- i) Consultants are carrying out a 'lean systems review' of the housing options team to improve 'the customer journey' by better integration of the customer services and housing options team. This work will lead to an improved service structure - to be in place by April 2014.

ii) Introduction of a customer feedback form by July 2014 for use by all customers with suggestions for improvements included with every housing advice and homelessness outcome letter. Feedback is to inform future service improvements. A number of agencies have agreed to hold stocks of these forms.

iii) Encourage applicants to apply for housing register on line and to consider administration charges for paper applications. The percentage of online applications should be increased year on year. The aim is to reduce officer administration time in order to focus on the early intervention of homelessness. A number of agencies have agreed to support clients making online applications and raise awareness of access points.

iv) A restructure of the department to provide officers with more opportunity to prevent and address homelessness and ensure efficient use of staff and management time - to be completed by September 2014.

## **5.2 Deliver sufficient, appropriate temporary accommodation**

This has been a consistent theme raised by stakeholders and service users. The consultant's assessment of Saunderton Lodge and its appropriateness reflects these wider views. The Council needs to review its overall TA portfolio – in terms of numbers and suitability and should also seek B&B accommodation within the District.

TA use has declined by around 40% since April 2013. This is after we reviewed internal procedures, made more efficient use of Saunderton Lodge and the arrangements with Red Kite for use of the properties they provide for TA.

It is difficult to make an accurate prediction of the need for temporary accommodation over the next five years. We intend to achieve the reduction of B&B use by focussing on prevention work and making best use of existing arrangements.

### **Actions:**

- i) Bed and Breakfast use to be ceased unless for emergency and/or exceptional cases. If such accommodation is required, a provider should be sought in Wycombe District initially, with outside district accommodation accessed if none available - Target of zero use of bed and breakfast accommodation by families (except in emergencies and then for no more than 1 week).
- ii) Prepare feasibility study into Saunderton Lodge being converted into fully self-contained units with showers replaced by baths and having at least 2 fully disabled friendly/adapted flats. Report to be submitted to Cabinet by April 2014 for options regarding improvements at Saunderton – timescales for actions being subject to approval.

- iii) The eight miscellaneous properties retained by the council as temporary accommodation - including six houses in Benjamin Road, High Wycombe - are all to be used or sold in order to procure alternative temporary accommodation – timescales for actions being subject to approval.

### **5.3 Improve access to and increase use of the Private Rented Sector**

There is a need to review the current capacity of the in house deposit scheme and the Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (WRDGS) in the light of the ability to discharge duty into the private rented sector (PRS), there is a need to address and mitigate the impact of the London boroughs sourcing and securing suitable accommodation in Wycombe – rents for properties within the scheme are not expected to exceed the applicable Local Housing Allowance. Co-location of the in house deposit scheme and the WRDGS schemes should be explored to improve efficiency and value for money.

#### **Actions:**

- i) Closer working with private landlords in the district to increase use of the private rented sector and understand any reluctance to work with WDC - and to seek a remedy to any issues raised. Regular landlord forums to be held with landlords encouraged to drive the agenda.
- ii) Use ability and power to discharge homelessness duty into the private rented sector for agreed homeless households who are considered (from individual assessment) to be appropriate - with first formal discharge to be achieved by January 2014.
- iii) Investigate potential for co-location of WRDGS and the internal rent deposit scheme, for economies of scale and to encourage closer working. Target of Spring 2014 for preparation of an options report.

### **5.4 Tackle rough sleeping**

Matters include the provision of accommodation - including access to emergency beds and the need for outreach worker support. The Council needs to monitor the No Second Night Out initiative as a rapid response to people sleeping on the street. The Council also needs to work on delivering an effective reconnections policy and appropriate move on from emergency accommodation. Much of this will be delivered through the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Single Homelessness Group, and the delivery plan of that group will need to be integrated with the delivery plan of the Councils new Homelessness Strategy.

Actions:

- i) Continue to gather information on people sleeping rough in the district and seek to monitor numbers of 'sofa-surfers' and prison leavers.
- ii) Monitor the current Outreach and NSNO for the sub-region service (including the B&B funding, emergency beds, reconnection funding and personalisation funding) - assisting rough sleepers to access accommodation and support to ensure the performance is in accordance with the tendered specifications.
- iii) Review outcomes when the current contracts end and assess if successful.
- iv) Consider options for 2015 and beyond.
- v) Continue to make the case for complex needs clients to access the countywide hostel services.
- vi) Monitor the current worklessness initiatives for individuals who have previously slept rough.
- vii) Review outcomes when the current contracts end and assess if successful.
- viii) Consider options for 2015 and beyond.

### **5.5 Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy Review**

A review of the Bucks Home Choice allocations policy began in 2012 - the new proposals being reported to Cabinet in December 2013. This report view draws on some of the findings of the homelessness review, particularly in relation to the link between homelessness and the provision of social/ affordable housing. The use of lettings made through Bucks Home Choice and the private rented sector are important in tackling homelessness.

Actions:

- i) Operate an amended Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy to reflect the local needs.
- ii) Carry out an annual review of Bucks Home Choice to ensure it is meeting the needs.

### **5.6 Address the Impacts of Welfare Reforms**

The impact of welfare reform will be an important issue for homelessness in Wycombe and will link with the other themes identified for the Homelessness Strategy – including affordability. Working closely with partner agencies on monitoring trends and delivering services to tackle specific emerging issues will be of key importance. The CAB has launched a Community Advice and Legal Forum (CALF) project.

Actions:

i) Gain an understanding of the housing impacts of the various Welfare Reform changes.

The various elements of Welfare Reform are each considered in more detail:

a) Social sector size criteria / under-occupation deduction

According to figures provided by the Housing Benefits team there are believed to be around 700 households affected in Wycombe

Actions:

i) Raise awareness of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), Mutual Exchanges and potential opportunities for matching of downsizers with existing RP tenants who are overcrowded - to maximise stock use and minimise void costs.

ii) Investigate the need and scope for an incentive scheme to assist households needing to downsize.

iii) Work with HB team to ensure consistent message is sent from the Council and early assistance is encouraged.

b) Universal Credit and direct payments

Actions:

i) Raise awareness of Universal Credit (UC) and basic bank accounts.

ii) Training of front line staff as to exemptions etc., mapping of debt advice services with agreed strategy for targeting households to avoid debt and rent arrears.

iii) Have IT facilities/ access available locally - UC has to be dealt with online – the Customer Service Centre has PC's to use, libraries etc.

iv) Monitor the impacts of UC, respond with actions if possible and keep under review.

c) Benefit Cap

Approximately 130 households are believed to be affected in the Wycombe District

Actions:

- i) Contact to be made with the affected households to offer support and access to resources.
- ii) Provide additional training for front line staff.
- iii) Regular liaison between the HB and Housing Options teams regarding the affected households and regular meetings with the Jobcentre Plus.

d) Local Housing Allowance

The 30th percentile has been in place for some time

Actions:

- i) - Investigate what affect has the 30th percentile has had on PRS sector in Wycombe.

e) Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)

Opportunities are to be sought to assist with provision of move-on accommodation – to assist clients and making spaces available for others. The exemption available for some eligible people in qualifying hostels assists with this.

Actions:

- i) Maximise opportunities for clients to move on from hostels – including residents eligible for exemption from Shared Accommodation Rate.

## 5.7 Reviewing Protocols / Joint Working

One of the areas identified from the work with stakeholders, was that of the need to increase joint working and have clear protocols in place to clarify the roles of the agencies involved. In particular there is a need to review the intentionally homeless protocol and to monitor the recently agreed protocol for 16/17 year olds - both of these areas to be undertaken jointly with Buckinghamshire County Council.

Actions:

- i) Monitor the impacts of the recently agreed Protocol agreed with county and other districts for 16/17 year olds who become homeless.

### **5.8 Better quality, self-serve housing advice**

To enhance service delivery and increase efficiency, there needs to be a focus on providing more service information electronically. Developing an on-line element to the housing advice service that can be accessed at any time is considered to be a useful way forward and should be investigated. *Please refer to the actions within the section headed Continue to develop the Council's Housing Options Service*

### **5.9 Social Lettings Agency**

Whilst reviewing how it accesses the PRS, the Council should also explore the longer term opportunities of setting up a social lettings agency for delivering more homes at no cost to the Council.

Actions:

- i) Work is to be undertaken to consider the feasibility of setting up a social lettings agency - feasibility study report to be prepared for Cabinet by September 2014 – future recommendations for action will depend upon findings.

### **5.10 Deliver Affordable Settled Accommodation**

The Council needs to continue working with Registered Providers, encouraging and assisting them to develop additional affordable / social housing. In addition, the Council also needs to continue working with Buckinghamshire County Council and specialist providers to deliver appropriate supported housing accommodation.

Actions:

- i) Support Registered Providers to develop affordable / social housing within the district - in line with annual targets.
- ii) Work with Bucks CC regarding the provision of appropriate supported housing accommodation

## **6. The DCLG Gold Standard:**

6.1 In August 2012, DCLG published a homelessness prevention strategy entitled 'making every contact count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness'. A copy of this can be found on the Department for Communities and Local Government website at:  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/makeeverycontactcount>

The strategy posed the following ten local challenges for Local Authorities to address:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

These 10 local challenges have since been adapted to a Gold Standard system - any Authority can apply for Gold Standard status with awards ranging from bronze (meeting up to 3 of the challenges), Silver (up to 9) and Gold meeting all 10. It is considered that the service is already at Bronze level and subject to Cabinet approval, the aim is to meet all 10 challenges to be a Gold Standard housing service before the end of this strategy period.

Action:

i) Subject to Cabinet approval, achieve the DCLG's Gold Standard by March 2016 with at least silver to be achieved by March 2015.

## **7. Preventing Homelessness: 2014 and beyond**

### **7.1 Addressing the Main Causes of Approaches for Assistance**

Building on the strength of the previous strategy, the Council's aim remains to prevent homelessness - tackling the issues that may result in homelessness earlier will reduce the social and economic burden on families who experience or who are at risk of homelessness.

To do this the Council will need to continuously review services against agreed outcomes and work collaboratively with our partners to provide a range of good quality services that prevent homelessness and minimise the risk of repeat homelessness.

In order to further prevent homelessness occurring, we need to understand the reasons for homelessness in the district and to consider ways of addressing them earlier.

Comparing Wycombe with national homelessness acceptance levels it appears that Wycombe has a higher rate of homelessness acceptances in cases of:

Parental eviction-	25% compared with 20% nationally
Termination of AST	24% compared with 19% nationally
Family/friends exclusion	17% compared with 14% nationally
Domestic Abuse	12% compared with 12% nationally

Using the data extracted from our systems over the past 18 months, it appears that Wycombe has a higher rate of homelessness acceptances than the national average for 3 of the 4 most common reasons listed above.

However, comparing Wycombe against neighbouring authorities and indeed the South East as a whole, the picture appears more favourable.

Figures for 2012/13

Reason for homelessness	AVDC	CDC	SBDC	WDC	RBWM	Slough	Reading	South East
Parental eviction	23.3	26.1	26.3	<b>19.8</b>	30	19.5	13	21.2
relative/friend eviction	6.8	21.7	0	<b>12.3</b>	13	14	13	12.4
Termination of AST	27.1	8.7	28.9	<b>24.7</b>	26	18.8	15	22
Domestic Abuse	12.8	4.3	5.3	<b>13.6</b>	2.2	9.4	14.4	9.5
Number of H/less applications	244	42	33	<b>175</b>	48	509	598	12,595
Approaches per 1,000 residents	1.4	0.45	0.49	<b>1.02</b>	0.33	3.63	3.84	1.46

Therefore, it seems although more work is required to prevent homelessness in general, Wycombe compares favourably with similar authorities locally.

We have also considered reasons for homelessness for households who have **not** been agreed a housing duty, either for reasons of seeking advice only or where homelessness has been prevented or not owed. (These figures are collated separately from figures used in the previous table)

Using our own figures, statistically most approaches for assistance are from:

Parental/family/friend exclusions-	25% of all housing advice approaches
Termination of AST-	24% of all housing advice approaches
Domestic Abuse/ relationship breakdown	9% of all housing advice approaches

Other reasons include:

Rent arrears in both social housing and private rented accommodation-	12%
Mortgage arrears	4%.

Actions to address the main causes of approaches for assistance are set out below:

Actions:

i) Robust approach to parental/family/friend exclusion- leaving home is a natural occurrence for most people and can be managed appropriately and effectively. Work in this area should include production of a clear process map type leaflet for parents/family members to understand steps and measures that can be taken to relieve internal pressures before emergency intervention is required leading to a housing solution. Also awareness raising in partner agencies, including social services, job centre plus, and health visitors to ensure referrals are made to the housing options team long before a housing crisis develops.

ii) A mapping of agencies/landlords who are terminating AST's to understand reasons for doing so and to again raise awareness of referrals to the department to allow for possible prevention of homelessness.

iii) To assist women escaping violence, develop a protocol for closer working with the local women's aid refuges to improve relationships and understanding of roles. Housing advice surgeries at the women's aid refuges to ensure all options are available to customers – not just homelessness. Also consider increased use of the Sanctuary scheme as a possible option.

## 7.2 Actions for Specific Client Groups

Further examination of the data suggests that certain ethnic groups are more likely to approach for assistance in certain circumstances than the expected level which will need addressing.

The areas of concern are as follows:

Asian Pakistani households appear more likely to approach for housing advice following parental/family/friend eviction than would be expected with 21% of such approaches from this community compared with a percentage of the population of 7.6%.

The same community are also over represented in loss of AST with 13% of approaches from this community compared with a percentage of the population of 7.6%

Other White households are more likely to approach for housing assistance for termination/loss of AST than would be expected, with 12% of such approaches from this community compared with a percentage of the population of 5%.

Mapping approaches for assistance to ensure advice is targeted to areas/wards and communities more likely to seek assistance. For example if individual wards/areas and/or community groups are more likely to seek assistance we should target community leaders/groups as well as members for the ward to raise awareness of services and options available.

A high number of applications for assistance are 16-24 year old single, pregnant women following parental/family/friend eviction as well as from loss of supported housing due to pregnancy.

Currently there is one specialist provider in the district provider supported accommodation for this client group; however there are only 3 bed spaces available. An action to address this should include consideration for more accommodation of this type.

The consultation process for this strategy has also highlighted issues regarding clients leaving hospital or prison who are also known to have been rough

sleepers. Continuing work with agencies able to assist clients who are drug and / or alcohol misusers is also proposed. In addition, it is considered that there is a need to work more closely with Social Services regarding people who are considered to be intentionally homeless.

Actions are therefore proposed regarding these client groups – as set out in the following section:

Actions:

- i) Develop a protocol which aims to prevent people being discharged from hospital who are known rough sleepers from going back to the streets.
- ii) Develop a protocol which aims to prevent people leaving prison who are known rough sleepers from going back to the streets.
- iii) Develop an understanding of why people in some community groups appear more likely to face homelessness than others - a targeted approach to raising awareness of housing issues is proposed.
- iv) Consider the possibility of providing more specialist accommodation for pregnant single applicants.
- v) Develop a protocol for working with Social Services regarding families considered to be intentionally homeless.
- vi) Develop links with agencies working with drug and alcohol misusers.