

Plymouth City Council

Homelessness Review 2007



This review builds on the extensive work that has been undertaken to review Plymouth's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2007, and constitutes a comprehensive and wide-ranging review following extensive consultation to include:

- o A description of the nature and extent of homelessness in Plymouth including future trends.
- o A summary of how the need is being met at present and the resources available.
- o Details of planned service improvements.
- o Advice and legal services in Plymouth.
- o Identification of the gaps in service.

This information will provide a clearer understanding of homelessness in Plymouth and will form the basis of the new Homelessness Strategy to be produced by August 2008.

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SETTING HOMELESSNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF PLYMOUTH

About Plymouth

Plymouth is a unitary authority that accounts for 5% of the South West's population. It is the third largest of the region's 45 unitary and district councils (only Bristol and South Gloucestershire are larger).

In mid year 2005 Plymouth's population was estimated to be 246,100. The Office for National Statistics figures published in 2006 showed that the Mid Year Population Estimate for Plymouth is **248,100** - an increase of 2,000.

The latest figures are estimates but have been based on sources including patient registers and school rolls as well as the electoral register and the registrar office.

Some of the key trends include

- 1,370 new residents as a result of international migration.
- Unlike other cities, we also saw 500 more babies being born than people dying.
- The largest growing groups are the 15 to 29, and 65+ year olds

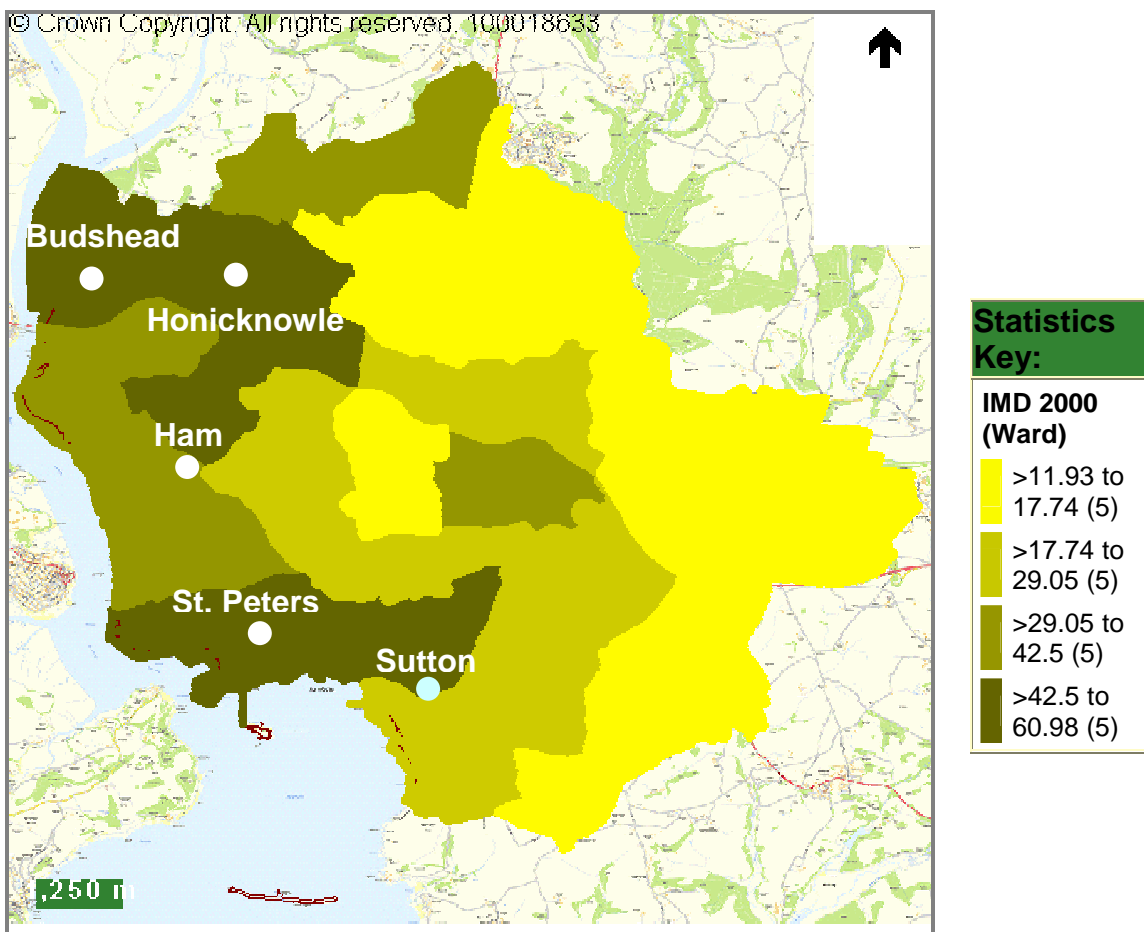
Particular features of the population

Age structure forecast: The Housing Market and Needs Assessment (2006) predicted that Plymouth's population would rise between now and 2026, and the table below illustrates the significant increases in the 15-29 and 65+ year old age groups.

	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026	Change	Change %
0-19	60,000	57,200	56,800	58,700	61,100	+400	+0.7
20-29	37,200	43,100	44,000	41,300	40,000	+7,900	+24.6
30-44	50,900	48,300	49,500	56,700	61,000	+7,500	+14.0
45-64	59,700	62,900	64,000	62,600	61,400	+5,200	+9.3
65+	39,200	42,100	47,000	50,700	54,900	+16,400	+42.6
TOTAL	246,800	253,500	261,300	269,900	278,400	+37,400	+15.5
80+	10,500	11,400	12,300	13,800	16,200	+5,700	+54.3

Population Age Band Forecast, Plymouth City – to 2026.

Deprivation: In the Indices of Deprivation 2004, Plymouth was ranked at 76 out of 354 local authorities in England, where 1 was the most deprived area and 354 the least deprived. Plymouth is a city of stark contrasts and is characterised by high concentrations of social deprivation and poverty, not just compared to other, more affluent areas of Plymouth, but also by National and European standards. 3 of Plymouth wards are among the 10% most deprived in the UK: St. Peters; Ham; and Budshead, as depicted below.



Ethnic Minority Population:

3.47% of the population are not White British. Plymouth's BME population is approximately 3968 – 1.65% of the total population.

Migrant workers:

Anecdotal reports from Housing workers suggest that more people who have migrated from European succession states are requesting housing advice.

National methods of recording are currently unsatisfactory, however, and currently there is no bespoke data available locally to calculate numbers. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) is encouraging Local Authorities to use a range of administrative datasets as proxies including National Insurance registrations, Flag 4 (registrations with GP's) and the electoral role to name but a few.

There are considerable problems in relying on proxy data in that it only indicates when migrants arrive and a common feature of new migration patterns is the 'churn effect' where significant inward migration is offset partly or totally by outward migration adding to the complexity of calculating numbers

The Local Government Association have identified pressures on housing services as well as health, children's services, and community safety, but a detailed examination of the impact in Plymouth is not available.

(Source: Talking sense about migration and localities: numbers and impacts on public services, LGA Conference, September 2006).

Employment:

Plymouth's unemployment rate is currently running at 4.2% - meaning that approximately 2,020 people between the ages of 20 – 65 years old are unemployed in the city.

(Figures based on Plymouth sub-regional Housing Market Needs Assessment, 2006, and 4.2% of population between age groups specified as an approximation of those who are of working age).

HOMELESSNESS IN PLYMOUTH



APPROACHES FOR SUPPORT

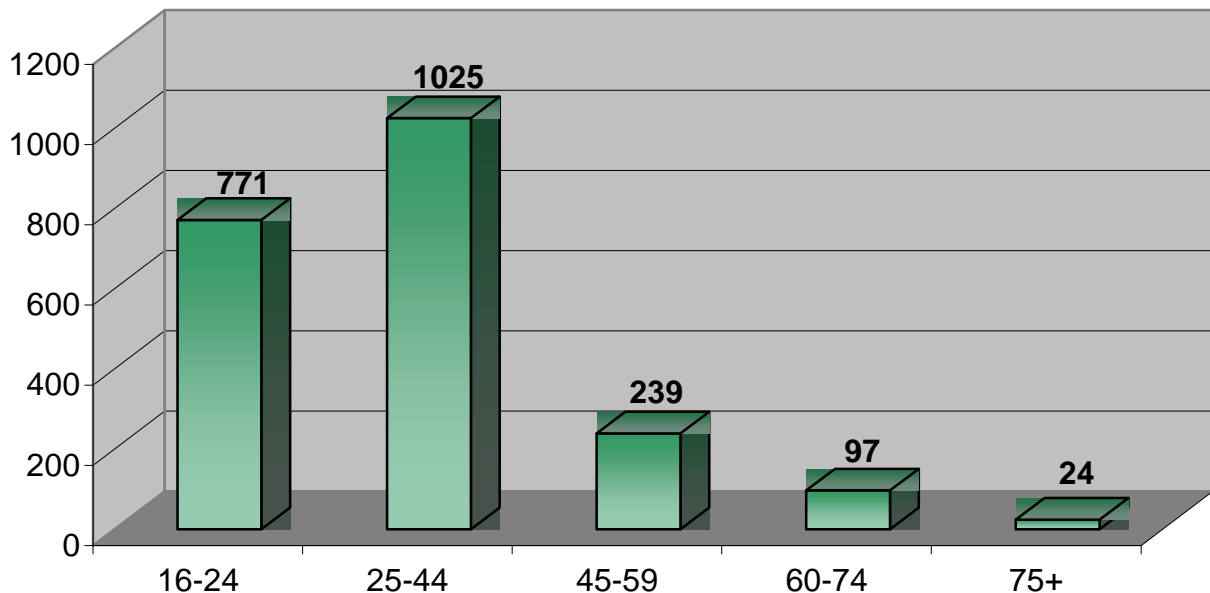
There are a number of different agencies that offer support and guidance to people experiencing housing difficulty that could lead to homelessness. Plymouth City Council operates a one stop housing advice centre at Midland House in Plymouth. Anyone looking for Housing Advice, Information or Support in Plymouth will benefit from a one-stop advice shop opened by the Housing Services of Plymouth City Council. Members of the public can come to a single point to get advice, be assessed for housing needs, make enquiries about accommodation and allocations and be signposted to other agencies in the city in the private and charitable sector.

Other organisations offering housing advice are: Plymouth Access To Housing (PATH – a local voluntary service); and the Offender Gateway (a Regional Offender Management funded advice and assessment resource for people leaving prison, or being managed by Probation Services, and have a housing issue).

ISSUES THAT LEAD TO PEOPLE APPROACHING THE LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING ADVICE SERVICES:

2229 people approached Plymouth City Council's Housing Advice team during the year 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007.

As the chart below shows, younger people are a key service user group for Housing Advice, with 35% of those who approached Housing Advice aged between 16 and 24 years old.



In addition, the following features of those who approached Housing Advice can be noted:

- 66% (1471) of those who approached Housing Advice were female.
- Figures show service users were predominantly white British people, with only 1.2% of BME background. This is lower than would be expected proportionally from the BME population of Plymouth, especially in view of the well-documented increased incidence of homelessness and housing difficulty with this client group. Focus group discussions with Housing Advice staff have highlighted that there are some issues with recording, which are currently being addressed.
- Over half (53% n=1171) of those who approached had dependant children.

- Though predominantly younger people approach the service, there is a significant number of older people experiencing housing difficulty, with over 5% of service users being over 60 years of age. Discussion with Housing Advice staff highlighted uncertainty regarding housing options available to older people, and referral routes into Sheltered Housing.

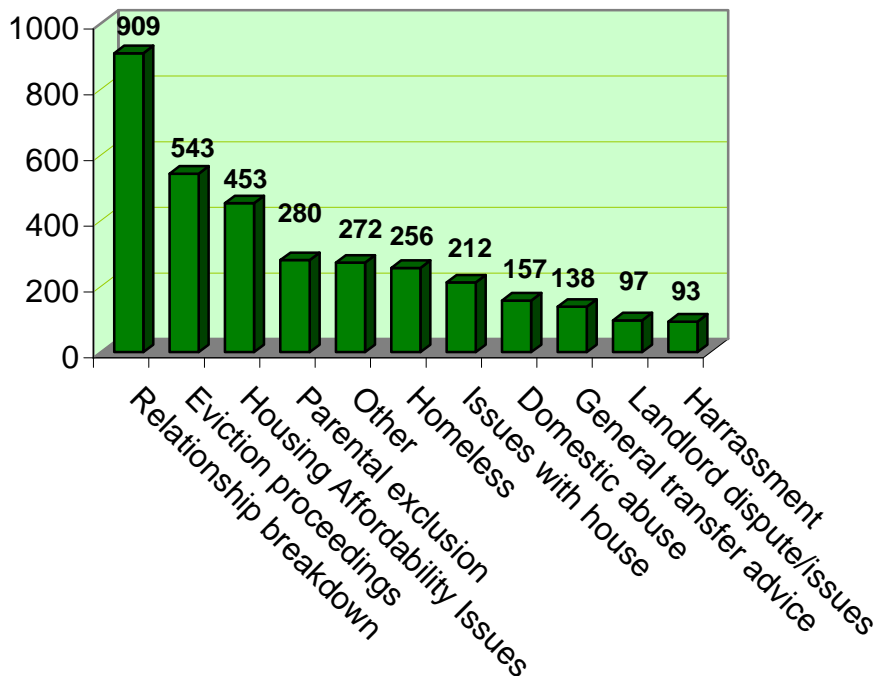
Our service users said:

“People who work with the homeless need to visit them in places like the Shekinah Mission to offer support and advice. People get intimidated about visiting official buildings or are disillusioned with ‘the system’.

(Source: John, Service User at The Gates Night Shelter, HOPE Consultation, November 2006).

Recorded issues of those who did approach Housing Advice are illustrated in the following chart:

**Issues of those presenting to Housing Advice
between 1.4.06 - 31.3.07**



The following features of the issues people present to Housing Advice with can be noted:

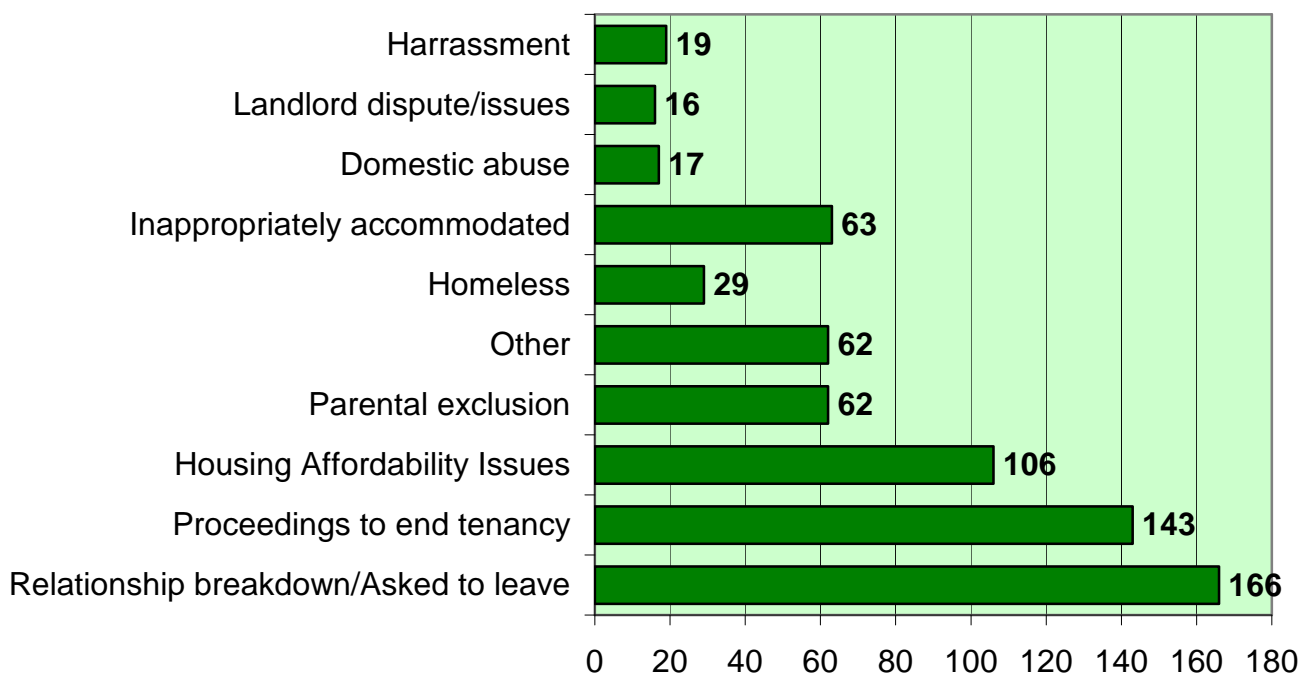
- o Over 40% of all people who approach P.C.C. for housing advice have experienced relationship breakdown.
- o Work is being undertaken to clarify recording within categories, but it is currently the practice of Housing Advice to use both the relationship breakdown category and the parental exclusion category to define a young person leaving home after a ‘fall out’.
- o Almost a quarter of all approaches result from eviction proceedings being taken against them within private rented tenancies – only 11 of which were considered ‘illegal’, and the vast majority of which had received a notice seeking possession.
- o A significant proportion of people (1 in 5) had issues around affordability of their current accommodation – the larger proportion of whom had already fallen into rent/mortgage arrears, with some not having claimed welfare right entitlements.

- o A significant number approached for advice regarding issues with the house – which includes damp and disrepair, householder’s medical issues and overcrowding.

Where homelessness was successfully prevented:

Homelessness prevention work has been the focus of Plymouth’s Housing Advice Team, with staff and resources increasingly targeted at this area of the work. Because of this, the team have achieved a large degree of success in preventing homelessness (recorded under BV213) in relation to the following categories:

Problems presented with where homelessness was successfully prevented (BV213)



It can be seen that homelessness prevention work was most successful where:

- o There was a relationship breakdown or the person had been asked to leave.
- o Where proceedings to end a tenancy had been instigated.
- o Where there were affordability issues.

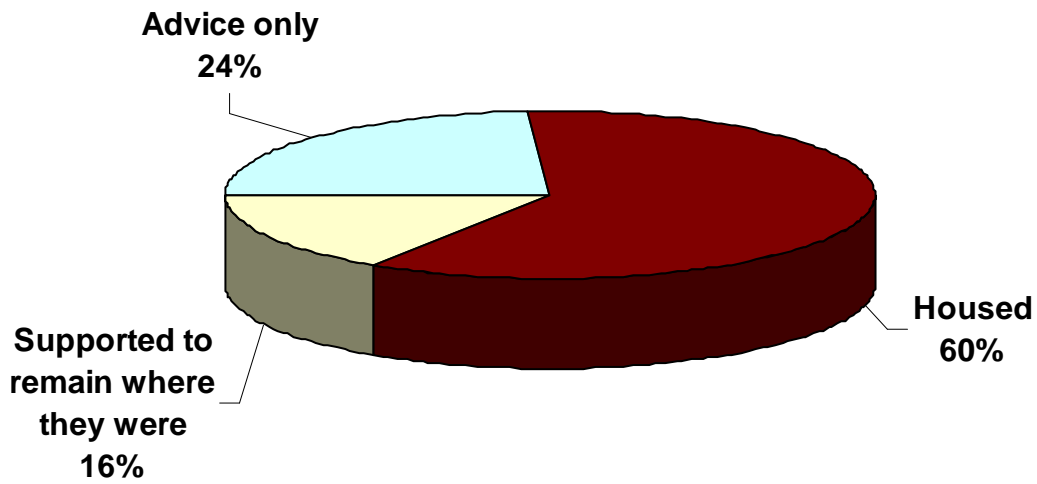
The team have a specific focus on affordability, with a member of the Housing Benefit staff co-located within the team to fast-track advice and claims, and a member of staff who specifically deals with advising and supporting people to maximise their income.

In addition team members spend a great deal of their time negotiating with individuals where there has been a relationship breakdown – though all team members identified a need for specialised and targeted mediation services to be available during focus group discussion – and felt that more homelessness could be prevented if this was the case.

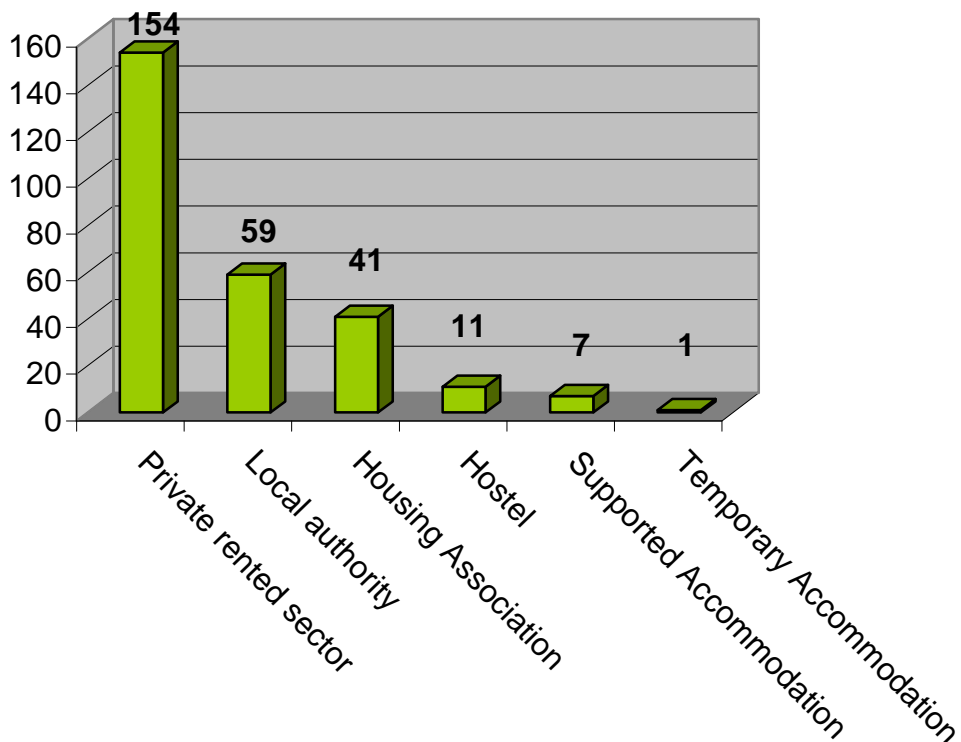
How homelessness was prevented by the Housing Advice Team:

Despite these successes, the majority of those who approached housing advice were prevented from becoming homeless by being supported to obtain housing as the chart below illustrates:

How homelessness was successfully prevented 06/07

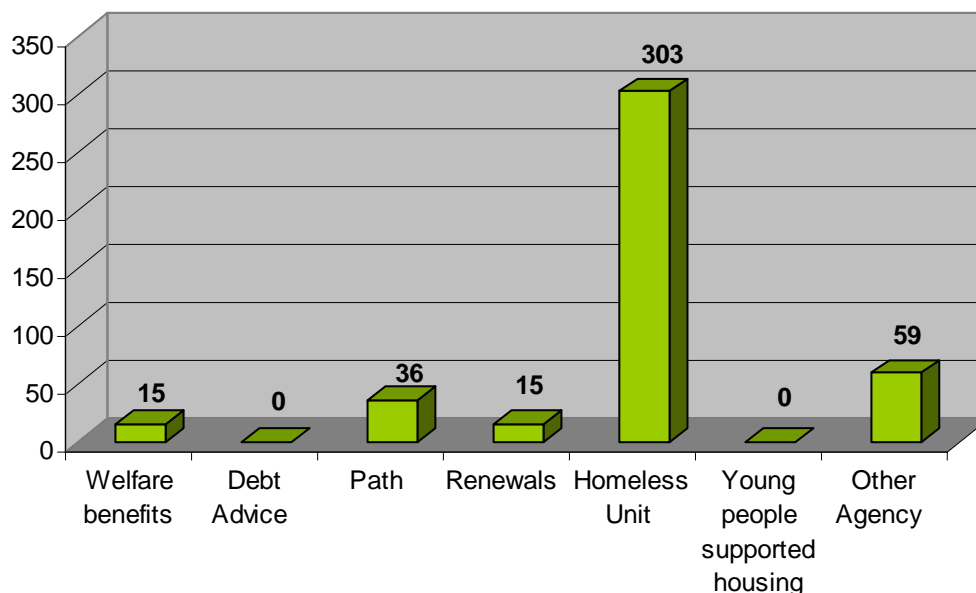


Many of these were housed in the Private Rented Sector as the following chart illustrates:



Issues were predominantly dealt with by Housing Advice staff, but where referrals on were made, these were predominantly to the Local Authority Homelessness Team for formal assessment where homelessness prevention work was either inappropriate, or was refused.

The chart below illustrates where the majority of referrals were made to:



Strangely, while a total of 771 young people required housing advice in the same time period, there were no referrals to young person's supported housing during the course of the year for young people aged 18 or over. Consultation with Housing Advice staff and management revealed that referrals to Supporting People accommodation projects are not routinely made because previous experience of referring to these services has indicated that they are overwhelmingly over-subscribed, and none of the team members could remember having successfully referred a placement. Younger persons aged 16/17 years are referred to the Younger Persons Housing Advisor within the Homelessness Team, who does refer to Supported Housing projects as part of her role, but is able to manage the wait for more specialised accommodation by using Clearsprings temporary accommodation, or through negotiating a limited return to the parental home.

Referrals to PATH relate to the rent deposit scheme co-ordinated by Plymouth Access To Housing, for whom Housing Advice is the main referrer.

Plymouth Gateway – specialist housing advice for offenders being discharged from prison/under current probation order:

Information provided by the Gateway:

Data provided between: Start of service (September 2006) until 1st October 2007.

Total referrals into the Gateway during time period: 460 (approximately 33 per month). Overwhelmingly (75%) the service was provided directly to Probation Officers, for whom the need for specialist housing advice resulted in a referral to the Gateway. Only 25% of all referrals came from Prisons to support prisoners at point of release.

Gender of service users: Service users are predominantly male (90%) n = 414 to only 10% female (n=46).

Age breakdown of service users:

AGE BAND	NUMBER	%
Under 18	0	0
18-20	50	11%
21-24	90	20%
25-55	305	66%
56-64	12	2%
65 and above	3	1%

Offenders using the service are predominantly aged over 25 and under 55 – though a significant number of younger people between the age of 18-20 are dealt with, and a small percentage of those dealt with would be considered ‘older’ people aged over 55.

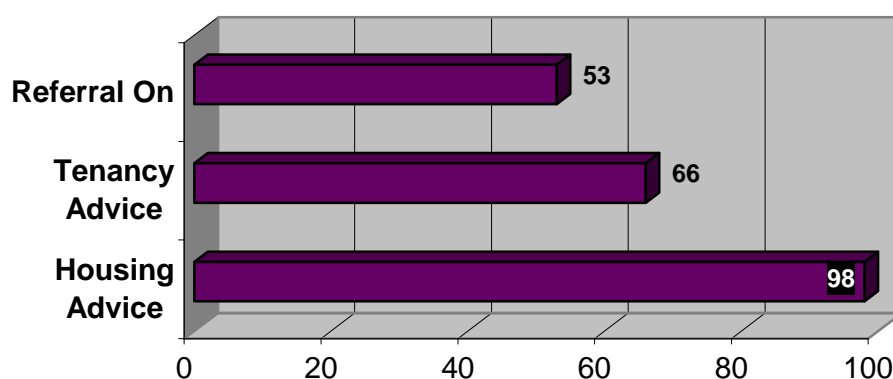
One third of all those who approached the Gateway were in need of accommodation at point of contact: 150 (32%) of service users needed accommodation at the time they contacted the Gateway – and 112 of these (75%) were housed. This means that it was not possible to help about 25% of these to access accommodation, in the main because they did not attend for their appointment, had breached licenses and were recalled to prison, or otherwise did not engage with the service.

Where service users were willing to engage, only 5 of these were not accommodated when in need – and in 2 cases this was because there was no appropriate and available accommodation to refer into at the point of need.

Plymouth Access To Housing (PATH):

People contact PATH for a number of reasons – many will be offered services such as rent deposit/bond schemes, tenancy support, or rough sleepers advice, but some simply want advice and guidance.

Between September 2005 and March 2006, 279 people approached PATH for advice – with 154 of these being members of the public (the others were from fellow professionals). Most approached for advice, as the chart below illustrates:



Where referrals were made to other agencies, these were predominantly to the Local Authority's Housing Advice team or to other services offered within PATH.

Issues arising from analysis of initial housing advice in the city:

- **Insufficient information provided about housing advice/housing options.**
- **The need to offer 'surgeries' in local agencies such as hostels to meet needs of service users who may not otherwise be able to access.**
- **The need for a specialist mediation service to be targeted to prevent homelessness where there has been a relationship breakdown/parental eviction – the dominant reason why people approach services in housing difficulty.**
- **Improved ethnicity monitoring both at front desk and within housing advice teams.**
- **Review services for young people (see other section).**
- **Review use of Younger Persons Housing Officer – currently all 16/17 year olds are directed to her and this is a seemingly overwhelming workload.**
- **Review pathways and referral routes to enable older people to access appropriate housing options including sheltered.**
- **Gateway issues?**

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION OPTIONS

Plymouth has a number of 'tools' that can be used in preventing homelessness – and these have contributed to the 31% of all approaches made to Local Authority Housing Advice, where homelessness has been prevented. The homelessness prevention 'tools' utilised in Plymouth are as follows:

HOUSING OPTIONS INTERVIEW: Housing Advice staff carry out a standard assessment that explores housing issues and prevention opportunities. Work is currently being undertaken to increase the quality of housing options and preventative work within the newly restructured team which has a renewed emphasis on prevention work. Fast-tracking to Homelessness assessment is available however, in order that necessary enquiries are not prevented or delayed where there is reason to believe a person is homeless.

HOME VISITS FOR ASSESSMENT: The service emphasises the importance of carrying out home visits with a homelessness prevention focus particularly focussing on young people who have had a relationship breakdown with their parents. Response times vary, but the service aims to provide a rapid home visit to negotiate with parents and make links with services that will support a young person to remain at home where this is appropriate.

RENT DEPOSIT/RENT DEPOSIT BOND:

In Plymouth, two rent deposit schemes are operated by Plymouth Access To Housing on Plymouth City Council's behalf:

(a) PATH Bond Scheme (for single people and couples).

489 people were referred to PATH and following assessment 67 (approximately 14%) were provided with a bond, while a further 19 people were supported to access alternative finances to access accommodation.

(Source: PATH Annual Report 2007).

Why is actual uptake so low in relation to the number of referrals?

The bond scheme has been reorganised to respond to the Government's National Tenancy Deposit Legislation in April 2007.

(b) Homefinder (rent deposit, rent in advance and support for families).

152 referrals were received, from which 127 (83%) were housed. 71 of these received rent deposit only, while 56 had both rent deposit and rent in advance supplied.

(Source: PATH data base supplied information 2007).

FLOATING SUPPORT (SUPPORTING PEOPLE HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES):

Floating support can be accessed where people are experiencing housing difficulty and are at risk of losing their home. The following table identifies schemes which offer floating support:

NB It should be noted that floating support is not simply used as a homelessness prevention option, but is also used to support people to move towards greater independence and to move on from supported accommodation.

Details of operation during 06/07	SERVICE								
	Carewatch Generic floating	Westcountry Generic floating	Westcountry Homeless Families	PATH CAST	PATH DTO	PATH PAAS	START/ PATH RHSS	Salvation Army	Clearsprings
Client Group Focus	Generic	Generic	Homeless Families	Single Homeless	Offenders	Offenders	Refugees	Single Homeless	Single Homeless
Referral Restrictions?	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Capacity	85	12	18	60	15	36	35	13	45
Average Utilisation	97%	91%	96%	98%	101	100	84	95	Attached to temp. accom. Therefore no details available.
Average Throughput	182%	110%	110%	137%	137%	370%	369%	131%	
Average no. SU's supported at any one time	111	11	11	57.5	14	23.5	26	9	
Average % SU's supported to establish/maintain independent living	99%	94%	94%	97%	97%	84%	99%	100%	

NB Areas highlighted in pink are the subject of the Supporting People Service Re-procurement exercise taking place over the next 2 years. Through needs assessment, consultation and business planning these services will be remodelled to take into account any changing needs and will be part of a tender exercise that will ensure a better fit to the needs of both service users and partnership organisations.

The following features of the availability of floating support as a homelessness prevention tool can be noted:

- Many of the services are over-subscribed, with very little spare capacity should additional homelessness prevention be required.

- Referral restrictions apply to much of the floating support (i.e. it is only accessible through specific agencies, or for people with specific needs) – with only Westcountry generic floating and PATH CAST more broadly open for referrals – with both services operating at approaching 100% utilisation.
- PATH CAST is the largest service offered to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the vast majority of their referrals come from the Local Authority Housing Department, as demonstrated in the table below, which samples referrals taken between 2005/06:

REFERRAL SOURCE	CAST	%
Nominated by LHA	8	10.81
LA Housing Department Referral	20	27.03
Social Services	3	4.05
Probation service/prison	2	2.70
Community Mental Health Team	10	13.51
Voluntary Agency	10	13.51
Self referral/Direct application	1	1.35
Nominated under Move UK		
Client applied for internal transfer	11	14.86
Moving from another RSL	1	1.35
Health Service/GP		
Youth Offending Team	2	2.70
Police		
Other	6	8.11
TOTAL	74	

Other floating support services with a greater client group focus can also be accessed, as depicted in the table below. Many of these services also offer homelessness prevention support.

Client Group Focus	Service	Total Units Available	Utilisation (based on last quarter)
Learning Disability	Bay Training	5	100%
	Dove Project	34	117.6%
	Durnford Society	1	100%
	Lifeways	18	100%
	Michael Batt	14	107.1%
	PIL	20	104.2%
	Colebrook	16	90.5%
	Mencap	3	94.9%
Mental Health	Colebrook	43	98.5%
	Devon and Cornwall	32	90.1%
	MIND Stepping Out	30	120%
Older People	Caretime	37	97.2%
	Caring 1 st Outreach	20	95%
	NVVS Visiting	7	No info.
	D & C Hospital Discharge	200	No info.
	Age Concern Advocacy	18	92.2%
	Plymouth Befriending	65	No info.
HIV/AIDS	Eddystone	8	100%+

Again, many of these services are over-subscribed, and many can only be accessed by supported accommodation managed by the same provider but some can be approached where service users with specific needs approach Housing Advice services with a housing need, and information about this can be accessed through the Supporting People Service Directory using the following link:

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/housing/supportingpeople/supportingpeopledirectory.htm>

HOUSING ADVICE OUTREACH POSTS: Two posts will be dedicated to outreach homelessness prevention work in the very near future. However, for the purposes of this

review, this service is not currently available. Given the full utilisation of floating support services, these posts will be vital in preventing homelessness.

SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE: As one of the top causes of homelessness in Plymouth, the City's Housing, Supporting People and Homelessness services were closely involved in the review of domestic abuse services and development of the multi disciplinary Domestic Abuse Strategy which highlights homelessness prevention as a key priority.

Traditionally, support services for households experiencing domestic violence have focussed on the provision of temporary accommodation that can be accessed when victims have to leave their homes in a crisis or emergency – including Plymouth Refuge. However, the new approach to domestic abuse has enabled more effective jointly commissioned services to be targeted at providing a range of options with regard to homelessness prevention in addition to providing emergency accommodation including:

- The 'Sanctuary Scheme' which offers safety and security provision for victims who choose to remain in their own homes after the perpetrator has been removed, and to Woman's Aid for specialist housing related support.
- Advice provision through Women's Aid that enables victims to leave their homes in a safe and planned way.
- The implementation of terms within Local Authority tenancy agreements to enable legal measures to evict perpetrators from Council properties to be taken.

NB For a full review of homelessness prevention work in relation to domestic abuse survivors please refer to the Plymouth Multi-Agency Strategy For Tackling Domestic Abuse, which was developed alongside and forms an integral part of this Homeless Review and development of Strategy.

The domestic abuse strategy can be accessed by following the link below:

http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/domestic_abuse_strategy.pdf

AFFORDABILITY/WELFARE RIGHTS ADVICE: A housing benefit 'fast track' worker is co-located between the housing service and the housing benefit department, and in addition a specialist benefit worker is attached to the housing advice team. Their role is to ensure that income is effectively maximised and that appeals regarding to housing arrears which could otherwise result in homelessness are effectively presented towards a solution that aims to keep people at home wherever possible.

What CLG says:

"Determining the homelessness prevention priorities appropriate for a particular local authority is a central function of the homelessness strategy".

(Source: Homelessness Prevention, A Guide To Good Practice. Department of Communities and Local Government Guidance).

ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED WITH REGARD TO HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVES:

- **Need for fully integrated working within Plymouth's Multi-disciplinary Domestic Abuse Strategy with regard to homelessness prevention initiatives.**
- **Need for specific and targeted mediation with a particular focus on young people involved in disputes with their parents.**
- **Need to ensure that housing advice outreach workers become operational as soon as possible.**
- **Need to ensure full awareness with routes to access Supporting People accommodation and floating support.**
- **The current focus on income maximisation needs to be maintained, with the effective operation of the Housing Benefit and Welfare Rights worker continuing.**

WHERE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FAILS – HOMELESSNESS APPROACHES:

The main causes of homelessness in Plymouth:

P1E statistics require authorities to identify the reasons for the loss of last settled accommodation, and these are detailed in the table below for the last 3 years.

Reason for homelessness	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Parents no longer willing/able to accommodate	170	164	94
Other relatives/friends not willing to accommodate	69	65	41
Non-violent relationship breakdown	39	42	30
Domestic violence	83	86	36
Harassment	7	5	8
Mortgage arrears/repossession etc.	4	6	6
Rent arrears – local authority/other public sector	1	2	0
Rent arrears – RSL/HA	1	0	1
Rent arrears – private sector	8	6	6
Termination of assured short-hold tenancy	125	119	85
Required to leave NASS accommodation	12	5	3
In institution/care (incl. prison/hospital/LA care)	35	17	4
Other	82	52	33

P1E statistics have highlighted that the main causes of homelessness have consistently been:

- 1. Relationship breakdown/parents, friends, other relatives evict.**
- 2. Loss of assured short-hold tenancy.**
- 3. Domestic violence**

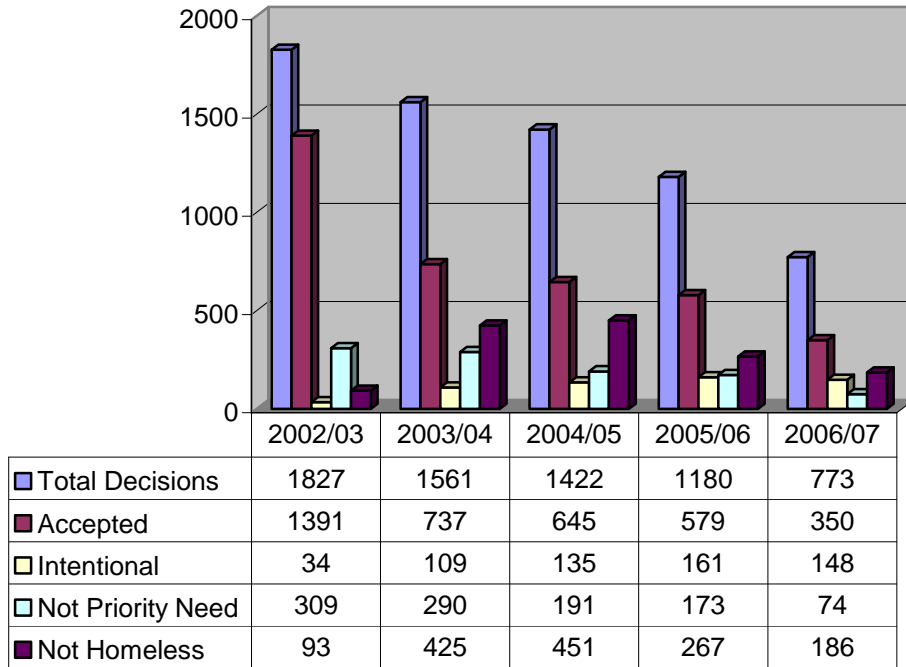
NB Combined totals are given for parents and others unwilling to continue to accommodate and relationship breakdown, which in Plymouth are often used to record similar sets of circumstances.

Though these remain the main causes of homelessness, numbers have steadily fallen over the last three years. It should be noted that numbers presenting to Housing Advice with these issues remain high – with more effective homelessness prevention resulting in less homeless approaches being made.

Rates of homelessness approaches have fallen:

Homelessness approaches and acceptances are formally monitored within P1E statistics, and these are presented in the chart below:

Homelessness approaches and acceptances between April 2002 - March 2007



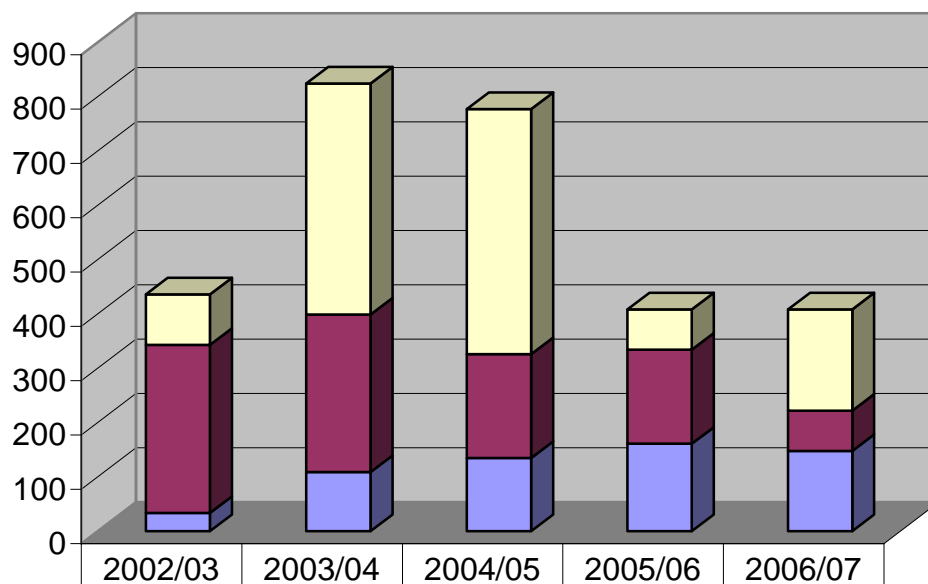
The following features of the above data can be noted:

- Total approaches have steadily fallen since 2002, and are over 42% less now than they were then. Focus group discussion with Homelessness Assessment staff has highlighted that this is wholly due to the increased focus and staff resource directed at homelessness prevention work within Plymouth City Council.
- Acceptances have also fallen, but after an initial dramatic fall between 2002/03 and 2003/04, have remained fairly steady as a proportion of total decisions made.
- Even though homeless approaches have fallen – negative decisions based on a decision that the applicant was ‘intentionally homeless’ have risen gradually over the last 5 years.

The basis of negative decision-making:

Between April 2003 and March 2006, over half of all decisions made were negative and the graph below illustrates the basis for these negative decisions:

Basis on which negative decisions were reached between April 2002 - March 2007



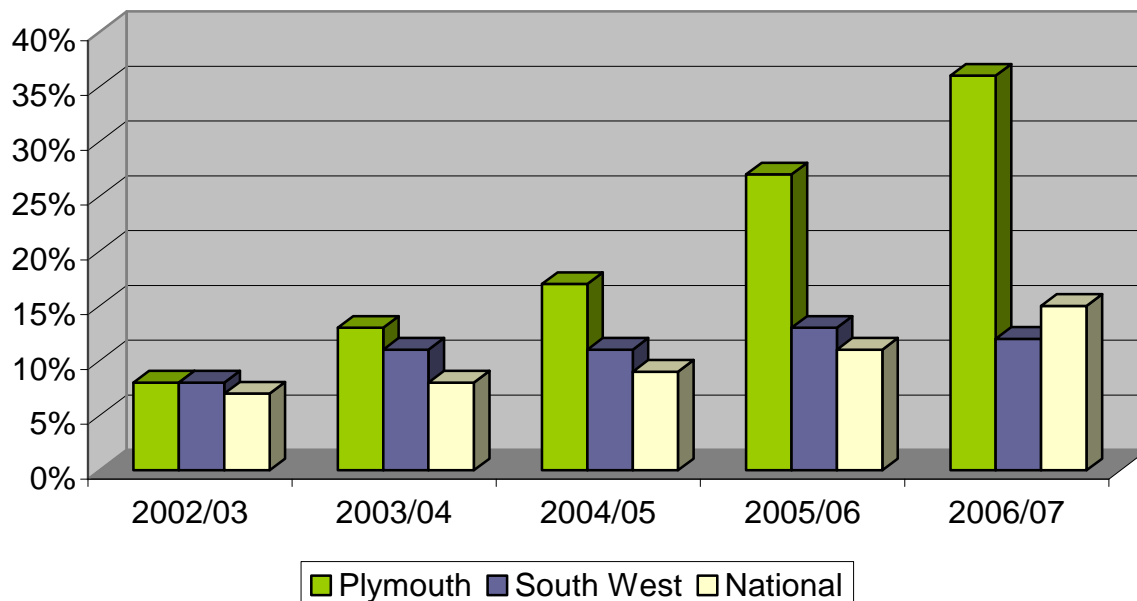
Not Homeless	93	425	451	74	186
Not in Priority Need	309	290	191	173	74
Intentionally Homeless	34	109	135	161	148

The following features of the above data can be noted:

- There has been no consistent trend in terms of numbers of negative decisions though they have remained stable over the last two years (therefore rising as a proportion of total decisions as these have steadily fallen).
- With the exception of 2005/06 approximately half of all negative decisions are consistently reached on the basis of the applicant being considered 'Not Homeless'. Discussion with the Homelessness Team highlighted the fact that this data should not be interpreted to mean that people were not homeless at the time of their application, but that many are able or are supported to find accommodation subsequent to their application, but before a decision is made – effectively using the application process as a form of 'safety net' in case they are unable to do so.
- The second highest proportion of negative decisions are reached because the applicant is considered 'Not in priority need' though the numbers have fallen over last year from an average of 43% to only 18% of total negative decisions.
- Negative decisions based on the applicant being considered 'intentionally homeless' have risen notably in Plymouth, with 36% of all negative decisions being reached on this basis last year in comparison with an average of 19% over the preceding 4 years.

Intentionally homelessness findings:

Negative decisions based on the applicant being 'intentionally homeless' are considerably higher – proportionally – in Plymouth, than in the South West region or nationally. The graph below illustrates that negative decisions based on intentionality have risen steeply in Plymouth, as opposed to relative stability/modest increases regionally and nationally, and over the last year constituted a third of all negative decisions in Plymouth.



Benchmarking with Southampton, a comparative authority of similar size with similar urban issues, 16% - revealed that unlike Plymouth, their proportions of negative decisions based on intentionality were only marginally higher than the national average.

Discussions with the Homelessness Team identified that high levels of intentionally homeless decisions result from the ‘culture of challenge’ that exists within Plymouth at the present time. Agencies within Plymouth often advocate very strongly on behalf of their clients and encourage them to insist on making a formal paper based homelessness approach – even when circumstances that could lead to a negative decision based on intentionality are clearly apparent and where preventative work would ultimately be in the best interests of the person.

Work is ongoing within Plymouth to develop a partnership approach to homelessness prevention and to raise awareness of where the homelessness duty applies so that preventative options can be fully and appropriately explored.

Assessment of homelessness circumstances and decision-making:

Focussed discussion with Homelessness Team staff identified the following issues that have contributed to the effective operation of the current homelessness team:

- Improvements to the quality of the homelessness investigation have enabled each applicant’s circumstances to be fully explored and a well-evidenced decision being taken.
- A new management approach to homelessness, which has encouraged consistent and effective decision-making.
- The recently revised Housing Needs Assessment which enables a detailed enquiry of homelessness, retains a focus on homelessness prevention throughout the process, and in addition takes into account support needs so that appropriate support can be arranged to prevent repeat homelessness.
- The recent team restructuring which created a specialist Youth Homelessness Housing Officer post to offer considerable experience and skill on this key cause of homelessness.

ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED WITH REGARD TO FORMAL HOMELESSNESS APPROACHES:

- **There is no shared understanding of homelessness legislation between partnership agencies in the city, leading to inappropriate homelessness approaches where findings of intentionality are inevitable.**
- **Intentionally homeless decisions are higher than average in Plymouth, and within a need to develop partnerships, negative decision making to ensure consistency and appropriateness is required.**
- **The Youth Homelessness Housing Officer post is the focus of almost all of the work undertaken with 16/17 year olds – an exceptionally demanding role that experiences a high volume of work.**

FOCUS ON KEY AREAS OF CONCERN IN PLYMOUTH:

- 1. Youth Homelessness**
- 2. Homelessness and Older People**
- 3. High risk offenders**
- 4. Direct access hostel provision**
- 5. Health needs of homeless people**
- 6. Rough sleeping**
- 7. Move on.**
- 8. Diverse needs**
- 9. Contribution of housing associations to homelessness prevention.**

Focus on:

Youth Homelessness

(Homelessness through parental exclusion or relationship breakdown)



Summary of issues:

1. **Greater integrated working with partnership agencies is required, in particular the Younger Persons DAT; Children's Services and Mental Health Partnership.**
2. **Need for preventative awareness raising and educational capacity within schools regarding homelessness so that it doesn't become a 'desired' option for a young person to present to Homelessness teams when they leave home.**
3. **Need for mediation and family support services to enable effective homelessness prevention work with young people who leave home.**
4. **Need for direct access emergency accommodation for young people in crisis.**

Focus on:

HOMELESSNESS AND OLDER PEOPLE

Summary of issues:

1. Need to ensure that older people can access advice and information at an early stage before they get into crisis and risk homelessness.
2. Need to review the needs of long term substance abusing older adults who are unable to move on from hostel accommodation because of the lack of appropriate supported accommodation.
3. Need for integrated working within the City's Older Persons Strategy and Housing Strategy (in development) to ensure that appropriate housing options are available to meet needs of rising older persons population.
4. Need to review pathways into housing through PCC Allocations; sheltered housing allocations; and Disability Panel.
5. Need for more integrated working between organisations – particularly with regard to assessment of needs by both Social Services and Housing Services.
6. Review operation of Pathways flats – and ensure continuation.
7. There is poor specialised informational, support and substance abuse support is available to meet the needs of older people.

Focus On:

HIGH RISK OFFENDERS

Summary of issues:

This section will need significant further discussion with Gateway, PATH, Probation Services – a workshop/consultation is planned.

Focus on:

DIRECT ACCESS HOSTEL PROVISION

SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

1. Plymouth's direct access hostels (The Gates and The SHIP) are currently located in buildings which cannot be adapted to comply with Disability Discrimination Act legislation and therefore new premises must be found.
2. The buildings inhibit positive and proactive work with service users, a high proportion of whom are revolving door service users who are difficult to engage.
3. The re-structuring and subsequent recruitment of staff at The SHIP Hostel has, as far as is possible within current premises, enhanced proactive support working, and work continues to improve the quality of the service.
4. In order to respond to the 'Places of Change' Hostels for the Homelessness agenda, capital funding is required to resource the building of a new hostel.
5. A fully consulted review of direct access provision has been carried out and identified specific needs and concerns.
6. A major gap in services has been identified in relation to direct access hostel provision for 16/17 year olds – and this has been incorporated into the design of the new hostel.

Focus on:

HEALTH NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

1. There are significant barriers to accessing primary care and specialist substance abuse/mental health services for rough sleepers and those who are just making the transition to direct access hostels.
2. There is a significant degree of health concerns among homeless people which, if left untreated, will prevent an individual from positively engaging with services and progressing toward independence.

Focus on:

ROUGH SLEEPERS

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

1. There are significant barriers to rough sleepers accessing appropriate health care.
2. Numbers of rough sleepers in Plymouth continue to be variable – with high numbers on occasions.
3. Need for support to deal with mental health issues, and long-term substance abuse highlighted by service users and stakeholders.
4. Older rough sleepers with long-standing substance abuse issues which they are reluctant to change have difficulties in accessing settled accommodation.
5. Plymouth Rough Sleeper's Strategy is an integral part of this Homelessness Review.

Focus on:

MOVE ON

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

1. Move on issues have been identified around accessing settled housing – particularly in the private rented sector.
2. Support to enable people to move on to accommodation in the private rented sector is not currently in place and would need specific development.
3. Procedures around payment of local rent allowance directly to landlords where vulnerability to non-payment of rent is identified need to be developed.
4. Information to enable realistic choices to be made about housing options is not available.
5. Outcomes in relation to homelessness prevention with regard to using the 'Pathways' flat need to be monitored to assess whether this initiative should be expanded.

Focus on:

DIVERSITY

SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

1. Disability access needs specific attention in the design and building of the new homeless hostel.
2. Design needs to take into account specific risks within the building on account of age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality where a risk assessment highlights that this might be an issue.
3. There is insufficient monitoring of faith, sexuality, gender and disability impacts with regard to homelessness.
4. Gypsies and travellers do not approach the housing department for support, despite the Housing Needs Assessments highlighting that there are specific issues around gypsies and travellers having insufficient sites in and around the city.

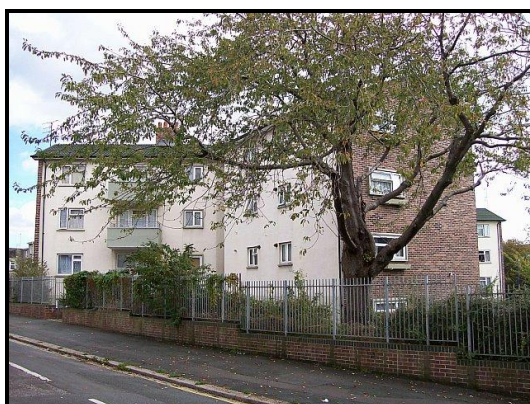
FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS IN PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

Work is currently ongoing within Plymouth Housing Group to identify and incorporate Housing Associations work to support Local Authorities to prevent homelessness (undertaken as a result of the Housing Corporation's Tackling Homelessness strategy).

A survey is underway, and specific workshops and action planning sessions are planned that will contribute both to this review, and to subsequent planning within the new Homelessness Strategy.

ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION



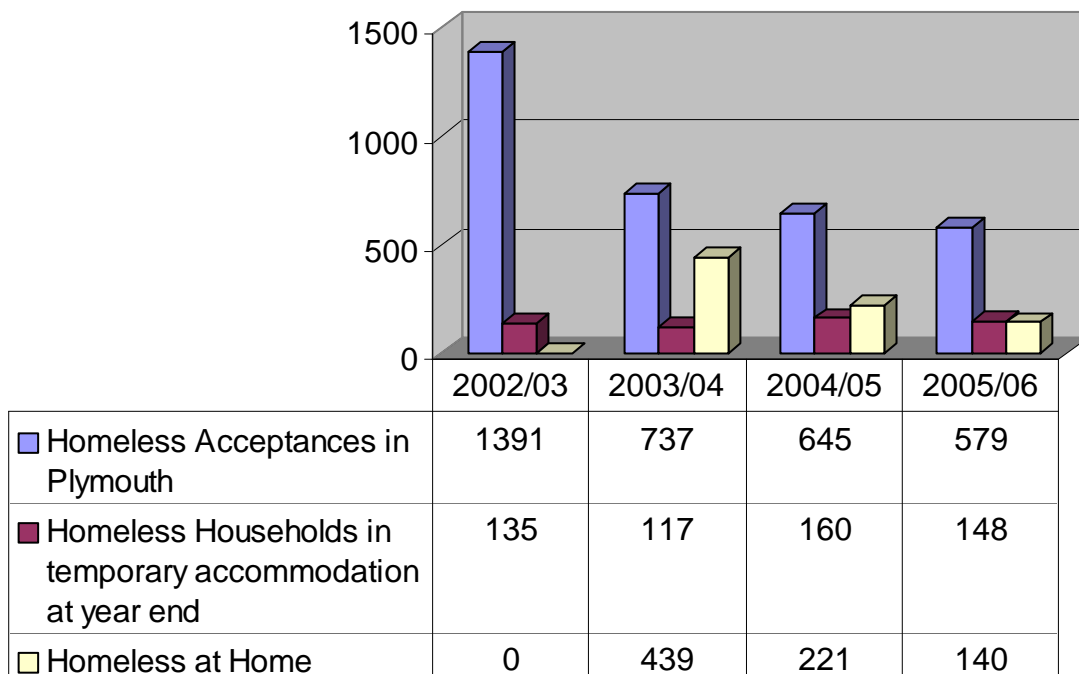
USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Plymouth City Council has been working to an action plan to meet the Government's 2010 temporary accommodation target by 2010 (with a baseline assessment from the end of December 2004, containing numerical targets for how temporary accommodation will be reduced as the result of each prevention activity).

The City's action plan forms an integral part of this Homelessness Review and targets actions against:

- Homelessness prevention and housing options improvements.
- Maximising use of existing social housing supply.
- Creating clear pathways and protocols in relation to use and move on from B & B; hostels; and private sector leasing properties.
- Increasing use of Assured Shorthold Tenancies to bring to an end the homelessness duty.
- Use of 'Homeless at Home' towards a planned departure that does require use of temporary accommodation wherever appropriate.

Numerical targets are being reviewed in order to sustain reductions in use of temporary accommodation as illustrated in the chart below.



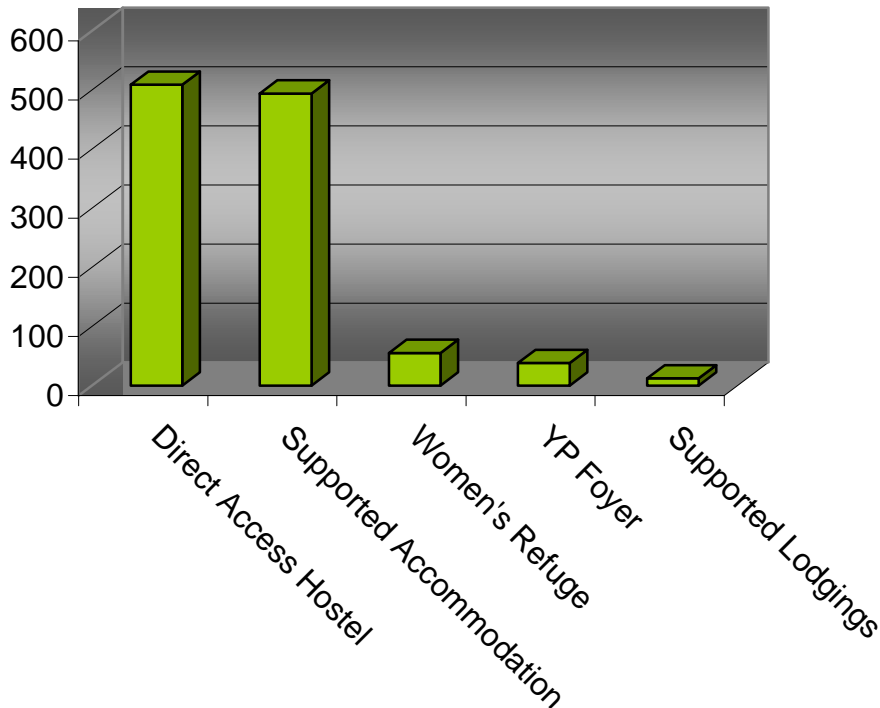
The chart shows that though temporary accommodation has reduced since 2002/03, when looked at as a proportion of acceptances, the picture is less satisfactory – with under 10% of those accepted as statutory homeless placed in temporary accommodation in 2002/03, and 26% of all acceptances placed in temporary accommodation in 2005/06 – with this proportion having remained stable for a couple of years.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

To review and renew Temporary Accommodation Action Plan to better reach reduction targets.

USE OF SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

1108 of the 1917 (58%) of the people who entered Supporting People funded services during the year April 2006 to March 2007, received accommodation based services (supported housing; supported lodgings; refuge; foyer; teenage parent accommodation; and direct access hostels for the homeless). As the chart below shows, the forms of accommodation dominantly used were supported accommodation, and direct access hostels for the homeless.



Use of these forms of accommodation constituted 91% of all accommodation use – with 46% of all service users using direct access hostels.

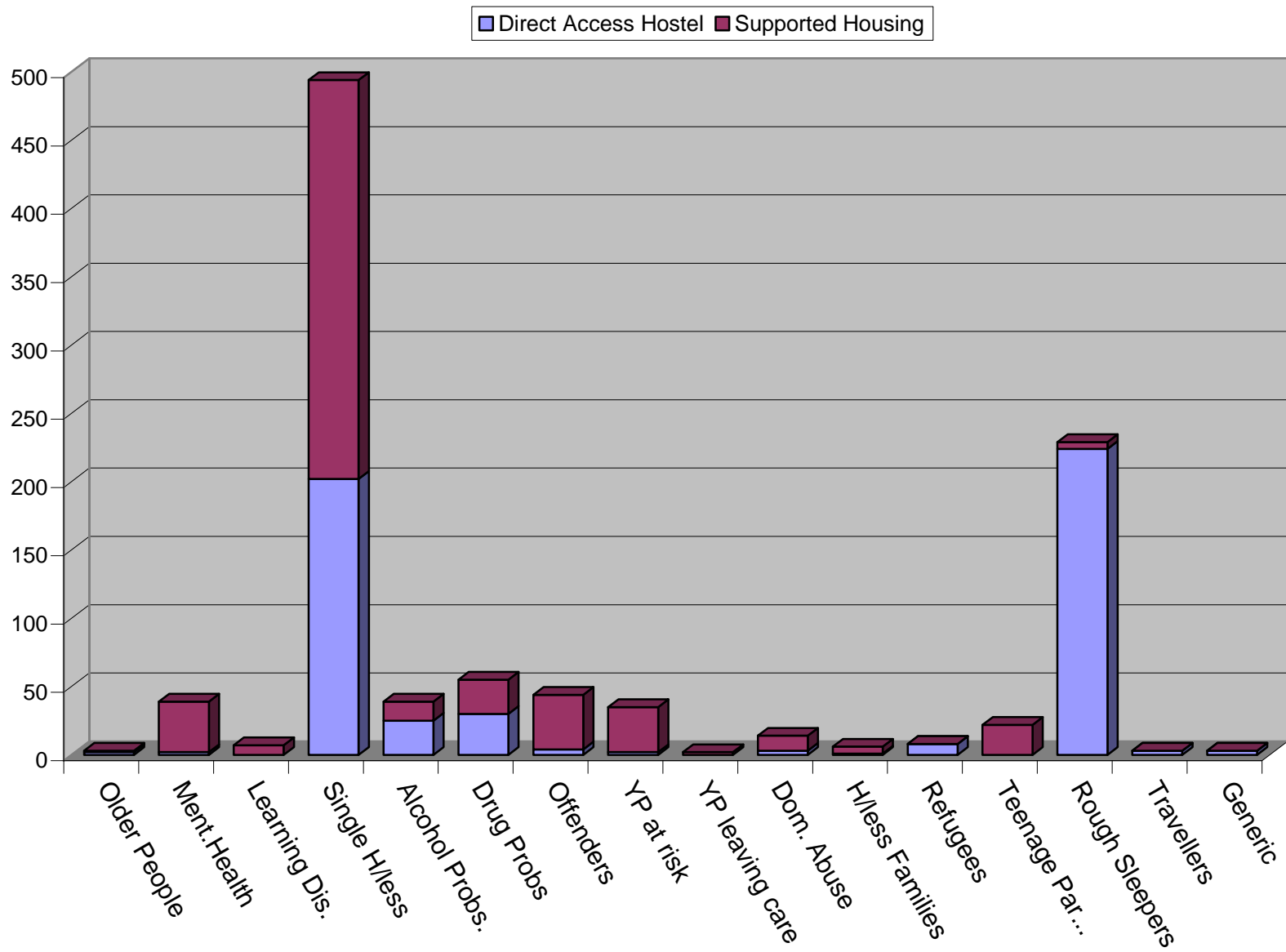
Uptake of supported accommodation and direct access hostels across different client groups:

As the chart on the following page dramatically illustrates, the majority of those using supported accommodation and direct access hostels were either single homeless with support needs, or rough sleepers. However, there was also a significant level of uptake for direct access hostel provision by those suffering from either alcohol or drug addiction – reinforcing local consultation that indicated the need for specialist resources in relation to assessment and treatment for those in recovery from substance abuse issues needs to be provided within direct access hostels.

Our service users told us:

“People admitted to shelters etc. who have drink or drugs problems should be evicted if they use these things while staying at shelter. I have seen drunks and druggies coming into shelters openly which is abusing the system for ‘genuine’ ones”.

Reuben, resident at The SHIP



Uptake of Supported accommodation of all kinds across client groups:

The below table shows access to accommodation across client groups, and the following additional points can be noted:

- Young people at risk are more likely to go into supported housing or the Foyer in Plymouth. This is because the direct access hostels in Plymouth are not considered suitable for young people currently. This will be addressed with the plans for hostel re-provisioning as this means that there is no direct access accommodation available to 16/17 year olds in an emergency (see earlier sections).
- Specialist accommodation provision is made for teenage parents, who therefore do not access other forms of accommodation.
- The majority of female victims of domestic abuse who need accommodation are accommodated at the Women's Refuge – though some are accommodated in other resources where there is no capacity within the refuge, or where the refuge is not appropriate (i.e. where the family has a male child over the age of 13 or where the family is larger). Dispersed units offering independent supported accommodation is the preferred option here – though some overflow is picked up by hostels for the homeless.
- Where travellers are accommodated, this tends to be in hostels. There is no uptake of floating support for travellers.

Client Group	Supported Housing	Supported Lodgings	Refuge	Foyer	Teen Parent	Direct Access Hostel
OP with Support Needs	1	0	0	0	0	2
OP Mental Health Needs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mental Health Probs.	37	0	0	0	0	2
Learning Dis.	7	0	0	0	0	0
Single Homeless	292	0	0	7	0	202
Alcohol Problems	14	0	0	0	0	25
Drug Probs	25	0	0	0	0	30
Offenders	40	0	0	0	0	3
Mentally Dis. Offenders	0	0	0	0	0	1
YP at risk	33	0	0	28	0	2
YP leaving care	2	12	0	2	0	0
Domestic Abuse	11	0	55	1	0	3
Homeless Families	5	0	0	0	0	1
Refugees	0	0	0	0	0	8
Teenage Parents	22	0	0	0	0	0
Rough Sleepers	5	0	0	0	0	224
Travellers	0	0	0	0	0	3
Generic	0	0	0	0	0	3

Analysis of the data also shows that Women experiencing domestic abuse (n = 297); Refugees (n = 87); and homeless families (n = 37) are more likely to access floating support than accommodation based support.

Access to hostels for single homelessness follows a ‘stages towards independence’ model:

Our service users said:

Case study: Bob, aged 63 years, Sheltered Housing resident, November 2006.

In 2004 Bob had a mental breakdown and as a result lost his job, his savings and his home:

“It crept up on me and I locked myself away. I’ve got no family and many of my close friends suddenly died at this time. I didn’t want to see anyone. I wouldn’t answer the door or the phone. I became a recluse and I did consider suicide”.

Originally from Hampshire Bob found himself sleeping rough for 2 months in Plymouth until he saw an information plaque about services for people who are homeless on the wall at Bretonside Bus Station:

“If the plaque weren’t there, I wouldn’t have a clue. I didn’t talk to anyone at this time so I didn’t know where to go to get help”.

Still feeling confused and ill, he presented himself at the door of the Salvation Army Hostel and following an interview was offered a place:

“I got a roof over my head and regular meals. I got a key worker and a programme to follow. They got me a doctor and a counsellor. I had a good social network around me again in case I get ill”.

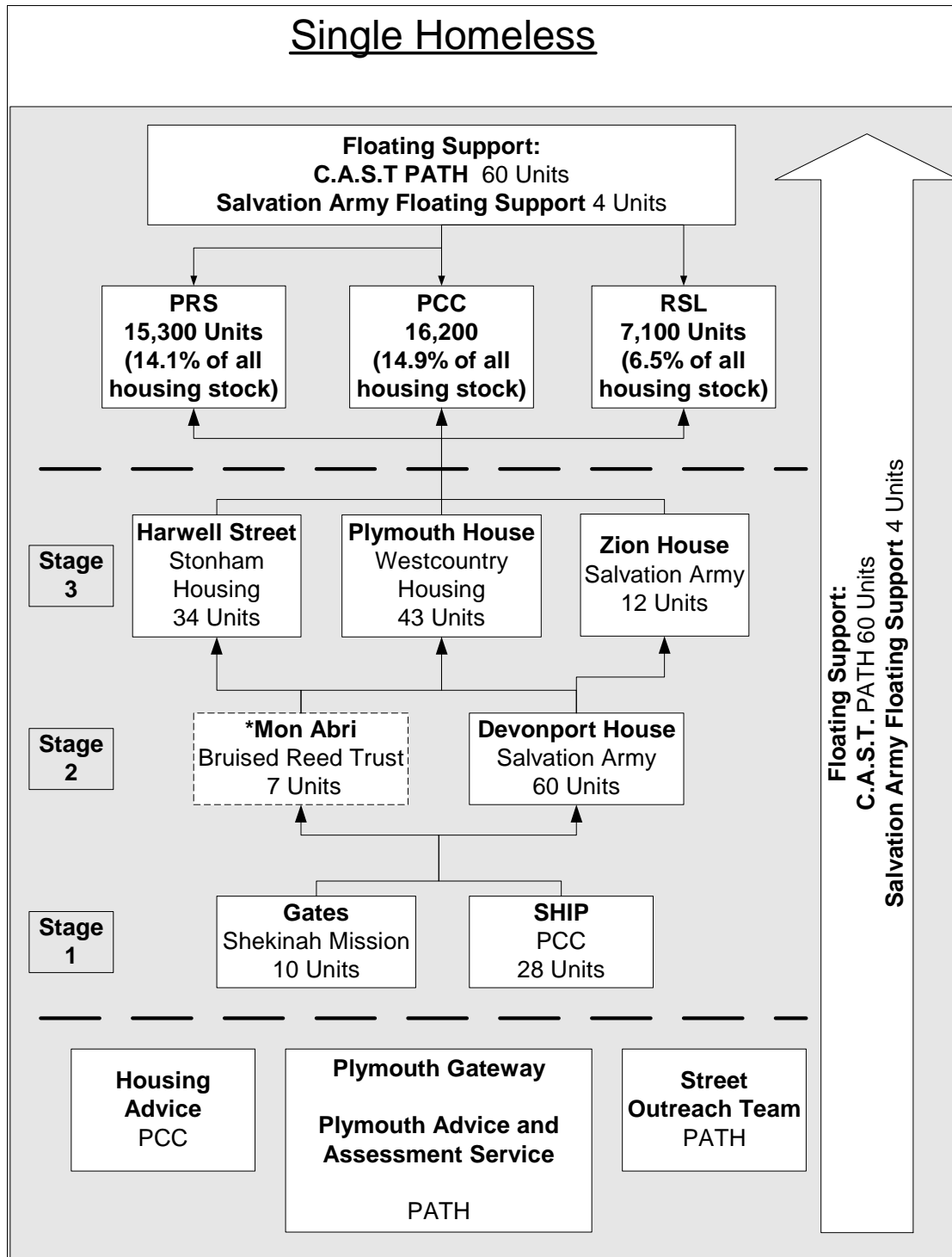
Bob stressed the importance of engaging with the help on offer and also the benefits of a strong supportive social network. From his experience at the hostel he feels that repeat homelessness is due to non-engagement with the support that’s on offer.

The staged model (together with indicative number of units available) is being reviewed within the single homelessness re-procurement exercise of Supporting People, but the current version is illustrated below:

Our service users told us:

“I am resident at The Ship for six weeks maximum. What happens if I get a job or time runs out. Where can I live?”

Jim, resident at The Ship Hostel



The utilisation and throughput in relation to accessing hostel accommodation formed an integral part of the analysis and consultation with regard to the hostel re-provisioning exercise, and further details can be viewed in previous section of this review.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO DIFFICULTIES IN ACCESSING HOUSING MARKET

Income levels:

Income is a core factor in the assessment of the scale of housing need and in determining affordability in the local housing market.

67.2% of Plymouth's households earn below the national average household income of £27,500 – with the lowest entry level price to buy a property requiring a purchase income of £29,857.

Analysis of annual income by tenure is as follows:

Annual Income	Owner Occupier with Mortgage	Owner occupier with no mortgage	Private Rented	Council Rented	Housing Association Rented
Below £10,000	6.3	26.3	53.5	62.7	52.9
£10,000 - £20,000	24.0	41.8	21.1	26.3	28.3
£20,001 - £27,500	17.8	10.9	8.2	5.9	4.6
£27,501 - £35,000	18.2	7.7	7.1	2.4	14.2
£35,001 - £45,000	17.7	6.8	4.1	1.4	0
Over £45,001	16	6.5	6	1.3	0

- o The profiles were largely as would be expected as between owner-occupiers and renters, especially bearing in mind that a significant proportion of owner-occupiers without a mortgage would be people with limited pension income.
- o Council rented sector incomes were concentrated (94.9%), below the national average of £27,500 with 62.7% having household incomes below £10,000 per annum.
- o Private rented sector incomes were slightly higher than Council rented sector incomes, with 53.5% having incomes below £10,000.
- o The average gross income of owners without a mortgage was found to be £21,944 compared to £36,712 for those with a mortgage.
- o Lowest incomes were found among local authority tenants (£12,168) and housing association tenants (£13,468).
- o 54.8% of households with incomes in the lowest income group (up to £5,564 per year) were social housing tenants; 24.4% were outright owners.

Low incomes also mean that people are reliant on means tested benefits to meet rent and Council Tax commitments. 45% of the households received Council Tax benefit and 40.5% of households responding were in receipt of housing benefit.

(Source: Plymouth City Council Housing Market Needs Assessment, 2006).

Affordability of housing:

Outside London, access to home ownership is particularly problematic throughout the South West, where average house price to gross earned income ratios average 4.84 to 1. The South West is also the region with the highest proportion (34%) of younger working households in the Intermediate Housing Market (i.e. able to pay more than a social sector rent, but still unable to buy even at the low end of the local housing market).

(Source: 'Can't Buy: Can Rent – The affordability of private housing in Great Britain' Hometrack, Winter 2007.)

Some indication of the affordability of housing in Plymouth, either through buying or renting, can be demonstrated as follows:

Please note: affordability assessments are normally carried out on an individual basis, taking into account current income, savings, expenditure and loans or debts. The following illustration offers a guide only.

	£41,067	Household income required to buy at Plymouth's average house price of £151,301 ♣
Household income required to buy an averagely priced terraced house in Plymouth at £141,772 ♣	£38,481	
	£32,642	Household income required to buy an averagely priced flat/maisonette in Plymouth at £120,264. ♣
National Average Household Income. 67% of Plymouth's existing households' income below this.	£27,500	
	£20,000	89% of all Council tenants have a household income below this level.
Household income required to rent an averagely priced 2 bedrooomed terraced house in Plymouth at £551 per month.	£19,836	
	£17,000	Average income of working households in Plymouth.
Household income required to rent an averagely priced 1 bedrooomed flat in Plymouth at £443 monthly. ♠	£15,948	
	£15,000	Above this income can apply for a low cost home ownership scheme through 'Home2Buy'.
Household income required to rent the lowest entry level price of a 1 bedrooomed flat in Plymouth at £397 monthly. ♠	£14,293	
Median income of new RSL tenants in Plymouth	£8,424	

♣Assumes 5% deposit and mortgage agreed at 3.5 x annual household income.

♣ Assumes a rent to net income ratio of 33% - the maximum proportion of income spent on rent if it is to be affordable according to the National Housing Federation, without recourse to Housing Benefit (NB opinion varies on the proportion of income that should be allocated to rent for it to be affordable, with some saying that between 30-35% spent on rent would indicate there are likely to be affordability issues).

(Information included above is sourced from: Plymouth Housing Market Needs Assessment, 2006; CORE Lettings data to December 2004; Income Maximisation Strategy 2006; HM Revenue & Customs ; Home2Own website).

The affordability analysis highlights the following features:

- Those earning about or above the average income in Plymouth should have reasonable ability to secure private rented accommodation – or to apply for low cost home ownership through Home2Own.
- Council tenants have extremely low income, limiting their capacity to move on to home ownership, and increasing the likelihood of their being dependant on benefits and therefore caught in a 'benefit trap' that makes worklessness more attractive.
- Mean figures published for new RSL lets indicates that there is a broad range of incomes for new tenants that would distort an averaged figure.

Difficulties in accessing housing and the likely impact on homelessness:

Low incomes in Plymouth mean that fewer people can afford to own their own homes, or even entry level cost of private rented property – creating pressure on social lets:

Research previously highlighted has indicated that access to home ownership is particularly problematic throughout the South West, where average house price to gross earned income ratios average 4.84:1. However, the Housing Market and Needs Assessment commissioned in Plymouth in 2006 states that “high house prices are not the main problem, but rather lower income levels”.

(Source: Housing Market and Needs Assessment, 2006).

The majority of currently concealed households are unable to access the housing market by any other route than through the Common Housing Register or the Statutory

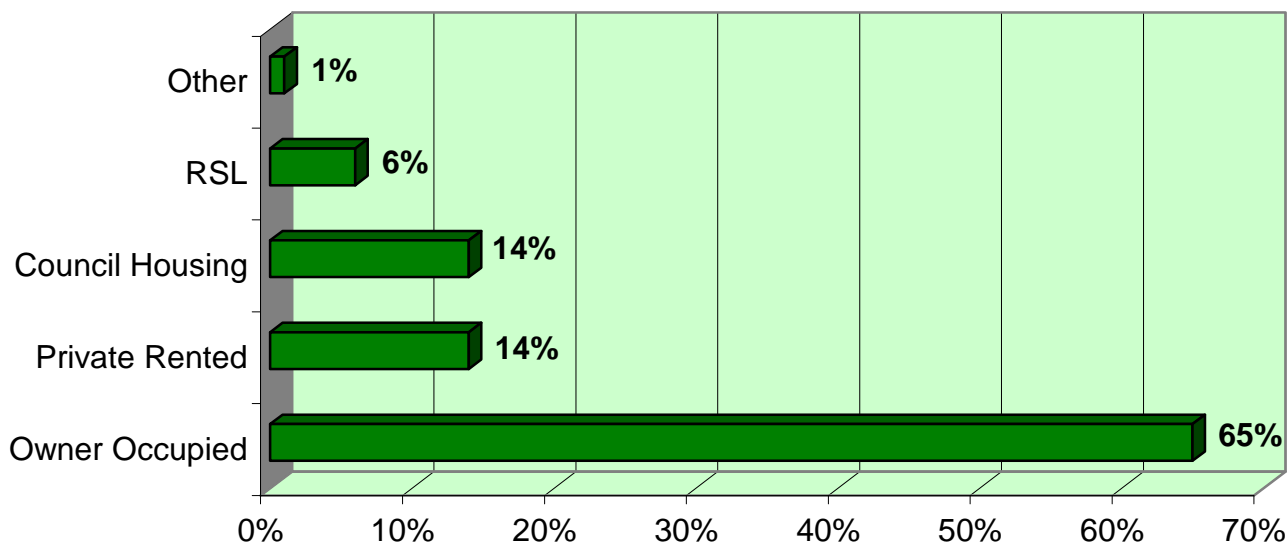
Homelessness route: There may be additional issues with concealed/new forming households, as the Housing Market Needs Analysis Survey of concealed households found that there were 6,719 concealed households in the city, 1738 of whom intended to move in the next year. Only 7.1% had incomes above £27,500, and 36.7% had income of less than £10,000.

Findings indicate that 76.6% of concealed households are priced out of the property ownership and private rented market altogether, meaning that the majority will make applications for Social Housing and **may explore ways of meeting the criteria for Statutory homelessness in order to gain access to housing.**

(Source: Housing Market and Needs Assessment, 2006).

Housing Stock in Plymouth:

Plymouth City Council allocations team data indicates that there are approximately 110,714 dwellings in the city – which can be broken down into the following categories of tenure:



- o The vast majority of stock in the city is owner occupied.
- o The private rented sector makes up 14% of total housing stock – higher than the national average.

Buy to let issues:

Strong buy-to-let market contributing to problems faced by 1st time buyers: The tax relief offered to buy-to-let owners is contributing to the problems faced by first-time buyers and their efforts to get onto the housing ladder. At the opening of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)'s Annual Conference and Exhibition, CIH President Paul Diggory has called on the Government to tackle the runaway buy-to-let market.

The CIH President argued that the phenomenal growth in buy-to-let investments is contributing to the affordable housing crisis by pricing first-time-buyers out of the market. Information from 2006 indicates that 11 per cent of all new lending in 2006 was in the buy-to-let market – 57 per cent higher than in 2005 and totalling £100 billion.

CIH wants Government to remove the tax relief currently available in an effort to direct whatever new affordable housing supply is available actually goes to those people who are struggling to get on the housing ladder.

In his opening speech at the UK's CIH President Paul Diggory: "The Government has acknowledged that there is an acute lack of affordable housing across the country so it does not make sense to still offer tax relief to those who buy, simply to rent. Buy-to-let owners have a financial advantage over those trying to buy their first home, as well as pushing house prices even higher.

"We hope the new Chancellor of the Exchequer removes this tax relief as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review due in the autumn. We also want more to be done to halt the

rise in the 'buy-not-to-let' market. If you wander around some of the new developments in our cities after work you can see there are no lights on – a clear sign that no one actually lives there. Investors can make enough money from rising house prices without having to let the flats to tenants – and they are buying whole floors or even entire blocks off-plan.

"Local authorities already have limited powers to tackle some empty homes but this doesn't go nearly far enough. These empty flats are contributing nothing to the crisis in affordable housing or to the Government's sustainable communities agenda", concluded Mr Diggory.

(Issued on behalf of the CIH by Jill Dwyer, Media Relations Officer, CIH Press Office, Octavia House, Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8JP)

Low cost home ownership:

Low Cost Home Ownership is the term used to describe government subsidised housing in the private, owner-occupied sector which is available to people who cannot afford to occupy houses generally available on the open market. Home2Own is the gateway to affordable housing in Devon and offers a number of different opportunities for people who may be homeless, but have an income in excess of £15,000.00 (considered to be the minimum income necessary to sustain mortgage for part ownership and rent payments through this scheme).

The government has introduced a number of opportunities to help first time buyers to get onto the property ladder. Some schemes offer an opportunity to buy a share in a property and pay rent on the part owned by a landlord (formerly known as shared ownership). Other schemes may offer an opportunity to buy a home on the open market with the help of an equity loan.

The schemes being offered by Home2own, the Government's HomeBuy agent in Devon, Cornwall, West Somerset, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane in Somerset, are as follows:

- Newbuild Homebuy
- Open Market Homebuy
- Social Homebuy
- Resales
- First Time Buyers Initiative
- Intermediate Rent

In order to be considered a priority for 'Home2Own' in the South West the following criteria must apply:

- Household must be awaiting housing through the Common Housing Register and/or be statutory homeless and/or be a key public sector worker and/or be a first time buyer.
- Have total debts not exceeding £15,000
- Have a total household income that exceeds £15,000 but doesn't exceed £60,000

Housing register and lettings to social housing:

Plymouth City Council operates a waiting list (the Plymouth Housing Register) for social rented housing in partnership with a number of registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations and Housing Trusts). Currently points are awarded to applicants based on their circumstances, with

points awarded on the basis that reasonable preference for social housing is given to groups who are:

- People who are homeless.
- People occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds.
- People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship.
- Where other legal criteria apply to create a duty to house.

In October 2007 there were 7100 households on Plymouth's housing register – and approximately 150 new applications are received every week. The housing register is administered by Plymouth City Council and includes lettings available through Housing Associations. Each year there are approximately 1700 new lettings.

There are five Special Needs Housing Panels that deal with a range of people who can be defined as having housing support needs. This includes applicants looking to be 'moved on' from supported housing projects. Referrals to the individual panels are made by relevant professionals in writing to the Special Needs Officer. Applicants will usually be visited, and their housing and support needs assessed.

95 people have been assessed by Special Needs Housing panels and are awaiting housing, with a further 36 people with a physical disability who require allocation to appropriately adapted property as it becomes available.

Access to sheltered housing/extra care housing:

People who need sheltered housing are assessed by the Older Persons Housing Panel to ensure that it is an appropriate housing option for them. Sheltered properties have an alarm package and support staff available to provide limited assistance for those with some needs but a fairly minimal need for supervision. In Plymouth, demand for sheltered housing far exceeds supply:

- Approximately 30-60 applications are received per month.
- There are approximately 30 people at any one time waiting for assessment.
- There is a waiting list of anything between 6 months to 2 years for property – which is not allocated on a 'time waiting' basis, but is allocated according to whether the property is appropriate/adapted to meet an applicants individual needs as assessed.
- In order to access sheltered housing an individual must have a need for low level housing related support as defined by Supporting People.

There are currently four extra care housing schemes operating in Plymouth, with two more schemes in the pipeline. There are 140 units with integral assistive technology available to let, 8 of which are specialised units for people suffering dementia.

There is an uncertain procedure for people who are homeless, or who approach Housing Advice at risk of homelessness to access this accommodation as a homelessness prevention option, without either being accepted as being Statutory Homeless, or being accepted by a Special Needs Allocation Panel (whereby a further referral would have to be made by the Special Needs Housing Co-ordinator to the Older Persons Allocation Panel, and there is potential for a further assessment(s) both there, and if a person is referred for Housing Association sheltered accommodation. Discussions are ongoing to resolve these process issues.

The impact of Choice Based Lettings on Homelessness Issues:

Plymouth City Council is moving towards adoption of a Choice Based Lettings approach in 2008. The scheme will band according to priority groupings and is currently undergoing an extensive consultation process, but currently intends the following to be the case in relation to homelessness:

Homelessness prevention will be a priority category: Where a full homelessness duty would exist, applicants to the housing register will be allocated to the highest possible band to enable them to secure appropriate accommodation without recourse to expensive emergency and temporary accommodation resources.

People found to be statutorily homeless following application will be a lower priority in order to encourage preventative options.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED WITHIN STRATEGY

- 1. Housing is inaccessible to a proportion of Plymouth's population due to low income levels – this may lead to higher homelessness approaches; 'points chasing' through choice based lettings.**
- 2. Need to link closely with Housing Strategy to ensure appropriate supply of low cost housing.**
- 3. Low incomes means that people are reliant on means tested benefits for rent and council tax contributions – and the sheer scale of income maximisation work done in the city indicates that many need support to access this.**

BACKGROUND TO THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

LEGISLATION AND SERVICE USER CONSULTATION

The legislative requirement to produce a strategy:

Local Authorities are required to produce a Homelessness Strategy following a review of homelessness issues in the Authority area. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 (“the 2002 Act”) gives housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. This power can be exercised from time to time, however section 1(3) required housing authorities to publish their first homelessness strategy by 31 July 2003. Section 1(4) requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within the period of five years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published (there is an exemption from this requirement for local authorities categorised as an “excellent authority”, see paragraph 1.42). However, it is open to a housing authority to conduct homelessness reviews and strategies more frequently, if they wish. The Homelessness Act 2002 required local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and produce a 5 year strategy in 2003. Section 1(4) of this act requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness review, within a period of five years from when their last homelessness strategy was published.

Plymouth’s multi-disciplinary Homelessness Forum reviewed the current Homelessness Strategy in September 2005, and developed an action plan to update and re-develop the new Homelessness Strategy, due in August 2008. The review and strategy will be targeted towards the following overarching aims and objectives:

Recommendations contained in ‘Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives’ – the Government’s Homelessness Strategy:

The strategy aims to halve the number of households living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010 and aims to do this by:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Providing support for vulnerable people;
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness;
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping; and
- Providing more settled homes.

Identifying needs: The Council already holds detailed information on the nature and extent of homelessness in Plymouth, and has drawn on local and national research in order to supplement this. In addition projects have been undertaken to develop services to address particular aspects of homelessness in Plymouth, and these have formed an integral part of the review. Extensive consultation has been carried out with customers of the homeless service, and this has formed a key building block of the homelessness review.

The consultation and review process: In carrying out its homelessness review the Council has:

- o Consulted widely with stakeholders through a range of forums and projects including the Homelessness Forum; Supporting People Core Strategy Group; The Ethnic Minority Innovation Project group; The Hostel Re-provisioning Consultation Group; Plymouth Housing Association Group; The Move On Planning Protocol Pilot Project Group; Rough

Sleepers Strategy development group; Domestic Abuse Strategy Steering Group and consultation events and the Youth Homelessness Innovation Fund.

- o We have consulted widely with customers using our services about the quality of services and how they prevented homelessness – as well as involving and engaging service users in the planning and re-design of services like the Hostel, services for survivors of domestic abuse, and other services through the Supporting People re-procurement exercise.
- o Established a Steering Group to contribute to and validate the review and to develop the strategy.
- o Engaged with Cabinet Members – particularly the portfolio holder for Housing.

The key elements of the review:

Legislation requires that the Homelessness review includes:

- o A description of the nature and extent of homelessness in Plymouth, including future trends.
- o A summary of how the need is being met at present and the resources available to meet those needs.
- o Details of planned service improvements.
- o Description of advice and legal services in Plymouth.
- o Identification of the gaps in service provision.

The Homelessness Strategy Implementation – a sub-group of the Homelessness Forum - will review progress against the Strategy’s action plan, and updates will be given to the Homelessness Forum, the Core Strategy Group of Supporting People, the Children’s Trust, and other key forums within the city who will participate in reaching the aim of preventing homelessness.