

Plymouth

Homelessness Strategy

2003-2006

Foreword by Cabinet Member

The opportunity to submit a Homelessness Strategy is welcomed by the Administration of Plymouth City Council. We have a Manifesto commitment to tackling homelessness and its causes, and expect to be judged by the improvements that the Council makes in the coming months and years.

There are major challenges in Plymouth to meeting targets for the delivery of an effective strategy. We face significant issues of deprivation in the City, and equality of access to sustainable housing is yet to be achieved.

Physical and financial resources available to the Council in meeting needs for the right kind of home and the right kind of support are limited. We recognise, however, the role of partner agencies, whether voluntary agencies, the Health Sector, or other landlords in meeting need by working in partnership with the Council.

In achieving our vision for the City, we recognise the need for:

- An interdepartmental approach, aligning complementary strategies so that key social objectives can be realised
- Creating a firm evidence base to inform our policies, driven by the needs and aspirations of end users
- Effective performance management to ensure that we meet our targets
- Creative use of partnerships to ensure that shared goals are met

I believe that this strategy sets out a robust and deliverable plan for meeting our own, the community's and the government's objectives in addressing the needs of the homeless, and those in danger of becoming homeless.

Mark King

Portfolio Holder for Housing Management and Street Services

Executive Summary for Plymouth's Homelessness Strategy

Introduction

This is Plymouth's first comprehensive homelessness strategy. It should be viewed in the context of following on from a review of homelessness in Plymouth that was conducted in 2001. Both reports will be available on the Council's website following adoption by the Full Council. The completion of a strategy is a requirement of the Homelessness Act 2002, and although the review was undertaken prior to the Act, it has been audited by external consultants and found to be generally compliant with the Act.

Although the Act states that Authorities do not have to produce a revised strategy for a further 5 years, it is proposed that a second review is commenced by 2006 to allow for effective consultation and planning prior to publication of the City's 2008-2013 strategy.

Purpose

The strategy intends to demonstrate how the Council and its partners will achieve the following aims:

- The prevention of homelessness
- An increase in the supply and quality of temporary and permanent accommodation
- The provision of appropriate support to people who are, or may become, homeless
- Improvements in operational services for homeless people

Successful delivery against these aims will enable the following outcomes to be achieved:

- No homeless family with children or a pregnant woman placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, except in an emergency, and even then for no longer than six weeks, from March 2004 onwards
- The number of rough sleepers in the city to be as near to zero as possible, and no more than four, from March 2004 onwards.
- Reducing the number of homeless acceptances against the main causes of homelessness by 10% per year.

Links With Other Strategies

The Homelessness Strategy attempts to make more than just token links to other important and related strategies. Most, if not all, of these strategies are themselves the product of cross-agency or partnership arrangements. In some cases the authors of the strategies have made their own statements to demonstrate the important links to homelessness.

Race Equality

In delivering the Homelessness Strategy, the partner agencies, and specifically Plymouth City Council, will work towards implementation within the framework of the following strategic aims for race equality: -

- To promote race equality and anti-racism
- To put race equality at the centre of policy making, service delivery, employment practice, regulation and enforcement
- To reduce any adverse impact on service delivery in relation to Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) service users and address barriers BME people confront in accessing services
- To reduce any adverse impact of employment practice in relation to BME applicants and employees
- To ensure that all partnerships and funding arrangements put race equality and anti-racism at the centre of service delivery

Partnership Working and Consultation

Homelessness is not just about the lack of accommodation. The involvement of a range of agencies during the review process and strategy preparation is an indication of the links that homelessness has with other services, strategies, and organisations. A key action from this strategy is to establish a multi-agency homelessness forum which will deliver and monitor the implementation plan. The involvement of a number of homeless people in the review process strengthens the appropriateness of the conclusions and effectiveness of the recommended actions that are contained within this strategy. The Council will lead the ongoing partnership working by establishing the new post of Homelessness Strategy Officer, who will assist the Homelessness Forum in driving the implementation plan forward.

Key Issues

In 2002/2003 the main causes of homelessness in Plymouth were, in order: -

1. Loss of assured shorthold tenancy due to termination – there has been a 28% increase in this category over three years from 2000/01
2. Parental eviction
3. Violent relationship breakdown
4. Being asked to leave by other relatives or friends

The number of households making homeless applications continues to rise and totalled 2230 during 2002/3.

With total lettings to social housing tenancies at around 1500, there is an obvious pressure resulting from the supply and demand imbalance.

At the end of March 2003 there were 69 households in bed and breakfast accommodation, including 23 families with children.

There is an insufficient level of homelessness prevention work which contributes to an increasing number of homeless applications and continued demands for placement in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast.

There is a need to significantly improve homelessness services, particularly in relation to customer focus.

Specific Objectives

The strategy attempts to address these issues by establishing a series of cross-cutting objectives. This methodology is preferred to a specific client based approach because so many of the issues that need addressing are applicable to most, if not all, the client groups. The exception to this is young people whose needs are often very different from adults and require specific focus.

The actual tasks to be carried out, as detailed in the implementation plan, fall within the following objectives:

- Improving support for homeless households
- Improving the prevention of homelessness
- Improving existing services
- Increasing temporary accommodation and alternatives to bed and breakfast
- Increasing access to permanent sustainable accommodation
- Making better use of private sector housing
- Improving data available on homelessness in the City

Implementation Plan

The plan is to be found toward the end of this strategy and identifies a range of specific actions under each objective. Where possible, the lead agency or person, the estimated costs (if any), the relative priority and the target date have been shown for each action. This plan will be used by the Homelessness Forum to monitor the progress of the strategy on a regular basis.

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1. Purpose and Vision

Plymouth City Council has produced this strategy in recognition of the need to provide better co-ordinated services to homeless people, to develop a more 'joined up' use of resources and to have a greater understanding of homelessness issues and prevention. The Council, together with other statutory and voluntary agencies, has been working toward these aims for several years and is now in a position to comply with Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002, which places a duty on all Local Authorities to have developed such a strategy.

The Act for the first time places a legal responsibility on local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their areas, and to publish a strategy that states how the authority, in conjunction with other agencies, intends to tackle homelessness in the future.

The Council welcomes this encouragement to take a strategic long-term view of homelessness and will work with other agencies in exploring and delivering long term sustainable solutions to homelessness. It has embraced the legal requirement and has over the last two years worked with others to carry out a full review of homelessness and to prepare the foundations for this strategy.

The strategy has been formed as a result of joint working and is the product of a multi-agency homelessness review. Many stakeholders have played their part in its development, but this joint work cannot end here. To reflect this, agencies that have a key part to play in delivering this strategy over the next five years have signed up to a commitment to do this. Plymouth City Council cannot possibly deliver the necessary results without these commitments.

Plymouth City Council and partner agencies have indicated their commitment to significantly improving the circumstances faced by homeless people in Plymouth, and to take joint responsibility in delivering the objectives set out in this strategy. The following agencies have pledged their support and commitment to joint working.

Agency	Director	Signature
Plymouth City Council		
Social & Housing Services	Lesley Reid, Director	
Housing Services	Giles Perritt, Head of Service	
Children & Families Services	Jane Hampton	
Finance Services	Alan Clifford, City Treasurer	

Plymouth Primary Care Trust Debra Lapthorne, Director of Public Health



Plymouth Access To Housing Elaine Bentley

Youth Enquiry Service Ralph Kramer

Shelter Jane Filby

Shekinah Mission Peter Chapman

Salvation Army Linden Gibbs

Harbour Tony Faragher

Connexions Steve West

Plymouth Community Safety
Partnership John Isaac

It should be noted that there are many other agencies and organisations that have an interest in this strategy and show equal commitment to partnership working.

2. Links with Other Strategies

The homelessness strategy should be viewed in the context of its links with other Council and city strategies as well as countywide, regional and national strategies. As such it has an integral part to play in achieving the Council's vision.

Recovery Plan

Key elements of Plymouth City Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment have been taken into account in the preparation of this strategy. The Administration, key partners and agencies and the Council's own departmental interests have been embraced in its inception. End users' views have been influential in its preparation. Detailed planning is being undertaken in terms of implementation. Resources are being made available for its delivery and front-line staff understand its implications for their daily work. The implementation plan outlines the detail of how the City intends to ensure the delivery of the strategy, having taken account of the lessons that have been learned from CPA.

Ambition

The Council believes that Plymouth can be *the* place where people choose to live, work and invest. Recognising the importance of the Council's role as a

community leader and the need to improve our work in this area, the Council has, as a partner to Plymouth 2020 - the Local Strategic Partnership - helped to develop a community strategy, to be known as the City Strategy, to deliver this ambition. This is now subject to extensive local consultation.

The City Strategy seeks to rejuvenate and modernise the city through transformational goals. These are:

- ▶ Plymouth as a world class city known for the quality of its buildings, places and spaces
- ▶ Plymouth offers outstanding quality of life and opportunity to all
- ▶ Plymouth is known for the quality of its learning at all levels
- ▶ Plymouth's name is associated with environmental quality and a way of living and working that protects it for future generations
- ▶ Plymouth's economy consistently grows stronger than the national average
- ▶ Plymouth is a significant international tourist attraction
- ▶ Plymouth is a model for promoting diversity and community engagement in all aspects of the city's life.

Plymouth City Council has a significant role to play in delivering changes to local services that are in line with the vision set out by the City Strategy. It has an opportunity to decide broad policy priorities that enable it to contribute towards this vision.

The Council's budget decisions - both short and medium term - and its selection of policy priorities must be driven by its vision of future core business. That core business can be defined by those activities or services where we have a statutory duty to see them provided or regulated, and where they support or contribute significantly towards our core purpose of improving the quality of life and making Plymouth the place where people choose to live, work and invest.

Our Broad Policy Priorities

We have identified five medium-term broad policy priorities which are:

- ▶ Improving the local economy
- ▶ Improving the health, social well-being and safety of the local people
- ▶ Continuing to improve the city's built and natural environment
- ▶ Improving and promoting opportunities for learning and cultural activities
- ▶ Promoting social inclusion through neighbourhood renewal

These broad policy priorities will be delivered through key corporate and service priorities with specific targets to be achieved within three years.

As well as the relevance of homelessness to a number of the city's broad policy priorities, this strategy also links with other relevant strategies both within and outside the local authority. For the implementation of this strategy to be successful, an understanding is needed that homelessness is an issue that is far more than just a lack of housing. If other issues are not also addressed then there is a greater likelihood that tenancies will fail and people will become homeless, sometimes not for the first time. Below are some of the most relevant strategies together with comments from a few of the authors

of those strategies, indicating how they see their own strategies impacting on and interfacing with this first homelessness strategy.

Supporting People Strategy

“Within a diverse group of people who are likely to become homeless, vulnerability is a key factor. Developing housing related support for such individuals and/or their families is a prime driver within the Supporting People programme. The opportunity to adopt a proactive and preventative approach in future is also a fundamental principle within the programme.

No longer will it be enough to simply offer alternative accommodation, hand over a set of keys and hope that the issue does not resurface. A comprehensive needs based assessment linked to a range of housing related support services provides a means for early intervention wherever possible. Such support can be both accommodation based as well as capable of moving and changing as the needs of individual tenant’s alter.

The Homelessness Strategy and Supporting People programme provides an opportunity and the means to achieve synergy between the variety of different situations, agencies and individuals affected.”

Alan Grant

Supporting People Project Manager.
Plymouth City Council

Social Services Children and Families Service Plan

“ The Homelessness Strategy is crucial in helping to develop means of supporting young people, particularly those of 16 and 17 years of age who have nowhere to live. We also need to support families where issues of homelessness are making their parenting task more difficult. The strategy should help in bringing together all those whose task it is to assist vulnerable children and young people.”

Jane Hampton

Head of Service, Children and Families
Plymouth City Council

Rough Sleepers Strategy

This has been an established strategy since 1998 and has, to date, delivered to the Government’s targets. Although a small client group in itself, the complex issues associated with this most extreme form of homelessness requires significant and ongoing investment and management. The Homelessness Strategy should be the vehicle that places rough sleepers within the wider context of single homelessness, and recognises the role of the Rough Sleepers Initiative Steering Group in moving forward plans for increasing prevention, tenancy support and sustainment.

Matt Garrett

Rough Sleepers Initiative Coordinator
Plymouth Access To Housing (PATH)

Housing Strategy

The key objectives of the Housing Strategy 2002-2005 are:

- To provide safe, stable, attractive communities where people choose to live

- To regenerate areas by improving the quality, type and tenure choice of housing together with broader economic, social, environmental and educational initiatives
- To significantly improve conditions, quality and energy efficiency of homes in the City
- To extend affordable housing choices, to redress housing imbalances and meet future needs.

The delivery of the Housing Strategy could potentially have a major impact on homelessness in the city in respect of access to permanent and temporary accommodation via the development and improvement programme.

Competing demands for scarce resources can also be identified and planned for, i.e. where families are decanted as a result of area based regeneration. As an overarching strategy, it also pulls together the related programmes of Supporting People, Housing Advice, Private Sector Renewal, Lettings and equality priorities. The Homelessness Strategy will be a major contributor of evidential need to future Housing Strategies.

Health Improvement Strategy-Our City's Health

“Homelessness is identified in Our City's Health as a key issue affecting people's health. One of the early initiatives we are proposing is to find ways of improving homeless people's access to primary health care. We know what's worked well elsewhere and want to move quickly to a solution that's right for Plymouth. We've already started scoping this work with partners and looking at other ways we can contribute towards preventing homelessness.”

Deb Laphorne

Director of Public Health

Plymouth Primary Care Trust

Care Leavers Strategy

Considering the Council's role as corporate parent to children in its care, it's no surprise that Care Leavers feature prominently in the Homelessness Strategy. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Homelessness Act 2002, together with the Children Act should ensure that no vulnerable child slips through the net in terms of support and/or provision. Both strategies need, however, to consider supply and demand issues and plan to meet future needs.

Plymouth Local Preventative Strategy (draft)

“The aim of this preventative strategy is to promote positive outcomes and to prevent children and young people experiencing negative outcomes, both as children and young people, and later in their lives as adults. By addressing the risk factors that make children and young people vulnerable to negative outcomes, such as being excluded from school, becoming homeless, becoming involved in crime, drug or alcohol abuse, the local preventative strategy will set the direction for services to reduce social exclusion”

Community Safety Strategy

“The recent Crime Concern Audit of the City’s Crime Reduction Strategy highlighted the need for a better fit to be achieved between key strategy objectives affecting communities. The Homelessness Strategy provides an essential bedrock on which the principles of the Crime Reduction Strategy are based, namely sustainable communities where resources are focussed on areas of individual need across agencies and in the pursuit of shared objectives. An appropriate and properly supported home life is at the centre of need for many of the target groups of our strategy. Whether substance abuse, domestic violence, or more generalised areas such as street crime, burglary or anti-social behaviour are at the root of issues requiring action, the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy are key in achieving our targets, and we will work together to ensure success.”

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

“There is an obvious overlap in both the geographical areas identified in the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, and in the issues of social exclusion that form part of our floor targets with homelessness and its prevention. Sustainability and choice form part of the joint agenda of both strategies, and this interdependence has been recognised. The Local Strategic Partnership, as well as Neighbourhood Renewal structures will be tasked in ensuring that our joint objectives are embraced and met.”

Promoting Social Inclusion – a Strategy for Plymouth

“Unless homelessness is tackled in Plymouth the city will not meet its vision and goals about tackling social exclusion. The Social Inclusion Partnership has had this issue on its agenda since its inception and includes an objective regarding homelessness amongst 14 key issues for promoting social inclusion in this strategy.”

Peter Aley

Lead Officer

Social Inclusion Partnership

Plymouth City Council Race Equality Scheme

The 2002-2005 Race Equality Scheme specifies a number of priority service areas that relate to homelessness and which need to be addressed by this strategy during its term. BME households are often over represented amongst the homelessness population and with diversity increasing rapidly in the City, this strategy provides the opportunity to significantly improve service delivery to, and meet the needs of, some of the most socially excluded people in the community, and allow agencies to demonstrate their commitment to anti-racist practices.

Private Sector Renewal Strategy

“ The relationship between poor housing and management of the private rented sector, in particular evictions, makes unsustainable demands upon the diminishing provision of social rented housing. Both the Private Sector Renewal Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy recognise that many of the answers lie in the step change in the quality and condition, management and

image of the rented sector together with a concerted move towards proactive tenancy sustainment in all sectors. Both strategies, therefore, include the establishment of an Urban Care Service as a major shared vision.”

Chris Byers

Housing Strategy and Development Manager
Plymouth City Council

Empty Homes Strategy

“ There is a shortage of specialist housing to support a range of vulnerable people, such as those with mental illness, learning disabilities, a history of substance misuse, and young people at risk. There is currently a need to accommodate for high numbers of single vulnerable homeless people. Empty homes schemes positively address these social housing needs by providing for a mixed range of households on an annual basis.”

J A Rhodes

Empty Homes Officer
Plymouth City Council

The homelessness strategy is not just a local authority strategy – it is multi-agency strategy and is owned by all of the agencies that have contributed to its development. Many of these will have responsibility for its delivery, either as a direct action or as part of the Plymouth Homelessness Forum.

3. Overall objectives of the strategy

The overriding aim of this strategy is to tackle homelessness more effectively and make real improvements to homelessness provision in Plymouth. In support of this aim, the City Council is committed to reaching the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers’ homelessness targets of having no families with dependent children living in Bed & Breakfast accommodation, except in emergencies, after March 2004; of keeping the levels of rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible (and at least two-thirds below the level in 1998); of reducing levels of homelessness against main causes; and reducing inappropriate use of temporary accommodation. In addition, a baseline assessment of repeat homelessness will be undertaken followed by the setting of specific targets for reduction.

Plymouth City Council shares the aims set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, which are:

- The prevention of homelessness
- Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or may become homeless
- Ensuring there is appropriate support for people who are or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- Promoting a cultural change so that homelessness is viewed in a wider context than just a lack of accommodation.

The detailed local objectives of Plymouth's homelessness strategy are to:

- Eliminate the use of B&B for families and pregnant women, by March 2004 in line with government targets
- To significantly reduce the use of B&B for all other household types
- To reduce rough sleeping in the City and increase links to education, training and employment for single homeless people
- To identify the extent of repeat homelessness and, where applicable, reduce levels by investigating and tackling the main causes
- To provide appropriate support for homeless people in Plymouth
- To make better, more appropriate use of temporary accommodation
- To move from the provision of responsive services toward a long term planning view
- To reduce expenditure on temporary accommodation long term
- To significantly improve the services for those who find themselves homeless in Plymouth
- To coordinate services for homelessness and to facilitate the development of joined up solutions in agreement with specific agencies
- To maximise the contribution other services make to prevention of homelessness
- To better understand the causes of homelessness and ensure preventative strategies are directly linked to the main causes
- To encourage innovative solutions to homelessness
- To improve and maintain standards of temporary accommodation

Section 6 of this strategy sets out the plans to meet these objectives in detail.

4. Partnership Working and Consultation

This strategy is the product of partnership working. The Plymouth Housing Forum, comprising of a small number of key statutory and voluntary agencies, has for some time been overseeing the development of strategic working, and is currently establishing a homelessness forum.

The implementation and monitoring of the homelessness strategy will be the responsibility of the Plymouth Homelessness Forum, which will be established in 2003 to oversee the co-ordination of homelessness services and provision in the City, and to ensure that the strategy does in reality move services forward.

As part of the planning process for delivering the homelessness review and this strategy, the Housing Forum drew together a consultation plan with the key stakeholders falling broadly into two groups: service users and partner agencies.

Consulting Service Users

Traditionally, engaging users of housing advice and homelessness services has not been a priority for Plymouth City Council, and this has been recognised as a weakness. Plans are included within this strategy to address this.

The homelessness review carried out during 2001 involved 46 interviews with homeless people. Interviewees were identified through a wide range of agencies to ensure a wide spread of circumstances and experience. Some were from the women's refuge, others were living in B&B, others were residents of temporary accommodation and hostels within the City, and some were sleeping rough on the streets.

In addition to this, we have undertaken a focus group meeting with a number of refugees and asylum seekers to obtain their views of, and understand their needs around, accommodation issues. This directly contributed to developing a refugee move-on scheme, and to the content of the Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASR) Strategy currently being developed.

Work with service users continues and a former member of the Plymouth Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (PETRA) has recently carried out a time-limited exit survey on people using the Homeless Persons Unit. This is being evaluated and issues will be fed into the strategy via the Homelessness Forum. We are also looking to commission work around user involvement and evaluation of services. It is anticipated that this could, at the same time as the outcome of the current Internal Audit of homelessness, start the process of reviewing the in-house service.

The Council's Housing Service has also introduced a number of service review groups. One such group is looking at the way property allocations are made. This group, which includes members of PETRA, will be expanded to take on the role of comprehensively reviewing the Council's lettings policy, together with a watching brief on the evaluation of the choice based lettings pilot schemes.

Consulting partner agencies

Work between partner agencies began in earnest during 2001 when the Plymouth Housing Forum initiated a review of homelessness. Colleagues from within partner agencies were contacted to identify areas of service provision where there were felt to be gaps or duplication.

In April 2002, a Health and Homelessness Conference was held which brought together many of the agencies working in Plymouth. There were 70 delegates at the conference (see appendix 2). The main aims were to highlight the implications of the Homelessness Act and to consult on the homelessness strategy. The event was funded by the Health Action Zone, organised by Shelter, supported by the City Council, and facilitated by the

small, multi-agency Plymouth Housing Forum. Specifically, the following issues were raised and discussed:

- Statistical evidence relating to homelessness
- Causes of homelessness
- Health needs of the population that can lead to homelessness
- Debt issues and the provision of debt advice and support to meet the needs of specific groups (substance users, ex-offenders, young people, rough sleepers, older people)
- Provision and effectiveness of advice services in homelessness prevention

In conjunction with the Review, these issues were developed into formal recommendations and an action plan. The Plymouth Housing Forum developed a work programme from this, with outstanding issues and actions now being incorporated within the implementation action plan for this homelessness strategy.

Since this time, partner agencies have remained involved with the work on reviewing homelessness and preparing this strategy for tackling homelessness. In May 2003, an agency survey was conducted by external consultants to seek further views on homelessness, specifically prevention issues.

Then in June 2003, a consultation session with agencies was held where the group considered the priorities for inclusion in the strategy, agreed the main priorities, and determined some specific mechanisms for delivery of key actions. It was agreed that setting the Homelessness Forum up formally, including establishing its terms of reference, should be given the highest priority within the strategy. The Forum, assisted by the appointment of a Homelessness Strategy Officer by Plymouth City Council, will be the vehicle for delivering the strategy and monitoring progress.

Meanwhile the Plymouth Housing Forum intends to re-focus its attention on wider housing related issues, with the Homelessness Forum picking up specific areas of work.

A small multi-agency Strategic Group of senior level officers from the statutory and voluntary sectors will also meet periodically to maintain a higher level check on progress of the strategy, check alignment with other key strategies, and assist the Forum with unblocking and removing barriers to progress.

From the range of consultation and involvement with partner agencies, the following was learned:

- There is a lack of co-ordination at a strategic and operational level
- PCC needs to learn more from best practise and should take a stronger lead
- There is a shortage of direct access accommodation and apparent clogging of bed spaces by residents awaiting move-on accommodation

- Improved access to the private rented sector is needed
- The protocol between social services and housing has not been followed
- The mental health and long term needs of vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers are a cause for concern
- Neither the Council's housing benefit service nor the Homeless Persons Unit take a sufficiently strategic view of homelessness
- PCC needs to ensure that private landlords become actively involved in the delivery of the strategy

The feedback from this consultation has been extremely positive and participants welcomed the opportunity to influence agendas and processes.

5. The Homelessness Review

An external research consultant completed a review of homelessness in Plymouth during 2001. Funded by the Plymouth Health Action Zone, it was primarily commissioned to explore the links between health and homelessness.

Summary of the Main Findings of the Review

The complete review report is available separately to this strategy and can be found on Plymouth City Council's web site. The main conclusions of the review were: -

- A priority need to develop and improve inter-agency communication, co-ordination and collaboration
- The importance of minimalist interventions should not be overlooked
- Particularly for single homeless people, the role played by, and availability of, move-on, temporary or supported accommodation is crucial to allow for preparation for independence
- The positive benefits of resettlement support
- The strategic influence of appropriate prevention work

Some of the key recommendations of the review were: -

- The establishment of a homelessness forum with the City Council taking the responsibility for its co-ordination
- That the key statutory front line service providers must seek membership of the Forum
- The maintenance of a single inter-agency private sector property register
- The development of a comprehensive private sector tenancy support scheme
- Increased access to primary care services and GP's

- Increased resettlement support to families in temporary accommodation
- Review the Council's homelessness application procedures
- Provision of more information about homelessness services to applicants
- Introduction of a complementary recording system of homeless people

Supplementing the Review

Because it was conducted prior to the duty placed on Local Authorities by the Homelessness Act 2002, an audit of the review was arranged to test compliance against the criteria of the Act and following the publication of best practice from the Audit Commission and the ODPM. The external consultants report is attached as Appendix 3.

To bring the review up to date some additional work has been done in looking at the data collected on homelessness and related issues.

The table below highlights the main causes of homelessness in Plymouth (based on homelessness acceptances). These are, in order:

1. Loss of assured shorthold tenancy due to termination
2. Parental eviction
3. Violent relationship breakdown
4. Being asked to leave by friends or relatives

Reason for homelessness	00/01	01/02	02/03
Parental exclusion	158	179	302
Eviction by other relative / friend	74	91	100
Relationship breakdown–non-violent	144	132	96
Relationship breakdown – violence from partner	168	127	165
Harassment – non racially motivated	N/a	N/a	N/a
<u>Rent arrears</u>			
Local authority	1	3	13
RSL	5	4	3
Private sector	16	15	24
Loss of AST due to termination of AST	267	269	341
Required to leave NASS accommodation*	N/a	N/a	34 wef 07/02

This table uses data based on homeless acceptances (i.e. it includes only information on those cases the LA had a duty to rehouse under the homelessness legislation). It only includes the main causes of homelessness.

** = introduced in 2002/3*

The substantial increase in homelessness acceptances resulting from parental exclusions is of great concern and could have partly resulted from the changes to the Priority Need Order classifications in 2002. Regardless of this, preventative measures to reduce this will be identified within this strategy.

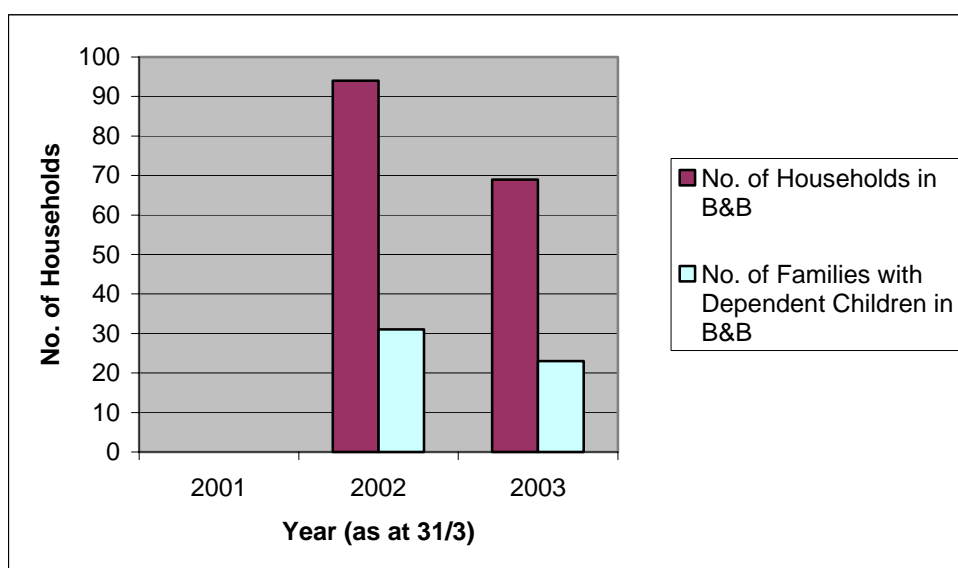
The recent increase in domestic violence is also reflected in the number of families requiring assistance with temporary accommodation. Actions from the Domestic Violence Strategy has led to an increase of reporting cases and identifying domestic violence as the “real” cause of a households homelessness.

The following table shows the total number of people approaching Plymouth City Council as homeless, and those that the Council accepted a duty to rehouse.

	00/01	01/02	02/03
Applications	2024	1781	2230
Acceptances	1112	1007	1335

This shows high levels of homelessness applications, with figures steadily increasing over the last 3 years. (The dip in 01/02 could have been due to a different methodology of collating data). The number of acceptances per year has remained relatively stable, but given the need to meet the BBU target of eliminating the use of B&B for families this is also an area of concern.

Over the last 2-3 years the number of households placed in B&B typically fluctuated between 50-100 and more recently averaged at the upper end of this scale. Move-on from B&B has been problematic, particularly for larger families. The figure below shows that there has generally been a reduction in the use of B&B, but the number of households is still relatively high and achieving the B&B targets for families by March 2004 will be challenging.



The average length of stay in B&B for families was 44 days at 31/3/2003; another key performance area that requires targeted actions during 2003.

The General Fund contribution to the Homelessness Service has totalled approximately £750,000 per year over the last two years. This has included a base budget of £150,000 per year with considerable overspend on this over the last 2 years. Financial data for 2001/02 shows that total expenditure on homelessness (B&B and removal payments) has restricted investment on prevention although a number of alternative temporary accommodation schemes have been developed.

It is recognised that homelessness cannot be looked at in isolation. Although homelessness represents the most extreme form of housing need, the Council also has responsibilities to consider the needs of those applicants registered on the housing needs register. Many of these will be in extreme housing need too. At the end of March, there were 9133 households registered.

This needs to be balanced with the number of lettings the council has access to. The table below shows an average supply of council vacancies over the past 3 years.

Year	Total lettings
2000/1	1699
2001/2	1319
2002/3	1605

There were 748 nominations to Registered Social Landlord lettings in 2002/3.

Achievements since the Review

Accommodation

- Procurement of 50 units of temporary furnished accommodation in the private sector for single homeless, managed by Clearsprings Management Ltd.
- Conversion of 40 self contained flats in Council stock for use as furnished temporary accommodation, jointly managed and maintained by the Council and Sarsen Housing Association.
- Development of Raglan Court - 12 self contained large flats in a warden maintained block for use by families as temporary accommodation.
- Development of 24 units of move-on accommodation for single refugees, managed by Adelphi Hotels Ltd.
- 21-unit quota of Council stock for care leavers from 2002.
- Development of the Gates project for rough sleepers – a dry night hostel for up to 10 people, managed by the Shekinah Mission.
- Private Sector Leasing scheme launched in May 2003.
- Increased use of rent deposits and rent advances to access private sector accommodation, particularly for families.

Services

- Restructure of Council services to include centralised allocations, and establishment of a Homelessness and Allocations Manager.
- More training for Council homelessness staff.
- Appointment of a Reviewing Officer for homeless decisions.
- Establishment of an appointments system and fast tracking in the Homeless Persons Unit.
- Arrangement established for the Youth Enquiry Service to undertake initial assessments for homeless 16-17 year olds.
- Commenced review of youth homelessness protocol.

Support

- Health Visitor for the Homeless re-instated within the Homeless Persons Unit providing support to homeless families and vulnerable people in temporary accommodation.
- Provision of 12 properties to young people as move-on from supported schemes with tenancy support from Stonham Housing Association.

Despite these achievements there are many gaps that need to be addressed and many improvements in services that are required. In response to the findings of the review, the emerging Government priorities, and more recently identified local needs, the following objectives are intended to take the homelessness agenda forward.

6. Specific Objectives of the Strategy

This section of the homelessness strategy sets out the specific objectives that we will be working towards over the next 3-5 years, the life of this strategy. We have identified these under 8 main headings. These are:

- Developing appropriate provision, support and services for young people
- Improving support for homeless households
- Improving the prevention of homelessness
- Improving existing services
- Increasing temporary accommodation and alternatives to B&B
- Improving access to permanent accommodation
- Making use of private sector housing
- Improving data available on homelessness in the City

These headings are the main focus of work on homelessness issues, and form the backbone of the Council's first homelessness strategy. Individual

tasks, which contribute to achieving these objectives, are highlighted under each heading. We have taken a deliberate cross-cutting strategic approach rather than take a range of client groups/issues separately. Appropriate priorities will still be reflected within this approach and, where necessary, will refer to sub-strategies either in place, or to be developed. The exception to this approach is in respect of young homeless people, which require specific attention due to their needs being often different to those of adults.

Developing appropriate provision, support and services for young people

This section of our strategy considers separately the housing issues for young people in Plymouth

Most young people in Plymouth become homeless either because of issues arising after leaving care or because they have left the parental home for some reason. This may be as a result of offending behaviour, parental separation, family dispute, bereavement, poverty or simply because they are at a point in their lives where they need a degree of independence in order to grow into adulthood.

It is important to remember that young people's housing and support needs are different to those of adults and they cannot therefore be expected to fit into adult systems and processes that do not allow them to fail or make mistakes without penalty.

Young people may have to deal with a number of issues as they grow up and may face these separately or all at once. Their issues may include:

- Substance misuse
- Sexual issues
- Mental health issues
- Relationship issues
- Housing issues
- Financial issues
- Behavioural issues

These issues will have an even greater influence on the needs of particularly vulnerable young people, such as 16-17 year olds, and children who have left or are leaving care. Approximately 20% of children leaving care become homeless.

The full extent of need for young homeless people has not been properly assessed in Plymouth. This is a high priority for the implementation plan and should be assisted by information held by the supporting people team. The Homelessness Forum will have the responsibility for developing a sub-strategy for young homeless people.

As a small indication of need: -

- An average of about 15 young people per month received a housing needs assessment by Youth Enquiry Service (YES) from Mar – May 2003.
- Nearly all of these left their home because parents were unwilling or unable to accommodate them
- There were 11 16-17 year olds in B&B at the end of May 2003
- Over 35 care leavers have been living independently since October 2001, about 10 of which have turned 18 years of age

Set Up Youth Homelessness Joint Assessments

The Homelessness Forum could utilise the current Youth Homelessness Group, chaired by the Head of Children & Families Services. This group includes representatives of Social and Housing Services, YES, Connexions and the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Although there is no specific plan for this group as yet, the issues considered to date include: -

- Developing a revised joint assessment form
- Commencing an innovative pilot scheme, with YES undertaking initial assessments of young homeless people at their central office, then providing the Social and Homelessness services with information to enable decisions to be made regarding accommodation and support
- Revising the Youth Homelessness Protocol to bring it up to date with the most recent legislation and practice
- Integrating the above developments into a common assessment process along the lines of Bolton's Child Concern model

This group has also agreed to combine resources for the purpose of launching a mediation scheme targeted at preventing young people leaving their parent's home on an unplanned basis, and so becoming homeless.

Increase Provision of Suitable Accommodation

Future discussions will also start to focus on the provision of a range of suitable accommodation, particularly for those young people with complex needs for whom current provision does not generally cater, or is of low turnover.

The main schemes currently providing accommodation and support for young people in Plymouth include The Foyer (Devon & Cornwall Housing Association), the West Hoe Project and Alma Road (Stonham Housing Association). Stonham also provide floating tenancy support to young people granted Council tenancies as move-on from the above schemes, as well as from other referral sources.

Care Leavers have minimal access to the above schemes. Alternative provision is in the form of supported lodgings, Local Authority owned flats (current agreement for approximately 20 tenancies per year), private sector

placements and bed and breakfast accommodation. A small private hostel will shortly be opening near the city centre for the use of up to five care leavers, and will include independence skills training as part of the support package.

Other initiatives currently being explored include a two bedroom flat in the private sector for use as a shared residence and training premises, and further emergency “crash pad” facilities in addition to the two Council flats currently provided.

However, further planned provision for care leavers is required and the City Council, with its corporate parenting role, must ensure that the Leaving Care Team is represented on the Homelessness Forum.

A number of care leavers have expressed a preference to reside in the private rented sector. However, the rental costs are higher than social housing placing additional burden on the Leaving Care budgets.

Accommodation and support schemes will be reviewed as part of the Supporting People monitoring process. Combined with a needs assessment specifically for young people, an understanding will be developed of future requirements, and whether these should be weighted towards new housing provision, re-focusing existing provision, increasing support, or all of these.

Increase support for vulnerable young homeless people living in temporary accommodation

There is some evidence, from homeless applications and assessments, that young homeless people do not receive sufficient support while living in bed & breakfast accommodation and other forms of temporary accommodation. This can lead to further social exclusion, disassociation, and repeat homelessness.

Increased support to former care leavers will be provided by the NCH, in partnership with Connexions, utilising the Council’s Homelessness Grant funding from the ODPM commencing in 2003. An additional support worker will be based within the NCH’s supporting people team and provide intensive short term support to homeless former care leavers until they are settled in accommodation, after which the team will continue to offer lower level support to encourage tenancy sustainment.

This work will complement a part time post managed by YES, which provides floating tenancy support to other young tenants or licensees.

Raise awareness of housing issues and rights

This will be achieved by contributing to educational and citizenship initiatives.

It is believed that more work in schools and colleges will increase knowledge of housing issues and help to prevent young people leaving home in crisis. Research information from work that has been carried out in neighbouring boroughs shows that if young people know their options are severely limited

(and usually far from ideal) then it may be a deciding factor in the next argument at home.

Visits to local prisons to provide housing advice to offenders are currently undertaken by the Council's SHIP hostel Unit Manager. This should be extended, in partnership with the YOT Accommodation Worker, to young offenders in custody.

The Council's Youth Work and Community Learning Service will be continuing to work with young people, including asylum seekers and refugees and BME clients, on a bid for Community Cohesion funding. Young People will be involved in the funding application and work programme, and volunteers will be present on the Young People's Panel for Community Cohesion in Plymouth.

A focus group will also be set up, led by the Corporate Assessment Panel, to allow young people to express their views about the performance of Plymouth City Council's services.

The views of these young people on homelessness services would influence priorities for implementation, and act as a check on whether or not the most significant needs are likely to be met.

Improving prevention of homelessness

Consultation following the homeless review, in tandem with homelessness data, has revealed that not enough is done to prevent homelessness in Plymouth, and that if the outputs identified within this strategy are to be met, then this is an area that must crucially be tackled. Key objectives are therefore:

To make prevention the focus of homelessness services

The Council's homelessness service needs to be refocused so that there is an emphasis on early intervention and prevention rather than on responding to homelessness applications. The Council recognises the need to be able to concentrate on quality assessments, quality advice, and appropriate placements in a coordinated way. So a review must include the Housing Advice Service as well as the HPU. A review will be even more effective if linked to other advice services i.e. Shelter, CAB, YES, PATH etc, although such a wider review may come after the initial in-house review

Improve housing benefit take up and preventing rent arrears

The administration of the Housing Benefit service has been identified as being a major contributor to homelessness in the City and it is recognised that by tackling the complexities of HB for individuals facing homelessness, we can

actually prevent homelessness from arising. The appointment of a dedicated homeless prevention officer to work on a case basis can make a significant difference to one or more of the main causes of homelessness i.e. evictions from assured shorthold tenancies for rent arrears.

The Plymouth Housing Forum is currently formulating a bid to the Social Inclusion Fund (SRB5) for establishing this post, and it is hoped that 3 year funding will be secured.

Opportunities to link into, or initiate, benefit take up campaigns will be maximised through the Welfare Rights Unit, who will also provide training to generic and specialist housing advisors.

Work closer with the Housing Benefits Service

The Housing Benefit Service must be more actively involved in the delivery of the homelessness strategy and other initiatives within the implementation action plan. The service needs to be regularly engaging with other agencies in the City. Some key areas in which the service can make an impact on tackling homelessness include: - more creative use of the discretionary housing benefit fund; targeted fast tracking of claims; early involvement in the procurement of accommodation (to assist in determining rent levels) and more sophisticated working arrangements with estate based housing officers.

Co-ordinate and maximise housing advice services to customers

One straightforward but effective way of contributing toward this objective is to design a series of housing advice factsheets and make these available in all the places people with housing issues tend to access e.g. doctors surgeries, playgroups, health visiting waiting areas, libraries and so on.

There is also a need to ensure that the various advice agencies can, between them, provide a holistic service so that advice is available when and where it is needed. When the Council achieves its vision of establishing the Urban Care Service (see page 22), there could be genuine opportunities to jointly provide advice services with other agencies.

Introduce home visiting

ODPM grant funding will be used to set up a Tenancy Rescue (Outreach) Worker in 2003. The Council is currently in discussion with PATH in respect of managing and delivering this role in conjunction with the Council's Housing Advice Service. This person would work very closely with the mediation scheme provider and prevention officer.

To introduce a mediation scheme aimed at tackling one of the main causes of homelessness - eviction by parents, families and friends

Similar schemes have been proven to work in other regions and work is underway to set up a scheme in Plymouth. ODPM grant funding is being used

in 2003 to help set this up, and opportunities for pooling budgets with Social Services Children & Families Division are currently being explored. It is believed that this would allow more specialist mediation to be purchased to give added flexibility in meeting demand.

Increase choices for victims of domestic violence by providing security measures to allow people to remain in their own homes

Using Harrow's Sanctuary model for providing a range of measures aimed at making victims of violence feel safer while remaining in their own homes, the Council will use a small amount of ODPM grant to set such a scheme up together with match funding from the Community Safety Partnership. The Domestic Violence Project Coordinator is based within the Community Safety Unit and will lead on this initiative.

The potential for providing access to housing advice in hospitals, for victims of abuse, will be considered via the Domestic Violence Forum.

Develop training and assessments for homeless people

The Shekinah Mission, as part of the Rough Sleepers Initiative Steady Work project, has developed an accredited training programme designed for clients who are supported by various agencies or who attend day centres, hostels etc. The impact of the client-training programme is already being seen in terms of the numbers of clients finding employment and a decrease in tenancy breakdowns. Instrumental in this process has been the development of a client core assessment. This assessment model is already being adopted by other agencies and has resulted in a weekly client review meeting attended by a number of homelessness agencies within the city. Resident's of the Salvation Army's Devonport House hostel also receive a range of skills development and training. The core assessments will be further developed to increase consistency of approach by different agencies to client assessments.

Improving support for homeless households

It is recognised from the review of homelessness, how critical support is for homeless households. Agencies have worked hard to help the homeless access primary care services. In terms of recent achievements the PCT has recruited a Health Visitor for the Homeless who is located within the Homeless Persons Unit; there is an Approved Social Worker within the Rough Sleeper Contact and Assessment Team; there has been a CPN for the homeless for a number of years; a CPN and Health Visitor started dedicated work with Asylum Seekers and Refugees; and GP surgeries are provided in the SHIP hostel. However, still more needs to be done:-

Establish the best means of delivering primary health care and GP services to homeless people.

There is concern about the lack of primary health care for homeless households, and a desire by agencies to provide consistent access to, and standards of, care for households until they move into settled accommodation and are able to register with providers in the usual way

Discussions with the Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) and the Single Regeneration Board (SRB) team will lead to the RSI Steering Group submitting a bid brief to the SIP for developing a scheme that increases regular access to GP's and primary care services pending a move into settled accommodation. We will also want to ensure that homeless people have easy access to the recently delivered dental health practice. The funding for developing the most effective delivery model is from Our City's Health, a former HAZ initiative now administered by the PCT. It is anticipated that £50,000 will be secured very shortly to commence this work.

Develop a process that allows for the support needs of vulnerable homeless people to be identified and met

Feedback from service providers has identified a gap in an individual's homelessness route whereby a client with complex needs does not benefit from co-ordinated delivery and intervention. This results in no, or incomplete, support packages and so threatens the individual's chances of a successful tenancy, and is more likely to lead to repeat homelessness.

Review the scope of current tenancy support provision

There is a need to identify and address any gaps in provision, and ensure clear targets are in place for the reduction of repeat homelessness. A mapping exercise will be undertaken using contract information from the Supporting People programme, and monitoring work will be carried out by the Homelessness Forum to ensure that the provision of support reflects the priorities of this strategy in relation to homeless people, or people at risk of becoming homeless.

A small number of initiatives will be started outside the supporting people programme, involving grant funding and core budgets, with a view to linking into the Supporting People review process from the latter part of 2003 onwards. It should be noted that there is a range of support schemes in existence provided by organisations such as Plymouth Access To Housing, Stonham Housing Association, Youth Enquiry Service, Salvation Army, to name a few. But it is firmly believed that a lot more is required hence the above action.

One specific area in which proposals are being put into place involves increased support to vulnerable tenants who have been resettled from the Council's SHIP hostel. The resettlement function provided within the SHIP will

be more focused with tenancy support following vacation to be delivered by Plymouth Access To Housing (PATH).

Provide more specialist advice and assistance at first contact

Learning from the beneficial experience of having a Health Visitor placed within the Homeless Persons Unit, the Council's Social and Housing Services are currently identifying the most effective way of providing a dedicated Social Worker for the Homeless so that assessments are completed in shorter timescales, and the most suitable housing options are identified at earlier stages of a homeless approach. Support to households in temporary accommodation will be improved with care packages established and monitored locally. Grant funding from the ODPM is being used as booster funding to establish this role. The post holder will also line manage up to two student social workers on placement within the Homeless Persons Unit.

It is anticipated that the presence of this post at the point of contact will contribute to the avoidance of unsuitable B&B accommodation. It should also improve working relations between Social and Housing Services staff and lead to greater consistency of assessments. This could be facilitated by the provision of specialist training to raise awareness of needs, issues and provision for vulnerable households.

Provide more support within homeless hostels

There is a lot of excellent support work provided within homeless hostels in Plymouth. As well as dedicated project staff such as those at the Salvation Army's Devonport House, the Council's SHIP Hostel, and the Shekinah Mission's Gates scheme, engagement with support services is also enabled via the Health Visitor for the Homeless who aims to visit as many hostel dwellers as possible, as well as people staying in B&B's.

Raglan Court is a Council owned and managed scheme consisting of 12 3-bedroom self-contained flats providing temporary accommodation for families. One of the flats is used as a community flat by the Sunflower Family Centre from where a range of support services are provided to the residents, as well as play facilities for children.

However, this objective has been identified in respect of developing a rolling programme of visits from resettlement workers, support workers and the Health Visitor, so that opportunities for households "slipping through the net" is minimised.

Improving existing services

The homelessness review identified weaknesses with existing service provision and the strategy needs to ensure that these are tackled as soon as possible.

Monitor, review, and improve services provided by the Homeless Persons Unit

There is a need to develop a programme of continuous improvement that sits alongside this homeless strategy. An Internal Audit of the Council's homelessness service, and its use of B&B, was carried out in June 2003. The findings and recommendations will provide a useful pointer as to what direction the service needs to be going to secure improvements. An external evaluation of the service will also be commissioned during 2003. The Council has acknowledged the need to implement minimum service standards, develop an ongoing knowledge based training programme for staff, and improve the provision of information to service users.

Develop an accredited staff training programme

As well as client based training, the Shekinah Mission is also commencing an innovative Open College programme aimed at staff and volunteers either working or considering working within the homelessness sector. This provides a flexible learning programme that also gives a clear framework that could be adopted by other agencies. It is anticipated that the accredited staff-training programme will be available for use by other agencies by the end of 2003. Agencies referring staff will be able to do so at no, or minimal, cost.

Convene a Homelessness Forum

There has been a call for such a group from all of the agencies involved in carrying out our homelessness review and developing this strategy. As well as serving to better co-ordinate services in the City, the Forum will assist in the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy over the 5-year period. The first meeting of the Forum was held in 2003 in order to take this strategy forward.

Appoint a Homelessness Strategy Officer for the city

The Council will establish this post from its core budgets with the post holder providing dedicated assistance to the Homelessness Forum in delivering the Strategy, providing regular progress reports and pursuing those responsible for actions within the Implementation Plan. There will be a particular focus on inter-agency problem solving and co-operative working, researching and recommending models of good practice, and formulating workable protocols.

The post holder will also co-ordinate the Forum meetings, and will be expected to commence work on the second Homelessness Strategy after reviewing the first within three years.

A close working relationship is expected with the Devon Homelessness Strategy Research Officer (also located within Plymouth City Council on

behalf of the Devon Housing Partnership) who started in July 2003 and has a similar role but on a wider geographical scale.

Develop inter-agency information sharing, assessment and referral protocols

These would directly address the specific aims and outcomes of collaborative working, inter-agency referral mechanisms and strategic planning, development and funding proposals for services for homeless people. This will govern the way in which the Homelessness Forum will work, both directly, and via sub groups that are established to look at specific issues. There are a number of protocols in place within other Local Authority areas that can be drawn upon. The Devon-wide Homelessness Strategy Research Officer will also be looking at this issue for the benefit of Local Authorities in the county, including Plymouth.

A small group is currently revising the Youth Homelessness Protocol to account for changes in legislation and working practices. The key action though is to establish a monitoring group to ensure that each agency is adhering to the protocol.

Introduce mechanisms for seeking customers' views and taking these into account in the shaping and design of future services.

This is likely to take the form of exit questionnaires and annual surveys. It is intended to either seek a volunteer current (or former) service user to be part of the Homelessness Forum, or hold separate Focus Groups for consultation. The Homelessness Forum will determine an annual consultation mechanism.

Ensure services have race equality at the heart of their planning and delivery

Although the Homelessness Review did not properly consider race equality, there is a clear indication that, particularly, statutory services need to make substantial improvements in how they plan and deliver services for black and minority ethnic individuals and communities. This has been supported by comment and input from the Plymouth & District Race Equality Council, and the Anti Racism Task Force, both on a general level and from individual cases.

Plymouth City Council's Race Equality Scheme (RES) demonstrates how important it is to ensure that it's homelessness services are accessible and responsive to the needs of BME service users. The 2002 – 2005 priority objectives include: -

- The application of homeless assessment policies
- The application of policies for housing allocations and transfers
- The housing of asylum seekers and refugees
- Improvements to the housing reception facilities

- Ensuring that services delivered through contract or partnership arrangements fully comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act
- Ensuring adequate availability of interpreters and translators for services

Race equality cuts across all the specific objectives contained within this strategy, as do other equality issues, however the significance of delivering to the RES priorities is more effectively highlighted by grouping the relevant issues and actions together.

The Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF), which pulls together representatives of BME support groups and statutory services, monitors progress against the above objectives. The City Council also has corporate and service based Anti-Racism Working Groups to locally monitor delivery of service priorities.

There are now estimated to be approximately 600-700 asylum seekers and refugees in Plymouth. These are predominantly single people and led quickly to a demand for temporary single person accommodation for refugees following positive decisions on their immigration status, to allow preparation and further integration prior to accessing more settled accommodation. A move-on scheme managed by Adelphi Hotels Ltd was established in January 2003 consisting of 24 units and utilising Supporting People funding. This scheme has rapidly developed a waiting list and the Supporting People review process should demonstrate a need for expansion, possibly including a women-only property.

With an increasing number of ASR families being dispersed to, and settling in, the City (currently around 65), there is a need to establish appropriate provision of larger properties on both a temporary and permanent basis.

The provision of interpretation and translation services is a priority and an Interpreter's Forum was established in 2002 with a view to increasing access to services, improving the consistency and quality of services, and developing a model for delivery which best suited Plymouth. A post will be established in 2003 to consider different models of service delivery and recommend to the Forum the most appropriate way forward. This work will be managed by the ARTF and funded by the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, ARTF, and the City Council.

Increasing temporary accommodation and alternatives to B&B

If the Government's and the Council's targets are to be met for reducing B&B then there needs to be some real alternatives in place. The main outcome to be achieved in relation to B&B is that there will be no families with dependent children or a pregnant woman in B&B by the end of March 2004. The only

exception is for emergency accommodation and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

Plymouth City Council's Bed and Breakfast Reduction Plan

The original reduction plan (Appendix 4) agreed with the ODPM was for the 2001/2 financial year and formed the basis of receiving grant funding from the ODPM. This funding was to be used primarily for:

- Purchasing and installing a homelessness database
- Rent deposits to enable families into private sector properties
- Rent advances to enable families into private sector properties
- Furniture payments to allow families to move into tenancies
- Contribution for dedicated responses from Housing Benefit officers
- Recruiting a Social Worker for the Homeless

Combined with focused management actions there was initially a 60% reduction in the total number of households in B&B over a four-month period. Unfortunately it has proved difficult to sustain these levels and the numbers of total households and families gradually increased between January and July 2003. However, the graph in section 5 shows that there has been a 27% reduction in total households from March 2002 to March 2003.

The B&B milestones agreed with the ODPM for 2003/4 are:

Quarterly Milestones against proposed targets

Quarter	No. Fms in B&B	No. Fms in B&B (6 wks+)
End of June 03	36	19
End of Sept 03	21	10
End of Dec 03	10	4
End of Mar 04	0	0

Achieving these milestones presents a major challenge to the Council. To further develop the reduction plan, grant funding for 2003/4 will be used to: -

- Commence a mediation scheme aimed at helping young people to remain in their homes
- Start a finder's fee scheme – to further encourage access to the private sector
- Establish a flexible prevention pot – to prevent homelessness arising on a case by case basis

- Introduce small but effective initiatives to speed up the homelessness assessment process

Other schemes that will help the Council achieve its milestones include: -

Introduction of a private sector leasing scheme

This can help provide an alternative to B&B and will make best use of the subsidy arrangements in place. Plymouth City Council launched its own scheme in May 2003. It will co-ordinate the scheme, initially through its Empty Property Team, with management of the scheme resting with Tamar Housing Society. The scheme will include a combination of short-term temporary accommodation and longer-term tenancies for homeless families, and aims to provide 40 houses within its first year.

Developing a homeless at home scheme.

This can be used in conjunction with home visiting and mediation, to help provide temporary accommodation where existing landlords genuinely cannot accommodate applicants, except in the short term.

Setting up a number of furnished units that can be used as emergency, crash pad accommodation.

This can provide a real alternative to B&B for dealing with emergency applications where no other temporary accommodation is available.

Plymouth has, over the last 18 months, procured 90 units of furnished temporary accommodation. 50 units consist of rooms in shared private sector houses for single people and couples and are managed by a private company, Clearsprings Management Ltd. The other 40 units are self-contained flats of Local Authority stock, managed by Sarsen Housing Association and provided for smaller families and single people/couples. These schemes are referral only and we need to establish some turnkey dwellings for emergencies. The Care Leavers Service has procured a small scheme near the City Centre that does include some emergency provision.

Provision of a wet hostel

The Rough Sleepers Strategy identified the need for a night shelter for people to sleep for short periods only, and to provide support to entrenched rough sleepers. The Gates Project has been very successful, but it is a dry hostel that requires residents to leave all alcohol in the site office on entry to the scheme and as such there remain homeless people who choose not to access the facility. The Rough Sleepers Initiative Steering Group will look at the feasibility of promoting and setting up a wet hostel that allows residents to

take alcohol on site, so potentially providing a resource for a small, specific but consistently unmet need.

Access to permanent accommodation

Review the housing register policy to ensure that it supports the aims of the homelessness strategy.

In order to actively encourage the use of alternatives to B&B, the housing register points scheme is likely to require some changes. The number of lettings going to housing register applicants needs to increase in the long term, in order to make the register the main vehicle for securing social housing in Plymouth. Commencing a review of the lettings service by May 2004 is also a Manifesto pledge for the ruling political party in Plymouth, with a view to giving consumers greater choice. An annual lettings plan will allow the full picture of supply and demand to be seen and should inform future development priorities.

Investigate how choice based lettings can impact on homelessness by learning from the pilots

The Devon Housing Partnership has secured funding to research and develop a countywide housing registration scheme. The intention is that access to housing in Devon is more consistent and understandable with greater choice at a sub regional level. Longer-term aims include joint policies and assessments. Plymouth is an active partner and will use this, in conjunction with its own service review, and Common Housing Register Steering Group, to determine the right model for City.

Investigate what use the LAWN scheme could be for Plymouth.

The LAWN scheme has started to be used by a number of authorities outside of London with some success and the Council intends to investigate whether it may help provide one solution for applicants.

Maximise opportunities within development schemes

Higher proportions of new or refurbished development schemes will be sought for homeless families

Underoccupation

There is no current incentive scheme in place to exploit any underoccupation of family sized homes. The Homelessness Forum will consider a small pilot scheme to re-introduce the concept to the city.

Shared Ownership

The Council will negotiate priority consideration of shared ownership schemes for families on the priority waiting lists.

Making use of private sector housing

There is a need to work with the private rented sector to improve access to private sector stock for homeless people. There is a lot of work to be done, specifically:

Work toward a one stop private sector service

Plymouth City Council has an ambitious vision of establishing a central Urban Care Team which integrates homelessness prevention; advice, aid and support to tenants, landlords and property owners; a range of tenancy support; rented sector support, including leasing; and a single point of entry Housing Shop. Other features of the service would include: - targeted advice and assistance packages, a private rented accommodation service, an accredited property register, a range of options for owner occupiers and a link to specific tenancy support providers.

A Public Sector Agreement (PSA) proposal has been submitted and received a positive initial response. If successful, this will allow the outline proposal to be developed and draw in funding to help toward implementation.

This is expected to be a 3-year project with implementation on a step basis. This will include co-locating the homelessness and advice services that are currently provided independently. The first step prior to this is to increase the capacity of the advice service to enable an increase in preventative work.

The Private Sector Renewal Strategy is being put together along similar time lines as this Strategy with both Implementation Plans identifying actions that will complement the Urban Care vision.

Expand the existing deposit scheme to create a scheme that is useable and reflects the real requirements of landlords and letting agents.

The scheme needs to be flexible and provide enough incentives for landlords to let homes to homeless households. Every effort will be made to encourage the success of the bond scheme. However, it must be recognised that cash deposit and rent advance schemes will often be the most effective incentive to access private rented accommodation. With the help from BBU funding, 31 families were assisted in this way during 2002/3, and 17 families have been located in the private sector since April 2003. We will look to expand the use of the deposit scheme to secure greater choice of accommodation for other client groups that have traditionally relied on offers of public sector tenancies e.g. individuals involved in substance use.

Improving data available on homelessness in the City

The homelessness review has revealed that data collected on homelessness is not used in the right way. It should be available as a management tool to inform and shape service delivery and provision.

Review data collection on homelessness and set up systems to keep key managers informed of progress against targets / budgets

The accuracy of our management information has come under scrutiny recently, in particular with data relating to acceptance levels, turnaround of decisions and households categorised as being in temporary accommodation. It is a priority for such information to be tested for accuracy and standardised.

Develop a city wide complementary recording system

We recognise the issue of double counting and are keen to establish a common monitoring form, or unique referencing system, for all agencies dealing with homelessness. This is particularly important in trying to identify and reduce repeat homelessness.

7. Resourcing the strategy and organisational capacity

The Council is keen to explore all possible resourcing opportunities. As well as ODPM funding, we have identified funding streams that can be targeted towards delivering a number of the actions in the strategy, in particular: -

- Council core budgets 2003-2006
The General Fund Homelessness Budget was increased for the 2003/4 financial year due to the projected impact of the Homelessness Act 2002. Within this the bed and breakfast budget increased for the first time for three years, although set very clearly against projected target milestones. To date in 2003, these milestones have not been consistently met hence there will be an impact on the other budget heads. It is crucial that this is limited as much as possible by the end of March 2004 to give confidence that actions in the Implementation Plan can be funded from this source where they are currently funded by time limited external grants. However, the increased core budget does allow the Council the flexibility to lead the commitment to delivering the Strategy. It should be noted that the current budget level is still deemed to be minimal, in relation to the Implementation Plan, at least for the first one to two years of the Strategy, by which time core funds should be being used differently, to greater financial and qualitative effect.

The Council's staffing levels can have one of the most significant impacts on homelessness services in the city and on the levels and

quality of support and prevention. There has been a reliance on the voluntary sector to date, which is provided to a good quality but is understandably limited to specific client groups because of limited funding. Current restructuring proposals are being presented and considered within the Council to increase the resources dedicated to homelessness prevention, and to improve the quality of its statutory services. The cost of this expansion has been included within the Medium Term Financial Plan forecast, with grant funding offsetting some of the costs that would be incurred prior to 2004. If agreed, these structures should be implemented during 2003 and 2004.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) makes a significant contribution to the Homelessness Strategy not least because of the Local Authority owned property used for hostel or temporary accommodation. The impact of rent restructuring and the overall financial position of the HRA, as reflected in the Council's HRA Business Plan, will need to be considered by the homelessness services in terms of savings alongside the rest of the housing management services. For 2003/2004 tapping into part of the Supporting People "windfall" has softened the impact. This is time limited however. The ownership and management of the Council's housing stock will be subject to an Options Appraisal over the course of the next couple of years, and this will also apply to the Council's hostels and properties used as temporary accommodation. This will probably need to be considered in more detail in the next homelessness review and revised strategy.

The Housing Capital Programme has been underused in the past in terms of potential contribution toward homelessness prevention and alternatives to bed and breakfast usage. Much of the Implementation Plan involves revenue funding therefore the capital requirements are quite modest, for example where small hostel type facilities are required, and increased use of the capital programme has already been identified within the Medium term Financial Plan.

The Private Sector Strategy will start to have an even greater impact on homelessness prevention following legislative and subsequent policy and practice changes to how grants will be used. With both strategies aiming at the delivery of the substantial one stop Urban Care service for private sector clients within three to four years, it makes sense to start thinking about how grants are used and to direct funds more toward support, for tenants, landlords and property owners.

- Public Service Agreements
The Council has submitted a proposal for the development/feasibility work associated with the Urban Care vision. If successful, this would provide approximately £50,000 for the first year, although subsequent funding for implementation could be considerable. It should be recognised that failure to secure PSA funding could put a significant dent in the Council's implementation plans for this particular vision.

- **Social Inclusion Fund /Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)**
Homelessness, particularly relating to improvements to health, is one of the Social Inclusion Partnership's (SIP) key objectives and some specific project funding to support the Implementation Plan is currently subject to a bid proposal with a positive outcome likely.
- **Our City's Health**
Linked to the above, as match funding, is a contribution toward proposals for improving access to health services by homeless people and rough sleepers that forms an action within the Implementation Plan.
- **Social Services Children & Families Division**
Increased thought to jointly funded initiatives between Housing and Social Services has commenced and will support some of the identified actions i.e. for mediation schemes, temporary accommodation placements, and Social Worker secondments.
- **S106 Funding within planning agreements**
Greater use of planning agreements is now being implemented in earnest to deliver more affordable housing, and an estimated £1M over the next few years will go towards this vital resource.
- **Supporting People**
This fund will have an essential role in the delivery of prevention and support initiatives. The level of tenancy support identified as part of the initial programme is surprisingly limited and the contract review process will provide relevant evidence as to the effectiveness of the "pot", with potential opportunities to redirect resources to support projects. A particular gap in the present programme is the lack of support to private sector tenants.
- **Housing Benefit/Discretionary Benefit Awards**
It has been recognised that the positive contribution these sources of funding could have to prevent homelessness has not been reflected by practice. Improvements in communication with the Housing Benefit service and increased awareness of the impact the service has on homelessness will lead to more flexible use of these budgets to prevent people becoming homeless. The early involvement of the service in developing accommodation-based schemes also allows more accurate forecasts of net costs due to the ability to determine reasonable rent levels.
- **Empty Property Strategy**
This strategy has identified a target of bringing 150 empty properties into use per year for the next four years. This includes a particularly active year projected for 2004/5. The sources of homes include ex MOD properties, s106 agreements, use of Approved Development Programme funding, SRB, and the grant regime.

- **ODPM Grants**
The various grant-funding streams from the Homelessness Directorate have contributed significantly to launching new schemes, allowing booster funding to projects, and generally to encourage thinking differently about how core budgets could be used more effectively. Several actions within the Implementation Plan will benefit from grant funding already committed for the remainder of the 2003/2004 financial year. An allocation of £52,000 per year for the next two years allows a certain amount of planning for the delivery of certain actions. Further grant funding, including rough sleeper/single homelessness initiatives and bed and breakfast reduction plans will be dependent on a self-assessment and performance based bidding process. This should be determined by December 2003.
- **Partnerships**
A range of partnership approaches to resourcing and delivering services and initiatives will need to be explored, in addition to existing schemes, over the duration of this strategy, particularly within the context of the Council's overall financial circumstances and its Medium Term Financial Plan. Examples potentially involve joint venture arrangements for s106 agreements, delivery of tenancy support services and Registered Social Landlord activity.

8. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation

The Homelessness Strategy will be monitored in a number of ways.

- Progress on delivering targets set out in the implementation action plan
- Progress of Council services against a basket of performance indicators
- Overall homelessness trends, for example, as evidenced by the P1E statistics submitted quarterly and annually to the ODPM by the Council
- From qualitative feedback from agencies and service users

It will be the responsibility of the Council's Housing Resources Manager to oversee the implementation of the strategy. Some actions will be led by an agency other than Plymouth City Council; it will still be this postholder's responsibility to ensure that progress is being made.

The Plymouth Homelessness Forum will have a key role to play in strategy monitoring and development.

Proposed outputs

Some of the key targets that Plymouth City Council has set itself as part of this homelessness strategy are set out below. These are intended to reflect the Governments existing priority targets involving the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by families and the number of rough sleepers. They also respond to the ODPM's "Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness" advice note in establishing a target relating to reducing homelessness against the main causes (parental evictions has been selected in our case) and to establish a baseline position on reducing repeat homelessness so that targets can be established in future years.

Performance Measure	Target
Total number of households in B&B	25 by March 2004 10 by March 2005
Total number of families in B&B by March 04	0 by March 2004 0 by July 2004
Families assisted into the private rented sector each year	50
Number of women fleeing domestic violence that are helped to remain in the home or moved into non B&B accommodation, each year	10
Number of empty homes brought into use and occupied by homeless applicants	30 by July 2004
Number of families in B&B to have been visited and assessed by a Health Visitor	ALL
Reduced levels of homelessness caused by parental evictions	By 10% each year for 5 years
Total number of rough sleepers	4 as at end March 2004
Reduced levels of repeat homelessness	Establish baseline position and monitoring system by July 2004. Establish reduction targets for 2004-2008.

9. Implementation action plan

See attachment

Appendix 1

Background Information

The City of Plymouth is the largest city on the South Coast of England, situated at the most westerly point in Devon. The population of the area is 254,000 people, living in 105,000 households and 1.9% of the population are from ethnic minority communities. The area of 80 square kilometres is largely urban and densely populated. The City is on the border of Cornwall and is surrounded by Dartmoor National Park and designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Some other facts about Plymouth:

- Unemployment stands at 3% compared to 3.2% nationally. A third of the working population are employed in public administration, health and education, with key employment opportunities also provided in defence, tourism and technology related businesses.
- Plymouth is among the six most deprived areas in the southwest and has nine wards within the 20% most deprived wards in the country.
- The City has a total of 16,500 Council properties, continually reducing due to the impact of the Right To Buy and demolitions in regeneration areas
- There are nearly 6,000 housing association properties in the City
- There are over 15,000 private rented units in Plymouth
- The average house price in Plymouth is £92,000, compared with a national average of £119,436
- 63% of households live in owner-occupation, 26% live in social rented housing and 11% live in the private rented sector

The ethnic structure of Plymouth is shown in the table below. Figures for England are shown for comparison purposes.

Percentage of resident population in ethnic groups	Plymouth	England
White	98.4	90.9
Mixed	0.6	1.3
Asian or Asian British	0.3	4.6
Black or Black British	0.2	2.3
Chinese or other	0.5	0.9

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

Appendix 2

Delegates List for Health and Homelessness Conference 2002

DELEGATE	AGENCY ADDRESS	REVIEW	SENT
Denise Rudgley	Plymouth Primary Care Trust, Mount Gould Hospital, Mount Gould Road	Will collect at conference	
David Stark	PCC, Council House, Armada Way, Plymouth, PL1 2EW	Does not require copy	
Nigel Barnard	Westcountry Housing Association, Hatfield House, Hatfield Road, Torquay, TQ1 3HF	E-mail to: Nigel.barnard@westcountryha.org.uk	
Paul Ainger	The Big Issue, Office 3, Bretonside Bus Stn, Plymouth, PL4 0BG	Will collect at conference	
Zena Gardener	66 Ebrington Street, Plymouth, PL4 9AQ	E-mail to: zena.gardener@workinglinks.co.uk	
Richard Morgan & Peter Chapman	Shekinah Mission, Bath Street, Plymouth PL1 3LT	PC does not require copy	
Bridget Thomas & Colin Minney	NCH-Plymouth Leaving Care Project, Bedford Villas, Amity Place, North Hill, Plymouth, PL3 4LB	E-mail to: swplca@mail.nch.org	
Tracy Childs	Nat. Schizophrenia Fellowship – Tenancy Support, 34 Camden St, Greenbank, Plymouth, PL4 8NW	E-mail to: plymouth_tenancy_supathotmail.com	
Not known	Stonham Housing Assoc., 17 Addison Rd, North Hill, PL4 8LL	E-mail to: andy.cochran@homegroup.org.uk	
Linda Adams	Hanover Housing Association, 4 Hanover Court, New Street, Plymouth, PL1 2LZ	Will collect at the conference	
John Creek	Alma Road Young People Scheme, Stonham Housing, 99-101 Alma Road, Plymouth, PL3 4HF	jocreek@eurobell.co.uk	
Tony Faragher	Harbour Centre, 9-10 Ermington Terrace, Mutley, Plymouth, PL4 6AG	E-mail to: tony@harbourcentre.co.uk	

Ralph Kramer & Ruth Mariott	Youth Enquiry Services, 14-16 Union Street, Plymouth, PL1 2SR	Will collect at conference	
Sergeant David Huggett	Devon & Cornwall Police, Charles Cross Police Station, Hampton Street, Plymouth, PL4 8HG	Will collect at conference	
Lynden Gibbs	Salvation Army, Devonport House, 24 Park Avenue, Milehouse, Plymouth, PL1 4BA	E-mail to: lynden.gibbs@salvationarmy.org.uk	
Peter Aley	Social Inclusion Partnership, Corporate Support Unit, Civic Centre, Plymouth, PL1 2EW	E-mail to: peter.aley@plymouth.gov.uk	
Mick Hill	Plymouth City Council, Dept for Social Housing Services, Housing Division, PL1 2EU	Do not require a copy	
Oliver Marner	Connexions, 10-12 Union Street, Plymouth, PL1 2SR	E-mail to: oliver.marner@connexions.cd.org.uk	
Carol Robb & Fiona Kingohott	Supportive Lodgings Scheme, Family Placements Services, Midland House, Plymouth, PL1 2AA	Will collect at conference	
DELEGATE	AGENCY ADDRESS	REVIEW	SENT
Jane Cookson	Plymouth City Housing Advice Service, Marwell Centre, 28-42 Harwell Court, Western Approach, Plymouth	E-mail to: jane.cookson@plymouth.gov.uk	
Andrea Peirce	DI AC, Ernst English House, Buckwell Street, Plymouth, PL1 2DA	E-mail: andrea@plymouthguild.org.uk	
Kevin Ivey	Plymouth City Council, Ship Hostel, George Place, Stonehouse, PL1 3NY	Do not require a copy	
Carole Northmore	Care Direct – Plymouth City Council, Floor 2, Midland House, North Street, Plymouth, PL1 2EJ	?	
Jacqui Hazell	Westcountry Housing Association, 10-13 Lockyer Street, Plymouth, PL1 2QQ	E-mail to: jaci7782@aol.com	
Peter White	Youth Opportunity Team, Heather House, 11-14 Gibbon Lane, Plymouth, PL4 8BR	Will collect at conference	
Nick	Housing Dept, PCC, Windsor	Do not require copy	

Carter	House, Tavistock Road, Plymouth, PL6 5UF		
Charlie Frais	Law Direct, 3 Elizabeth Court, Whimble Street, Plymouth, PL1 2DH	E-mail to: lawdirect@stephens-scown.co.uk	
Elaine Bentley Mat Garrett	PATH, The Harwell Centre, 28-42 Harwell Court, Western Approach, Plymouth, PL1 1PY	E-mail to: elaine@pc2harwell.freereserve.co.uk	
David James		Will collect at conference	
Dr Warren			
Diane Williams	Plymouth College of Further Education, Learner Services, Kings Road, Devonport, Plymouth PL1 5QG	e-mail to: dwilliam@pcfe.ac.uk	
B A R Dann	Hardcombe Farm, Plympton, Plymouth, PL7 5ER	Will collect paper copy at conference	
Sally Dean	C/o Gary Streeter MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA	e-mail to: deans@parliament.uk	
Sally Sanderson	Colebrook Housing Society, 3 Woodland Terrace, Greenbank, Plymouth, PL4 8NL	Will collect paper copy at conference	
Andrew Pratt	Plymouth Health Impact Assessment Project, Groundwork SW, Crownhill Fort, Plymouth PL6 5BX	e-mail to: Andrew.pratt@groundwork.org.uk	
Derek Finch	Sovereign Housing Association - dfinch@sovereign.org.uk	Paper copy	
Jill O'Sullivan	Sovereign HA, Abbey House, North Road West, Plymouth PL1 5DH	Josullivan@sovereign.org.uk paper copy	
Ken Preston	Salvation Army, Devonport House, Plymouth		
Yvonne Quinlan	Plymouth Christian Centre, Cattedown Roundabout, PL4 9HP quincurl@netscapeonline.co.uk	Paper copy at conference	
Val Willcocks	Plymouth Lone Parent Forum and Emmaus	Paper copy at conference	
Jill Gregg	Sarsen, 40 Priory Close,	Paper copy	

	Ivybridge, Devon PL21 9JG jill.gregg@sarsen.co.uk		
John Freeman	Tamar Housing Society john@tamarhs.org	Paper copy	
John Doleman	Plymouth City Council	No copy required	
Kathy Keegans	Devon and Cornwall HA kathy.keegans@dcha.co.uk	Paper copy	
Sally Walach	Clearsprings Management, 15 Forde Close, Abbotskerswell, South Devon TQ12 5LW sallywalach@clearspings.co.uk	e-mail	
M Langfield and Tony Gigg	Wouth West Landlords Ass PO Box 188 Plymouth PL1 5YR Swlandlords@hotmail.com	Disk at conference	
Brian Moore	Shelter Devon, Virginia House, 40 Looe Street, Plymouth PL4 OEB	brianm@shelter.org.uk	
Mathew Cunningham	Shelter Devon, Virginia House, 40 Looe Street, Plymouth PL4 OEB	mathewc@shelter.org.uk	
Catherine Marsh	Shelter Devon, Virginia House, 40 Looe Street, Plymouth PL4 OEB	catherinem@shelter.org.uk	
Lynn Hannah	Shelter Regional Office, Kingsbourne House, 229-231 High Holborn, LONDON WC1 7DA	lynnh@shelter.org.uk	
Phil Jew	Shelter Regional Office, Kingsbourne House, 229-231 High Holborn, LONDON WC1 7DA	philj@shelter.org.uk	
Gary Sargent	Supporting People, Plymouth City Council	gary.sergeant@plymouth.gov.uk	
Jenny McGowan	Plymouth City Housing Advice, 28-42 Harwell Court, Western Approach, Plymouth PL1 1PY	jenny.mcgowan@plymouth.gov.uk	
Alan Stephens	Plymouth Citizens Advice Bureau, Virginia House, 40 Looe Street, Plymouth PL4 OEB		
Neil Boot	Plymouth Health Action Zone, Public Dispensary, Catherine	Neil.boot@phaz.nhs.uk	

Appendix 3

Report to Plymouth City Council Audit of Homelessness Review First Draft

1. Introduction

Housing Quality Network Services (HQNS) has been commissioned by Plymouth City Council to carry out an audit of the homelessness review published in July 2001. The purpose of this is to make an assessment of its role within the new statutory review and strategy framework.

This work has been carried out making use of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, the ODPM Homelessness Strategies Good Practise Handbook, and using what is known of best practise so far.

This report sets out the findings of this review and also identifies what tasks Plymouth City Council now needs to undertake in order to move the review and strategy onto completion. As discussed with Andy Edwards, HQNS will be able to offer support at this stage if required and some suggestions for this are set out in Appendix A.

2. Audit of Homelessness Review document

The first thing to note is that the Homelessness Act 2002 places two separate legal duties onto the local authority. The first is to carry out a review of homelessness in the district, and the second is to publish a homelessness strategy showing how the council will tackle homelessness in the future.

The Act and the Code of Guidance are very clear about what the review and the strategy need to cover. Compliance with this is essential.

The Homelessness Act 2002 s2 states that a homelessness review is a review of:

- The current and future likely levels of homelessness in the district
- The activities carried out:
 - For preventing homelessness
 - Securing that accommodation is available for homeless people
 - Providing support for those people
- The resources available to the authority, the social services authority and other agencies for these activities.

The simplest way to assess how fit for purpose the current review document is, is to measure it against these legal requirements. (Please note that what Plymouth current has is a homelessness review; the homelessness strategy is yet to be published.) The table below shows how Plymouth's *review* document measures up.

What the Code requires	How Plymouth measures up
Mapping and understanding the context of homelessness to develop a profile of homelessness (location, reasons for, background of homeless people, household composition etc)	Limited data on this is included within the review document. The review should include analysis of data from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1e • Local & national PI's • Data from other agencies (inc. advice agencies, CAB, prison, probation etc)
Understanding what might effect homelessness levels in the future	Analysis of things such as availability of accommodation, property prices, regeneration activity, RSL activity, homeless people leaving care, the armed forces, hospital, prison etc not included within the review.
Review of activities for preventing homelessness, securing sufficient accommodation for homeless people and providing support	Requires a mapping exercise of existing services. This is included within the review.
Review of resources available to the council and all other bodies for these activities (staff, property, funding)	Needs up to date information on this.
Publication of review document	Done.
Involvement of social services in the review	Done, but needs to be a key part in the strategy & action plan too.
Note - Review of all forms of homelessness, not just of those people to whom the council has a rehousing duty	Done

Essentially the Homelessness Review provides a sound starting point for Plymouths review and strategy process. There are a number of concerns about relying on the document in its entirety that are highlighted in the table above but HQNS believes that the gaps and omissions identified can be remedied by including the work on these in the resultant homelessness strategy document. Additionally, the service has clearly moved on since this review was published, for example, by working on the bed and breakfast reduction action plan. It is felt that all of these changes need to be incorporated into the strategy.

3. A way forward

What a large number of local authorities are doing is to produce one homelessness review and strategy document. This would be a useful way forward for Plymouth. The homelessness strategy document could signpost readers to the review published in July 01, and embellish this with a range of up to date data that meets the requirements set out in the Code of Guidance.

In order to move this forward, there are a number of actions the Council is recommended to take. These are set out below:

Data analysis -	Use current data to analyse causes of homelessness, profiles of homeless people, proportion of acceptances, numbers in TA, use of B&B etc
Consultation	There is a requirement to consult stakeholders on the strategy. Clearly some consultation with users and agencies took place during the review. It would be useful now to survey agencies involved with homelessness to seek their views on what issues the strategy should address and on priorities for action
Draft a strategy document	Pulling together critical information from the original review, the fresh data, feedback from consultation, identification of gaps in provision, and recommendations. HQNS has devised a standard structure that can be used.
Involvement of multi-agency steering group	To oversee this remaining process and to buy into the delivery of the action plan. This group can have responsibility for turning strategy into action and monitoring results.

4. Conclusions

Relying on the homelessness review published in 2001 isn't ideal because it was prepared for a purpose other than to comprehensively review homelessness in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Act. However, it is robust and relatively up to date and with the additions suggested in this report could be used as the statutory homelessness review. A separate Homelessness Strategy clearly needs to be published and Appendix A, as requested, sets out what support HQNS could offer in this process.

Kirsty Jenkins
Housing Quality Network Services
3rd April 03

Appendix 1

Support that HQNS can provide to move the strategy forward

HQNS can offer some support in moving the strategy forward, although consultants are heavily committed at the current time.

If Plymouth City Council could pull the data together (using the Homelessness Strategies Handbook) in a format that can be used in the Homelessness Strategy (i.e. presentation of data in chart format with evaluation of the implications) this would provide a sound start.

HQNS would be able to assist in the consultation exercise and with the drafting of the final strategy.

Consultation

Carry out a postal survey of all agencies working in the district to tackle homelessness. HQNS could design the questionnaire with input from the Council. The Council could then send it out to the agencies concerned, and responses could either go back to HQNS for analysis and a report, or they could go back directly to the Council for evaluation. Survey design would require 1 days input from HQNS, evaluation and final report another 2.5 days.

Drafting strategy document

HQNS could pull together a first draft of the document for consultation with stakeholders. This would require an estimated 5 days work. Clearly this needs to be done in conjunction with some input from the Council.

A further 2 days could be used following consultation to prepare a final draft, if required.

Unfortunately this second piece of work couldn't commence until late May due to current commitments, but on the positive side this does allow for feedback from consultation.

Any or all of this work could be carried out. The daily rate is £570 plus VAT and expenses. Expenses would largely involve travelling costs to Plymouth where work on site is required.

Appendix 4

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE THE USE OF BED AND BREAKFAST HOTELS FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS 2001/2002

Introduction

For a number of years Plymouth City Council has relied heavily on the use of B&B hotels as emergency accommodation for homeless households to whom the Council has had duties under the Housing Act 1996. Until August 2001 the only real in-house alternative was a small block of flats situated in the City's red light area. Battery Street consisted of very basic units in which mixed households were often required to share facilities. The flats were unpopular and attracted a poor reputation. The block was eventually closed down in Autumn 2001 and is awaiting demolition.

Over the last 2-3 years the number of households placed in B&B has typically fluctuated between 50 and 100 and more recently averaged at the upper end of this scale.

Move-on from B&B, particularly with families, has become more problematic with less availability of large properties (for example, due to redevelopment and Right to Buy) and increasing demand. The private rented sector has provided a very limited alternative to social housing, mostly due to the requirement for large deposits, higher rents, and Housing Benefit administration problems.

There have been two major Departmental restructures and a number of smaller changes over the last 6 years which have had a significant impact on homelessness and lettings services. Further, and indeed continuous, changes cannot be discounted, and it is therefore vital that robust and flexible arrangements are put into place to tackle the B&B problem.

The General Fund contribution to the Homelessness Service has been £156,000 pa for last, and the current, years. The annual outturns have shown considerable overspend and it has proven extremely difficult to develop alternative accommodation schemes. However, an action plan was presented to Housing Committee in October 2000 with a number of proposals only now coming to fruition.

Current Performance

Total number of households in B&B at 31.3.02	= 94
Of these, total number of families with children	= 31 (33%)
Average length of stay in B&B (all households)	= 16 days

It should be noted that the accuracy of our Management Information has come under scrutiny recently and the methods of data input. This would particularly relate to acceptance levels, turnaround of decisions, and households categorised as being in temporary accommodation. It is a priority for such information to be tested for accuracy and standardised.

The use of B&B as a proportion of all temporary accommodation has not been measured to date. As an indication, B&B accounted for approximately 54% of temporarily accommodated households at 31.3.02. It is assumed that "homeless at home" and those accommodated under s193 are not considered under such a target.

The latest financial outturn for 2001/2 shows that total expenditure on homelessness (B&B and removal payments) was approx £600,000 representing a considerable overspend on the allocated budget.

Current Initiatives

Homeless Persons Unit

In late 2000, a Senior Homeless Investigator post was established with the principal objectives of B&B management, problem solving, chasing offers etc. This had a positive effect in the short term but, unfortunately, the post holder was absent for much of 2001 due to long-term sickness. The agency temp replacement was focused more on supporting the work of the homeless investigators. The post holder has recently returned with a role that will, once again, be focused on temporary accommodation management and monitoring, creating a dedicated link to providers, screening of applicants and formulating tighter procedures.

A 5-month secondment post was set up in the HPU from Nov 01- Mar 02 to audit HB claim procedures relating to applicants going into temporary accommodation. Verification Framework training was arranged for Homeless Investigators, awareness raised of financial implications of non-claims or incomplete forms, attempts to re-coup lost subsidy and set up new procedures and guidance for officers. The number of non-claims did stop initially and responsibilities have been formalised. However, there was little success in clawing back subsidy due to the rigid rules that apply where claims are not submitted or are incomplete.

A Homelessness & Allocations Manager was appointed and commenced in Jan 02 to oversee the HPU and the newly created centralised Allocations Team, which now sits adjacent to the Homeless Officers. This will give greater flexibility to lettings but also improve control, consistency and performance management.

Re-training for officers has taken place, in partnership with Shelter, with the aim of improving the quality of investigations and speed of decision-making.

Hostels

Raglan Court – Opened in August 2001, this is a LA owned and managed hostel providing 12 x three bedroom self-contained furnished flats. There is a daytime warden and out-of-hours static security officer both of which are part THB funded. The block includes a ground floor flat designed for use by person(s) with a disability and the Sunflower Family Centre uses one flat as a community flat on a sessional basis. This facility is used to accommodate larger families wherever possible.

SHIP Hostel – A LA owned and managed direct access hostel for single, mostly non-priority homeless people over 18 years of age. It provides 31 bed spaces in a safe, secure, 24 hour a day staffed setting. The hostel does take statutory homeless people and the balance of use by these client groups is being reviewed at present.

Women's Refuge – This recently refurbished house provides refuge to 11 households at a time. It is owned by Devon & Cornwall Housing Association and managed by the Plymouth Guild of Voluntary Services. The average stay is 5-6 months due mostly to the difficulty of obtaining move-on accommodation. Unfortunately, the facility cannot take families with four or more children and it does not allow males over 16 years of age, which can obviously cause some stress if households have to be separated.

Anwyl Close – A Stonham Housing Association project, the scheme provides 34 bed spaces for single people. It is used as secondary move-on accommodation from direct access hostels but also takes many referrals from a range of organisations. PCC has just contributed £25K toward the cost of remodelling the building and discussions are taking place with a view to increasing the flow of homeless people moving into the scheme from direct access hostels.

Alma Road – Another Stonham HA scheme but for young people including homeless and care leavers.

Salvation Army – Devonport House provides accommodation for 60 single males, with a mix of direct access, secondary and supported units. The scheme Manager has expressed his keenness to support proposals to improve co-ordination of provision and plug gaps in services.

Plymouth House – A further scheme for young people operated by Westcountry Housing Association, and situated adjacent to a mother and baby unit. Westcountry HA has been consulting agencies on proposals to re-model the building but is looking to retain young people as the main client group.

Gates Project – A small scheme opened in March 02 as part of Plymouth's Rough Sleepers strategy, it offers 10 units for rough sleepers to stay overnight and receive assessment and access to services.

Spring Hostel – A small Devon & Cornwall HA scheme for homeless single people with enduring mental health needs. The hostel has its own move-on scheme nearby.

Plymouth Foyer – A large, high quality scheme by Devon & Cornwall HA providing accommodation for 50 young people who wish to access education, training and employment opportunities. Although referrals from the HPU are limited, the target client group would very possibly require temporary accommodation, including B&B, if the Foyer hadn't been established.

Private Sector Accommodation

In February 2002, PCC signed a contract with Clearsprings Management Ltd (CSM) to manage a scheme of 50 units of accommodation in the private sector. This comprises of individual rooms in fully furnished shared houses for occupation by single homeless people referred by the HPU in exercising its duty to provide temporary accommodation. The gross costs are intended to be met by a combination of HB (or rent), direct service charges to the occupant, Transitional Housing Benefit,

and top-ups from the Council covering gaps between HB and rent. CSM have agreed rent levels with a number of private landlords guaranteed for 5 years. As a national organisation CSM is able to absorb greater risk, and as well as recruiting experienced housing managers and support workers specifically for the scheme, it has also been able to call on its staff providing asylum seeker services and accommodation. To date, 42 people are now in occupation.

Cash Deposits – In appropriate cases the HPU agrees to pay deposits where homeless applicants find private accommodation. The funding of this is from within the overall budget as specified in the introduction. Storage and/or removal costs are also paid on a negotiated basis in some circumstances. This has been offered very sparingly due to the financial constraints.

Bond Scheme – Plymouth Access to Housing (PATH) operates a resettlement and tenancy support service. Their bond scheme is limited to the presently narrow client group (probation clients, rough sleepers).

Private Landlords' Forum – This is held regularly and as well as HB staff, PCC supports the forum with the presence of principal officers from the Grants team, Environmental Health Officers, and Housing Advice Service. The Housing Advisors have been intentionally re-focused on private sector advice over the last 12 months and have developed much improved relations with the major Landlord Associations. Key issues have included standards of accommodation, education on tenants' and landlords' rights and obligations, evictions, and extending length of tenancies. The latter continues to be a key objective.

Housing Benefit

The delays in processing HB claims by PCC Housing Benefit Section has had a major impact on private landlords willing to take people on benefits. Delays have been caused predominantly due to the Verification Framework requirements where the majority of un-processed claims result from incomplete forms or information not being provided. Improved liaison has been attempted with HB officers regularly attending the Landlord's Forum meetings and a hotline being set up solely for private landlords. A corporate Housing Benefit Task Group was also created recently to identify an action plan to reduce backlogs. There has been very little evidence that there has been any shift in landlords' views and access continues to be problematic.

Within the last two weeks, agreement has been reached to eliminate the conflict arising within the Women's Refuge where occupants were not able to get claims processed for stays under 7 days.

Housing Assistants in all estate based housing offices have been trained on HB verification and are able to accept claims from tenants of all sectors. Within the last few weeks the document imaging software used by the HB Section has been installed in the estate offices providing access to all documented information relating to claims. This allows housing officers to see exactly what information is still required for claims to be processed.

Corporate and Cross-Departmental Commitment

Members of both the main political parties have shown concern with the number of households in B&B, in terms of cost to the General Fund and suitability. The Portfolio Member for Housing is regularly updated on performance and it is anticipated that a

Housing Scrutiny Panel will be set up shortly which will consider all key performance areas, including B&B.

A Performance Assessment Framework and service plans are being implemented corporately to identify priority objectives within each service. The reduction of B&B is a key objective within the combined Social & Housing Services plan.

Liaison and joint planning with Social Services, Health and voluntary organisations has been developing apace in recent months. Accommodation has become a recognised pivotal issue in contributing to solutions for families and individuals in need. Examples include: - Care Leavers Action Group (CLAG); Looked after children; accommodation for hospital discharges; children in need assessments; National Framework for Assessments for older people; single assessment point for young homeless; dedicated social worker for community care assessments of homeless in private sector temp accommodation scheme. In most of these cases B&B use is a realistic and unwanted outcome if alternatives are not developed. In CLAG, for example, concerted efforts are now being made to secure increased use of supported lodgings in all sectors, as well as night stops and “crash pads”.

A Homelessness Conference was held in Plymouth 2 weeks ago with 70 delegates attending from a range of agencies. The main aims were to highlight the implications of the Homelessness Act and to consult on the Homelessness Strategy (key issues, current and future provision, structures for monitoring and delivering the strategy action plan etc). The event was funded by the Health Action Zone, organised by Shelter and facilitated by the small, multi-agency Plymouth Housing Forum.

Local Authority Stock

A contract between PCC and Sarsen Housing Association is to be signed imminently for the management of 40 PCC owned one and two bedroom properties for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation for homeless single people and small families. The responsibilities are to be shared with PCC continuing to maintain the dwellings through its existing in-house contract and Sarsen undertaking tenancy and furniture management. Although a mix of quality is planned, it is also an opportunity for the Council to let some of its lower demand properties.

Proposals to Further Reduce the Use of B&B

Private Sector Accommodation

Plymouth is in the fortunate position of having a very significant private rented sector due largely to the presence of a University, dockyard, and major hospital. Recent surveys show that there may be up to 1500 empty properties in this sector. The unfortunate position is that access to reasonable quality properties is all but blocked due to private landlords being unwilling to rent to benefit recipients and/or being able to rely on other demand groups, such as single professionals, contract workers, nurses and students.

It is imperative that PCC continues to utilise the potential offered in the private sector. This can be achieved by obtaining temporary accommodation as an alternative to B&B, and/or by increasing access to private accommodation before a household becomes literally homeless and preferably let on longer term tenancies than the usual 6 month assured short hold.

It is proposed that 10 family sized houses in the private sector are made available for temporary accommodation for homeless households, the scheme to be managed by a Housing Association or private company, possibly one of the organisations currently involved in such provision in Plymouth. Such a scheme could provide for about 60 families pa. Rent levels would be within, or near to, benefit levels therefore any management fee would be the most significant cost, plus some furniture costs.

The cash rent deposit, and bond, schemes operated by the HPU and PATH should be extended to prevent more families having to resort to B&B placement when faced with an emergency situation. Arrangements should be put into place to ensure as much of this is reclaimed as possible either from the landlord or the tenant. If this was successful, about 50 families pa could be helped in this way.

Rent payments will be made to private landlords for up to 50 families as a stopgap until HB claims are processed. This will speed up family's moving-on from B&B or moving straight into private accommodation and offer reassurance to landlords. A significant percentage of this cost should be recovered once claims are processed.

These proposals should assist in avoiding the unacceptable trend of waiting until tenants have received an eviction warrant before offering assistance that inevitably, at that stage, means B&B! It is also of concern that tenants are often required to pay court and bailiff costs when eviction may have resulted from no fault of their own.

Removals and Storage

Due to the increased use of furnished accommodation occupied on a temporary basis, both in private and social housing sectors, greater provision will be required for covering the costs of removals and storage of belongings. Payments will only be made direct to legitimate removal companies

Furniture

Provision of furniture for properties, either full or part, will be made available in certain circumstances. The main Housing Association players in Plymouth will be asked to provide just one or two family size properties each for use as temporary accommodation. It is expected that these properties could comfortably be managed within existing management arrangements but assistance with provision and maintenance of furniture could be considered. Alternatively, one of the Associations may wish to manage the properties as a scheme. This could provide between 10-20 properties.

In a number of cases it has been found problematic for families to move-on from temporary accommodation into permanent homes because of the dependence and delays on Community Care Grants being awarded for purchase of furniture. Tenancies are often commenced with the family not taking up occupation for several weeks. Although discussions will take place with the Benefits Agency on possible solutions, it may be beneficial to provide cash "loans" to encourage earlier vacation of valuable accommodation with a view to recouping the cost from the Benefits Agency or the tenant.

Domestic Violence

Although there is a refuge in Plymouth, the Community Safety Partnership via the Domestic Violence Forum, has determined from independent research that there is a lack of support services for those experiencing domestic abuse. A service level agreement is to be agreed with Plymouth Women's Aid to provide support via help

line, drop-in or referral with the main aims being to reduce the risk of re-victimisation and maintaining occupancy of the family home, or seeking other options. This work should ease the pressure on the Refuge, which regularly has to turn families away, and hopefully lead to fewer homeless approaches. The SLA will specify performance criteria that, if achieved, could lead to increased funding. The project requires the set up costs to be funded.

Empty Homes Strategy

The Empty Homes Officer is keen to link the refurbishment of long standing empty properties to provision of long term good quality accommodation for homeless families. Assistance is provided to landlords to bring the properties back into use. In return, agreement is reached to nominate a family to occupy the property for up to 5 years. Housing Associations will be invited to manage the tenancy and minimum market rents agreed which should be within HB levels. Currently, one house has just been completed and divided into one 4 bed and one 2 bed flat. It is anticipated, because the works tend to be excessive, that a possible 6 additional properties could be made available during the next 12 months. It is anticipated that the cost to the council may be limited to assistance with removal costs, because of the relationship between negotiated guaranteed rents for landlords, and affordable rents set by Housing Associations which should not require contributions from the Council.

PCC Direct Private Sector Leasing

PCC has not entered into any direct leasing arrangements for about 5 years now. The estate based Operations team has just gone through a major restructure with a view to allowing for a greater focus on rent income and tenancy management. The repairs service, as well as allocations, has been centralised. After a reasonable period of “bedding down” consideration can be given to the capacity of local officers to manage a small number of units on a lease basis. In the meantime, the capacity, skills and willing of other organisations will continue to be utilised.

Housing Benefit

Any opportunities for fast tracking HB claims will continue to be explored with HB Officers. Further assistance from Housing and Homelessness teams will continue to be offered. The merits of having a dedicated HB assessor situated within the Homeless Unit, or at least targeted at claims from homeless households, are currently being debated. If a resource issue is identified then there may be value in looking at funding, or match funding, a post. However, it is realised that this cost may be outside the capacity of BBU contribution in addition to the prioritised areas identified above.

What may well offer good value though, is to invite the Welfare Rights Unit to undertake some intensive benefit take-up work to households living in temporary accommodation, particularly B&B.

The introduction of the Verification Framework saw the % of Housing Benefit payable fall from 66% to 33% for claims made by households in B&B. Improvements in procedures, clarification of responsibilities and tighter management must result in this trend reversing.

Management Information

Only data input into the Council's own stock-related database can be interfaced with the existing Management Information software. With increasing variety of temporary

accommodation being used, systems need to be set up that include data regarding properties in different sectors. It is therefore proposed to investigate stand-alone database options. Any system must be able to effectively monitor costs and performance against target outputs.

Access to Support Services

Health Visitor for the Homeless

This post is funded and managed by the Health Authority and located within the Homeless Persons Unit. There was a gap in provision for much of 2001 due to the previous post holder moving on and some difficulty experienced in obtaining a replacement. This has recently been resolved and the current Health Visitor is involved in some hugely beneficial work, including: -

- Developing good working partnerships with agencies, jointly operating with the likes of Social Services, Education, Mental Health and Drug services among others. Links have also been made into the Midwifery Service for antenatal women and into the voluntary sector for training and employment opportunities.
- Supporting families in B&B and temporary accommodation – by visiting, assessing needs, promoting good health and preventing ill health with a whole family approach, and encouraging uptake of services such as registering with a GP.
- Developing pro-active working practices with the Homeless Officers, including earlier intervention at first point of contact, advice for investigations etc.
- Identifying vulnerable groups so that the right services are provided i.e. providing advice on clients being discharged from hospitals, prisons and other institutions.
- Improving standards in B&B by liaising with other agencies and doing joint inspections.
- Communicating with other homeless units, health visitors and other professionals providing specialist services to the homeless to pick up good practices.

Sunflower Family Centre

This team is situated in central Plymouth and provides intensive support to families. When Raglan Court was opened last year one of the flats was designated as a “community flat” which would be opened to residents on a sessional basis and run by Family Support Workers from Sunflower. This provides support, respite, and companionship to parents while they are living there temporarily, as well as access to advice and training & education opportunities. Plenty of play equipment is available for young children. As part of a housing development scheme adjacent to Raglan Court which is due to commence during 2002, agreement was reached for Sarsen Housing Association to pay for a small play area within the grounds.

Raglan Court also benefits from being situated just yards from the Cumberland Health Centre where GP's have agreed to support all residents during their time there.

Private Sector Scheme for Single Homeless

The scheme managed by CSM offers fairly intensive management (2 ½ officers to 50 people) and includes experienced community support workers. The mostly vulnerable residents are guaranteed an assessment within 3 working days of moving in and good links have been developed between this private company, social services, the HPU and the HB team. A dedicated Social Worker has been allotted to set aside one morning a week to liaise with CSM with the aim of completing fast track Community Care Assessments that are then forwarded to HB officers so that THB payments can be authorised. This ensures that the appropriate level of support is identified for each new tenant.

Community Psychiatric Nurse for the Homeless

This dedicated post has been in place for a number of years and provides an invaluable aid to Homeless Officers, Hostel Workers and agencies in terms of providing direct contact with vulnerable clients and access to mental health services. The post holder is actively involved in a number of forums, working groups and committees to promote better practices and identify gaps in services.

An identified need is to have a dedicated Social Worker for the Homeless based in the HPU. Similarly to the Health Visitor, this would encourage early intervention and advice and improve quality of assessments and decision-making. No funding opportunity within existing services is possible at present with Social Services currently under severe financial pressures.

Proposed Outputs

Total No. of households in B&B	-	32% reduction by 12/02 to 64 74% reduction by 12/03 to 25	
Total No. of families in B&B	-	48% reduction by 12/02 to 15 84% reduction by 12/03 to 5	(which should only include emergency placements)
Average length of stay in B&B For families with children after Assessment completed	-	2 weeks by 12/03	
Max. length of stay in B&B for Families with children after Assessment completed	-	8 weeks by 12/03	
Average length of time for Assessments to be completed For families in B&B	-	10 days by 12/02	

50 families to be assisted into private rented accommodation that would otherwise have been placed into B&B.

Between 10-20 families to be assisted with move-on into permanent accommodation by providing furniture or cash for purchasing furniture.

No. of persons experiencing domestic abuse helped to remain in own homes or moved into non-B&B accommodation (target to be determined from SLA but a reasonable target of 10 households).

6 long-term empty properties brought back into use for settled accommodation for homeless families.

% Housing Benefit payable on claims from households in B&B – 40% by 12/02.
60% by 12/03

All families in B&B to have been visited and assessed by the Health Visitor.

Outputs are based on a combination of proposals and existing, or imminent, initiatives

Which are outlined within this report.

Costing For 12 Months

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Estimated Cost</u>	<u>Agreed</u>
Domestic Violence SLA	£5000	£ Nil
TA Software Database	£3000	£3000
PRS HAMA/CAMA scheme (Housing Associations or private companies managing 10 houses in PRS as temporary accommodation for homeless families)	£15000	£10000
PRS Rent Deposits	£10000	£10000
HB Stop Gaps (These two initiatives are intended to assist about 50 families into permanent PRS accommodation)	£10000	£10000
Cash for Furniture (Assisting 10-20 families to move-on from temporary into permanent accommodation)	£10000	£10000
Welfare Rights Unit (To increase rate of HB claims & documents submitted by households in B&B. Will increase income to homelessness budget)	£5000	£3000

Social Worker for Homeless (Advice at point of contact and during investigations will speed up decisions contributing to turnaround targets and identify needs, facilitating access to services)	£20000	£20000
Total	£78000	£66000