



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives – One Year On

Policy Briefing 14



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This policy brief is the latest in a series that has covered issues such as providing more settled homes, homelessness prevention, domestic violence, employment and health. The series offers advice to local authorities and their partners on the Government's homelessness agenda and its key policy issues and priorities.

Introduction

In March 2005, ODPM published *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives*¹, its strategy for tackling homelessness. The strategy acknowledged the significant achievements of meeting challenging targets to reduce rough sleeping and to end the long-term use of bed & breakfast hotels for families with children.² In November 2005 the Public Accounts Committee recognised the impact of these achievements when it reported that, "The Homelessness Directorate's target setting, supported by financial support and advice to local authorities, has helped to bring about significant alleviation of the worst consequences of homelessness."

The strategy set out our plans for building on these successes whilst moving the agenda forward, in particular through tackling some of the wider causes and consequences of homelessness. This paper summarises our actions in the year since the strategy was published.

At the heart of our strategy is continued investment in homelessness prevention. This approach has demonstrated considerable success in reducing new cases of homelessness. During 2005 homelessness acceptances reached their lowest level for 20 years. Statistics published today (13 March 2006) show this downward trend continuing with acceptances during the October – December quarter 27% lower than the same period in 2004.

Households who are owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation are often provided with temporary accommodation by local authorities, where a settled home isn't available immediately. The latest statistics show that there were 98,730 households placed in temporary accommodation. This represents a reduction of 2% on the previous quarter and is the first time that there has been a similar reduction since 1996; and follows two years of virtually no change. The vast majority of households have been provided with homes which are self-contained and provide sole use of kitchen and bathroom facilities. Latest statistics show that 92% of families with children are living in this type of accommodation.

However, the temporary nature of this accommodation means that households may find it hard to put down roots in the community and call where they live a home. For these reasons, we have set a target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 (from a total of just over 100,000 at the end of 2004).

All local authorities are expected to contribute to the achievement of a 50% reduction in temporary accommodation use by 2010. We see this target, and effective implementation of

1 Available at:

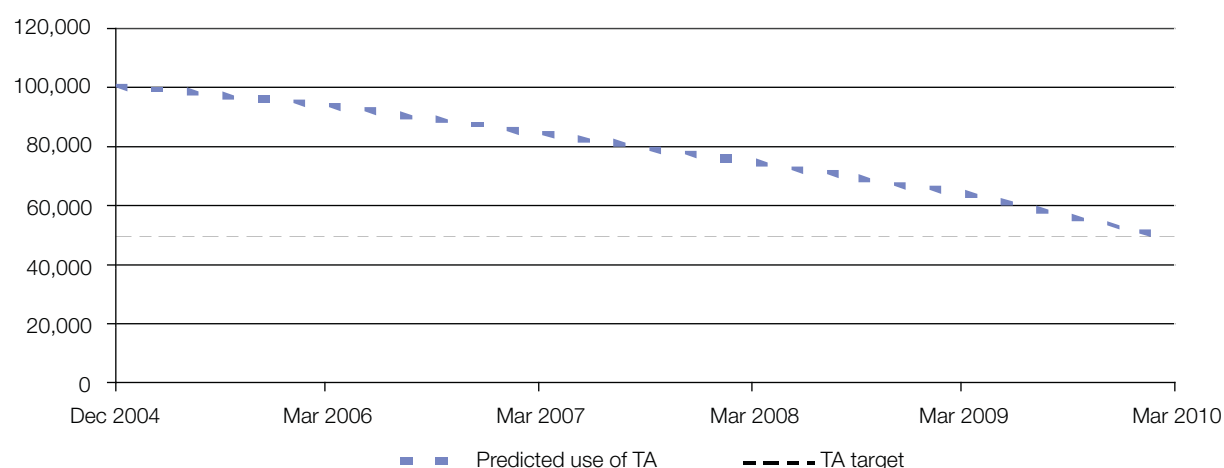
www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/784/SustainableCommunitiesSettledHomesChangingLivesPDF796Kb_id1149784.pdf

2 The Prime Minister's target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds was met early in 2001 and the reduction has been sustained at lowest recorded levels (currently a 75% reduction in rough sleeping since 1998). The 2002 target to end the use of B&B accommodation for families with children except in an emergency (and even then for no more than six weeks) by March 2004 was met and has been sustained.

the measures needed to achieve it, as milestones on a route towards a longer-term minimum level of homelessness and temporary accommodation use in every area.

Local authority temporary accommodation action plans and the information provided by local authorities in the homelessness surveys reported in Policy Briefing 13 *Survey of English Local Authorities About Homelessness* demonstrates a projected 51% decrease in the number of households in TA by 2010. The chart below illustrates the progress we expect.

Temporary accommodation trajectory – based on predictions by LAs



We shall keep this under review and report on progress against this trajectory each quarter.

Key Actions

Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives commits ODPM to increasing investment in homelessness prevention and increasing the opportunities for moving out of temporary accommodation. This policy brief gives a summary of the key actions the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate has taken towards delivering the aims of the strategy, together with future plans.

We aim to:

Deliver a wider range of effective front-line preventative services, through increasing homelessness funding for local authorities and voluntary sector agencies by 23% by 2007/08 (£200m over three years 2004/05 to 2007/08):

Action we have taken includes:

- Encouraged, through guidance and financial support, local authorities to introduce effective schemes to prevent homelessness. In a survey in September 2005, local authorities reported that:
 - Eighty six per cent of local authorities now have more staff employed to prevent homelessness than to “process” homelessness applications compared to 2002.

- All but one local authority ran one or more prevention schemes. While 34 local authorities have four or fewer schemes in operation, there are 152 authorities that have 10 or more schemes running. Most commonly local authorities have eight to nine schemes up and running.
 - Rent deposit/bond schemes, designed to help people get a home in the private rented sector, are the most likely prevention scheme to be implemented by local authorities.
 - The most common scheme planned for the future that is expected to prevent homelessness is Choice Based Lettings for social housing, whereby 177 local authorities plan to implement such a scheme by 2007. Other popular schemes that are planned include Sanctuary schemes for victims of domestic violence (165 LAs) and Accredited Landlord Schemes in the private rented sector (142 LAs).
 - The survey asked for the number of cases where homelessness was prevented in 2004/05. Nationally, it was estimated that 58,604 households had not become homeless due to the prevention initiatives of local authorities. If data submitted for the first quarter of 2005/06 is grossed into an annual figure, we can estimate that 73,884 households will have been prevented from becoming homeless – a 23% increase from the previous year.
- We have announced an £88 million two year financial package for local authorities (for 2006/07 and 07/08), to support prevention schemes. This two year package fulfills our commitment to provide greater certainty for authorities and capacity for longer-term financial planning.
 - In November 2005 we announced the allocation of the £2 million HIF (Homelessness Innovation Fund) to the nineteen successful projects. These schemes are predicted to lead to a decrease in temporary accommodation of around 4,000 households and prevent some 2,400 cases of homelessness.
 - We will shortly be publishing a good practice guide based on an independent evaluation of homelessness prevention schemes. This will offer both good practice principles, as well as case study examples, to help local authorities and their partners implement successful and cost-effective schemes to prevent homelessness.

We aim to:

Help 1.2 million vulnerable people sustain independent living through the £5 billion for Supporting People over the three years 2004/05 – 07/08:

Action we have taken includes:

- We have recently consulted on work to develop a strategy for taking forward the Supporting People programme, looking at the full range of issues in relation to effective delivery of the programme and its links to other services and strategies (e.g. around homelessness). The consultation ran until the end of February 2006, and we intend to publish our conclusions on a way forward in the summer.

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- In October 2005 we launched a new online Directory of Supporting People Services. This allows any vulnerable person or their advocate to search for available support services across England. Over 20,000 searches have already been completed with the website.

We aim to:

Increase the supply of new social rented homes by 50% by 2008, providing 75,000 new social rented homes over the next three years:

Action we have taken includes:

- *The Government's Response to Kate Barker's Review of Housing Supply*³ confirms our commitment to increase the supply of housing and the availability of homes to rent at affordable levels. It included a commitment to set out ambitious plans for increasing social housing supply in the next Comprehensive Spending Review (2007), with new investment alongside efficiencies and innovation in provision.
- The timetable for the provision of 75,000 social rented homes only commenced from 2005/06 but we are on track to deliver.
- The Housing Corporation will shortly be set a target for delivery of social rented homes over the next two years.

We aim to:

Make better use of existing social and private sector housing, including converting temporary accommodation into settled homes, where suitable, and improving co-operation between local authorities and housing associations in the allocation of social housing:

Action we have taken includes:

- In *The Government's Response to the Barker Review of Housing Supply* we have said that we will be "examining with local authorities and others the effectiveness of new initiatives and approaches to provide settled, affordable homes in properties that would otherwise be provided as more expensive and insecure temporary accommodation".
- The London Housing Board is making available £20m in 2007/8 to London boroughs and housing associations for innovative 'trial' schemes which provide settled housing solutions for households in temporary accommodation.

3 Available at:
www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pre_budget_report/prebud_pbr05/assoc_docs/prebud_pbr05_adbarker.cfm

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- The Working Future pilot led by GLA and East Thames Group was launched in September 2005 and over 100 households are now signed up and receiving subsidised rents and training/employment support.
 - In September 2005, we published “Improving the Effectiveness of Rent Arrears Management – Good Practice Guidance”, which emphasises the importance of establishing clear links between arrears policies and homelessness strategies.
 - We continue to work with the Housing Corporation to support local authorities and housing associations in developing effective partnerships to tackle and prevent homelessness. The Corporation plans to issue later in the year a consultation document about RSLs’ role in tackling homelessness.

We aim to:

Improve the evidence base about homelessness.

Action we have taken includes:

- We will shortly be publishing the key findings of an independent evaluation of homelessness prevention schemes, which will be accompanied by a good practice guide. Key messages from the good practice guide are that knowledge of homelessness within the local area should inform decisions about the provision of homelessness prevention services. Prevention should not just be targeted at households likely to be in priority need under the homelessness legislation, and local authorities should consider providing housing options interviews, focusing on preventing homelessness, to all those who seek their help.
- We have conducted an email survey of every local authority in England, which showed that 99% of local authorities operate one or more prevention scheme and most run 8 or 9 and published the full results in our last policy brief in this series (December 2005).⁴
- We are conducting a major survey of 2,500 households who have experienced homelessness (due to report Autumn 2006). The survey will provide evidence on the causes of homelessness and the impacts of living in temporary accommodation.

4 Available at: www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162473

We aim to:

Take forward a programme of work across Government to tackle the disadvantage that can cause homelessness:

Action we have taken includes:

- We are working closely with the Home Office and other Government Departments to support the delivery of the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan, the Five Year Strategy for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-Offending, the Prolific and Other Priority Offenders (PPOs) Strategy and the Youth Justice Board's Youth Resettlement Framework for Action. Work to assess prisoners' housing needs and provide housing advice are achieving positive outcomes:
 - Currently 89% of prisoners are assessed for housing needs during induction (the target is 90% of all new receptions);
 - the proportion of offenders leaving prison with accommodation to go to has risen from 74% in April 2004 to 89% at the end of November 2005; and
 - Housing advice is now available in 123 of 141 prisons.
- In line with our action plan, 13 Drug Action Team (DAT) areas⁵ have been funded by the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP), to develop a Comprehensive Rent Deposit Model (CRDM) for drug misusing offenders leaving prison or residential settings to help find them a home in the private rented sector.
- Six Regional Reducing Re-offending Strategies have been published and work is progressing in London and the North East to develop links between NOMS (The National Offender Management Service) and housing providers. Work has also begun on the development of an accommodation Gateway in Bournemouth and Poole in the South West. This is a three year project aiming to develop links with housing providers to reduce re-offending. The project will handle referrals from a range of services, establishing a strategic relationship across the region.
- Jointly with the Home Office, we are planning to appoint specialist advisers with knowledge and experience of housing/homelessness issues and drug treatment service delivery. The advisers will map needs and services for drug users in areas which have historically high numbers of drug users who are homeless or living in insecure accommodation, and will work with local authorities, DATs and other partners to identify barriers to accessing accommodation for those leaving drug treatment and promote solutions to overcome barriers.

5 Oxfordshire, Bristol, Cambridgeshire, Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Derby, Birmingham, Gateshead, Manchester, Liverpool, Calderdale & Bradford

- We are working with the Home Office, the Department of Health (DH) and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) to support delivery of the Drugs Strategy. Work includes improving access to:
 - drug and alcohol treatment for rough sleepers and single homeless people by ensuring DAT treatment plans are aligned with homelessness strategies; and
 - accommodation and support for drug misusers leaving in-patient and residential rehabilitation.

- In January 2006, DH published its White Paper “Our health, our care, our say”.⁶ This highlights the needs of people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation, and the need for joint working between health services and local authorities to address them. ODPM and DH have each seconded a specialist adviser for two years from a health background to work on homelessness and health issues. The two advisers are developing a joint work plan which will include mapping health services in key areas with high levels of homelessness, to provide a snapshot of service provision, examples of good practice and identify gaps which need to be addressed. This mapping will then inform the development of a model for service provision, which other areas can adopt to improve health outcomes for people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation.

- We have been working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to ensure that statutory guidance linked to the Children Act 2004 addresses the needs of children from families who have experienced homelessness, and are living in temporary accommodation. We are also supporting specific initiatives to prevent homelessness amongst children and young people, for example rolling out the Safe Moves pilots. We have funded Relate to develop a nationally recognised model for homelessness mediation which should be available for piloting by July 2006. We have also funded YMCA England to look at innovative ways of preventing homelessness and supporting young people who are threatened with homelessness.

- We are working with DWP and Jobcentre Plus to develop the London Homeless Partnership which aims to provide benefits, training and employment advice to homeless people in London and to signpost them to other sources of support and services. The London Homeless Partnership will be based in Wedge House in Southwark, but will operate on an outreach basis to key hostels, and day/drop-in centres, including a number of those being funded by the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP). We will also co-operate in offering jobcentre plus service to homeless customers in other partner premises such as those offering vocational and motivational training. The aim is to ensure that homeless people receive a holistic package of support to help them move onto and through benefits to independence and work.

- ODPM is supporting a bid led by Off the Street and Into Work for Invest to Save Budget funding over 3 years for the “Transitional Spaces Project” (TSP). If successful the project will work with 100 individuals each year to help them gain sustainable employment, move out of hostels and into private rented sector accommodation.

6 Available at www.dh.gov.uk

- ODPM continues to work with DfES, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and other agencies to improve access to training and employment for people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. Specific initiatives include work with LSC to develop accredited qualifications⁷ for homeless people and those who support them in learning, and continued support for Business Action on Homelessness' pre-employment training and work placement programme.
- ODPM and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport continue to look for opportunities to use art, sport, dance, play, and physical and creative activity to improve the self esteem and engagement of people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. ODPM has part funded a project called Route Out, a collaboration between Connection at St Martins and a group of organisations and individuals with an interest in both homelessness and the arts. This project will increase opportunities for homeless people to take part in high quality arts activity and raise public awareness of the potential of the arts to tackle social exclusion. ODPM recently hosted an exhibition of artwork by homeless people, including those participating in Route Out.
- ODPM has strengthened its working relationship with NASS in a drive to prevent refugee homelessness. The joint appointment of a specialist adviser on refugees and housing, seconded from a local authority, has been central to this initiative.
- The adviser was fully involved in the recent retendering of the NASS accommodation contract and, as a result, the new contract contains a number of requirements to prevent refugee homelessness and contribute to the wider sustainable communities agenda. Workshops are currently being held in each region to promote these changes and encourage greater partnership working between local authorities and NASS accommodation providers.
- Regional pilots have also been operating in the North West and West Midlands since November 2005. The pilots aim to develop an effective model of delayed eviction or tenancy conversions for former NASS supported refugees and improved housing advice and support. The pilots' successes will be promoted more widely from May 2006 and will be included in a joint Departmental policy brief later this year.
- We are working jointly with the MoD on the next phase of research which focuses on the effectiveness of interventions in preventing rough sleeping and homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in London.
- We have invested £1.4m over 3 years (2003/04 – 05/06) to develop a new national domestic violence freephone helpline, supported by UKRefugesonline (UKROL), a secure internet based UK-wide database of refuge spaces and domestic violence services.

7 The Certificate in Self-development through Learning (Learning Power) and the Certificate in Supporting the Development Needs of Homeless and Vulnerable People were developed through the 'Outside In' project which was run as a pilot through the Learning and Skills Council's Homelessness Sector project.

- As a result of improved access to refuge accommodation and domestic violence support services, UKROL plays an important part in preventing homelessness. We will continue to fund the project in 2006/07.
- We have invested more than £30 million over 3 years (2003/04 – 2005/06) for new refuge provision and refurbishment of existing refuge schemes.
- We provided £200,000 in 2005/06 for the development of minimum service standards for the Women's Aid network of domestic violence services, a programme of accredited training and to support the regional network of women's refuges.
- In September 2005 we published a development guide on tackling homelessness amongst ethnic minority households, published research findings into the causes of homelessness in ethnic minority communities and launched a £3m Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund to support local authorities and their partner stakeholders develop new ways of tackling and preventing homelessness amongst their ethnic minority populations. An announcement of successful projects to be funded during 2006/07 and 2007/08 is expected in the early summer.
- The revised Homelessness Code of Guidance will give improved guidance on the factors to be taken into account by housing authorities when considering whether temporary accommodation is suitable for people who have been accepted as homeless. The Code will draw local authorities' attention to relevant statutory provisions dealing with standards of accommodation such as the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System introduced by the Housing Act 2004. This will enable authorities to more easily understand and deliver accommodation to acceptable standards and empower households accepted as homeless to access information on such standards.
- *Settled homes; changing lives* recognised that there is wide variation between different geographic areas in the scale and nature of homelessness problems. While homelessness is not a bigger problem in rural than in urban areas, rural areas have their own specific homelessness problems and appropriate solutions. In order to support rural authorities, we have worked jointly with DEFRA to appoint a specialist adviser to concentrate on rural issues.

We aim to:

Help more people move away from homelessness and avoid a return to the streets:

Action we have taken includes:

- In 2005 we published a best practice "toolkit" to help providers improve the efficiency and effectiveness of hostels.⁸

8 Available at www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/804/HostelsReviewToolkitPDF700Kb_id1149804.pdf

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- The £90 million Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) was launched in January 2005 and runs until 2007/08. It currently funds more than 100 projects in 35 local authority areas. The funding is underpinned by the need to change the very nature of hostels to provide better opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness and prevent them from becoming homeless again. Through the Programme, hostels will cease to be a place of last resort, but instead will be centres of excellence and choice which positively change lives.
 - We have spent some £54 million this financial year (05/06) on the programme, with a huge amount of work being put into the design and planning of projects, and construction now taking place on many. Some of the projects are now completing and opening, for example Riverside House in Tower Hamlets, London and the Dawn Centre in Leicester. The bulk of the projects will be opening this coming year and next.
 - The programme is supporting real innovation. We are encouraging projects, through user consultation, to look at innovative ideas on design and use of buildings and in how to deliver the projects. In a number of cases this is resulting in residents' real involvement in the building of projects. For example, Elliot House in Newcastle will be built through self-build, by the residents themselves, with on-site training.
 - A number of the projects include exciting activities on site, such as cafes (for the public – run by homeless residents), leisure facilities (e.g. football pitches), enterprise units (e.g. car mechanic workshops, music studios). These sorts of activities all help to build an energised community feel that will encourage residents to face the future positively and to tackle their problems and needs.
 - Change Up officers, employed through Homeless Link (and funded through the Government's Change Up programme), are working in each region with the voluntary sector and local authorities to help to achieve a culture change and to identify and translate exciting opportunities to improve services and facilities for homeless people in their areas.
 - Work is ongoing to identify and develop ways in which to ensure that projects and services are sustainable, for example, through ongoing funding streams (not just Supporting People funding).

Conclusion

Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives set out an ambitious programme of action aimed at eradicating homelessness. Our approach has been to help those who are most vulnerable or at greatest risk, while building up a more effective system for meeting wider housing and support needs. Progress over the last year has been good – new cases of homelessness continue to reduce, whilst the numbers of households awaiting settled housing has levelled off and, in the last quarter, shown a reduction of 2% for the first time since March 1997.

There is further to go and in the coming year will build on achievements to date, identify and promote what's working in preventing homelessness, and, in doing so, will continue to draw on the expertise of our delivery partners through the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Group.

Today also sees the launch of a DVD produced by the seven councils awarded Beacon status in 2003 for their achievements in tackling homelessness. Copies are available free of charge to anyone working in housing and homelessness and will be a valuable tool in sharing best practice. Local authorities will shortly be reviewing their homelessness strategies which must be renewed by 2008 and we hope that they will be able to learn from the DVD about new approaches which they can consider for their own reviews and strategies.