



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies

Evaluation and Good Practice



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Evaluation and Good Practice Guide

November 2004

Housing Quality Network Services

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Executive Summary

The Homelessness Act 2002 is intended to bring about a step change in the way many local authorities approach the issue of homelessness. The Act requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to take a more comprehensive approach, promoting prevention over traditional and reactive responses, and taking an overview of future needs.

This is the report of an evaluation of LHA Homelessness Strategies developed under the 2002 legislation. It was carried out by Housing Quality Network Services (HQNS) between February and July 2004, on behalf of the ODPM.

HQNS evaluated Strategies and Reviews from all 354 authorities, and also studied self-assessment forms submitted by the authorities to the ODPM. A further group of 14 authorities (covering each region) plus two outside agencies attended a workshop in May 2004 to discuss the process of Strategy development and lessons for the future.

Findings

This report is designed to offer LHAs and others a picture of how authorities have tackled their new responsibilities, and in particular to offer good practice to aid future service improvements. This section summarises the research team's main findings. The recommendations on page 15 reflect these findings.

OVERALL COMMENTS ON THE PROCESS

The legislation requires LHAs to carry out a Review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a Strategy based on the results of this Review within one year of the Act coming into force – that is, by July 2003. Every authority produced a Review and Strategy within the timescales set out by the ODPM (Paragraph 3.21 and 3.91).

The exercise has been an impressive undertaking that, at best, drew in the views of service users, other agencies and authorities, and other council departments as never before to focus on tackling homelessness. LHAs and their partners seeking to tackle and reduce homelessness were able to plan for significant changes to their services and their responses, as a result of what was learnt during their Review of homelessness. Overall, it has been a very positive process, and the universal view among participants in a workshop as part of the evaluation was that, although the task had been quite a difficult one, it was highly useful and they felt much had been gained by it, making a difference to the homelessness picture across the country.

Feedback from authorities suggested the guidance from the ODPM was clear and useful. Other guidance that LHAs found most helpful included the Shelter website and booklets, and seminars run locally and nationally.

The strongest authorities have not considered the exercise finished, but have continued the process to fill the gaps in services that were identified, and extend the reach of prevention measures. The researchers commend this approach to all authorities: the benefits of a co-ordinated approach are already being felt in tackling Government priorities, and should impact upon other forms of homelessness and other user groups over time.

Developing Homelessness Reviews

CARRYING OUT THE REVIEW

Many authorities produced thorough Reviews that take account of and analyse the current situation in terms of understanding the causes and scale of homelessness, and what needs to change in the provision of services to meet the needs identified. The best authorities have been able to build on already good services by developing their strategic role within their region and sub-region. Some groups of authorities worked particularly effectively together, setting up several partnerships to undertake Reviews and develop Strategies. Other initiatives included setting up advisory groups for authorities to learn from each other or share research; working with near neighbours to share resources; and joint action planning or joint delivery of particular services (Paragraph 3.11 – 3.19).

USING EXISTING INFORMATION TO INFORM REVIEWS

There were some excellent examples of authorities using information from their previous activities to develop strategic approaches to homelessness and consult others. Authorities that had carried out Best Value Reviews of homelessness or housing advice generally built on this, and others had built on work done to develop single homelessness or rough sleeping strategies (Paragraph 3.25).

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES AND CURRENT AND FUTURE LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS

Authorities were required to attempt, as accurately as possible, to gain an understanding of the main causes of homelessness locally. Good quality data, comprehensive coverage and systematic collection are all central to this.

Most authorities carried out this exercise well in relation to current homelessness, with some working hard to expand the information base beyond information about those in priority need groups. Ideas used included exploring where people came from or went to outside the authority's boundaries; and mapping at parish level. Data availability was acknowledged as a difficulty, however, particularly in obtaining information from other agencies, such as Social Services, Probation and Youth Offending Teams, and advice and support agencies. Many authorities' Action

Plans identified the need to improve data collection. Assessing future levels of homelessness was difficult and this was a gap in many Reviews. Some authorities said they would welcome more guidance on mapping future needs. Authorities that did tackle the issue used: population trends; indicators of need, demand and aspirations from Housing Needs Surveys; trends in homelessness data; and plans for prevention through, for example, advice to those leaving prison, hospital or care (Paragraph 3.34 – 3.36).

LEARNING ABOUT THE MAIN CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The main causes of homelessness were, almost without exception, found to be:

- Parents/friends/other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate.
- Violent relationship breakdown with partner.
- Loss of tenancy through the termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy.

This finding was consistent across the country, though in some cases the order among the three main causes varied, and some authorities identified relationship breakdown in general as one of the top three causes (in some cases authorities didn't distinguish between violent and non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner). Authorities with more sophisticated monitoring systems for homelessness confirmed the general finding. Those that explored the triggers to homelessness in detail uncovered evidence of previous rent arrears in all tenures, substance misuse and poor health among the underlying causes. Many Action Plans identified the need to do further research on the causes of homelessness, amongst both priority and non-priority groups (Paragraph 3.42).

MAPPING AND AUDITING SERVICES

The legislation requires LHAs to base their Strategies on what has been learnt through the Review about the gap between current provision in all sectors and needs for prevention, accommodation, and support. A few authorities went beyond their own and other services specifically aimed at homeless people and described activities that help to prevent and respond to homelessness, such as RSLs' advice for applicants, Social Services' help on welfare benefits, and Care and Repair services for older and disabled people. Many made the link with Community Legal Services Partnership strategies and plans, and most described the services provided by voluntary sector advice and supported housing agencies.

Examples of good practice in this area included mapping provision in a table format with detailed information on services, premises and opening hours, plus strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities (Paragraph 3.49).

REVIEWING PREVENTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Prevention is a core element in the 2002 legislation, and is seen by the Government as the key to better services, reduced cost and avoiding the most damaging effects of homelessness.

Some nine in ten authorities included prevention in their Reviews, though in some cases authorities had not taken a wide enough view of prevention as this was not considered as separate from housing advice or support. Some did not examine gaps in provision or did not evaluate the success of existing services.

Examples of good practice include listing gaps and unmet needs for a series of risk factors – financial, social, health, behavioural, and multiple needs; and tracking a sample of households who had made homeless applications to identify how their homelessness could have been prevented. Several authorities reviewed the outcomes of tenancy support services (Paragraph 3.55).

REVIEWING THE NEEDS AND ISSUES AFFECTING DIFFERENT CLIENT GROUPS

About four-fifths of authorities considered all forms of homelessness in their Reviews, the remaining one-fifth had focussed on priority need groups. However many missed particular client groups. The most frequently missed groups were: single homeless people and/or rough sleepers, ex-services personnel, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, former asylum seekers and refugees, and Gypsies/Travellers.

Young people, either single or in families, are a key priority in most parts of the country. A second key group is women and their children who are victims of domestic violence; and a third group appearing in many Reviews is people with drug and alcohol problems.

Activities to assess needs of different groups include a hidden households survey that identified the experiences and difficulties of finding accommodation; research through a charity working with single homeless people; and use of a county-wide event to reach people from the Looked After system (Paragraph 3.67).

INVOLVING OTHERS IN REVIEWS

The Government expects LHAs to take a lead in developing and publishing Reviews, but not in isolation: other agencies, particularly Social Services, are expected to be fully involved. Social Services authorities must take the Strategy into account in their day-to-day work, and are required to provide assistance in the Review and Strategy development process.

Social Services departments were invited to be represented on most Strategy Steering Groups. However, it proved difficult in many areas to get staff along to meetings and in general, it is clear that LHAs in many places failed to get over to Social Services managers the benefits that participating in the process could have for them and their service users. As a result, the involvement of Social Services at a strategic level was disappointing in many areas, though staff at other levels contributed to most consultation events informing the Reviews (Paragraph 3.74).

Other statutory agencies such as Health and Probation were also hard to engage in many areas; where they did play a part, they provided helpful input alongside staff from agencies such as Connexions, Youth Offending Teams, drug and alcohol agencies, and prisons.

Many LHAs put a great deal of thought into how to get a full picture of homelessness in their areas, and consulted such bodies as local colleges, youth parliaments, building societies, traveller liaison officers and others, in addition to the ODPM list of 19 types of organisation that should be included (Paragraph 3.79).

Some authorities creatively addressed the problems of engaging with homeless people and service users by going out into the streets, or into hostels and day centres to talk to them, or organising 'speakout' events (Paragraph 3.80 – 3.82).

In two cases, county councils produced Social Services Strategies to tackle homelessness in partnership with districts. In other areas, Homelessness Forums, postal surveys of agencies, structured interviews, Reference Groups, conferences and a roadshow were held to aid consultation.

Developing Homelessness Strategies

The great majority of Strategies were clearly based on the authority's Homelessness Review. Some authorities suffered at this stage from their Reviews being incomplete, while others that recognised gaps in their Review sought to take a more comprehensive approach in their Strategy (Paragraph 3.86).

PUBLISHING READABLE AND ACCESSIBLE STRATEGIES

Every council completed a Homelessness Strategy by July 2003, the deadline in the 2002 Homelessness Act. The authorities responded to the legislation by focusing on the new agenda, improving information on homelessness and its causes, looking critically at services and focusing on prevention.

Strategies were produced in a wide variety of formats and often in other languages. Good examples include a folder containing the Strategy, the Review, a service audit and a summary of all three documents; and a Strategy in a ring binder to allow easy updating (Paragraph 3.99).

MAKING WIDER LINKS AND DEMONSTRATING CORPORATE AND MULTI-AGENCY COMMITMENT

The 2002 legislation and guidance emphasise the need for greater corporate commitment from authorities to tackling homelessness than in the past, and the need to make links to other strategic documents and groups, including the work of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) where they exist.

Both proved to be areas of difficulty for some authorities, particularly district councils. However, those with well-connected forums and groups already working on homelessness and housing issues were able to use these as a resource and means of widening the scope of activity.

The high profile of Homelessness Strategies helped officers to raise the awareness of members and senior staff about this area of work. Workshop participants highlighted the positive aspects of securing corporate and multi-agency commitment (Paragraph 3.118).

ADDRESSING ALL FORMS OF HOMELESSNESS

Most authorities included all forms of homelessness in their Strategies, though non-statutory homelessness was a gap in a significant number. Particular examples of good practice included pre-release work with prisoners; enabling access for single homeless people to a drug and alcohol detoxification project; and an initiative to provide information and access to networks for victims of forced marriage (Paragraph 3.119).

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) issues

Some authorities demonstrated excellent engagement with BME communities and groups locally but many authorities neglected BME issues. There is a clear need for better data collection, involvement of BME groups in Strategy development, and better services to these communities. Specialist services such as refugee customer services officers, advice for Travellers, surgeries with marginalised groups such as Asian women, and development of a BME Housing Strategy were among the more innovative approaches (Paragraph 3.126).

TACKLING PRIORITY ISSUES ON HOMELESSNESS

The focus on a small, well defined set of Government priorities has produced results in tackling rough sleeping and use of bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B); and almost every Strategy considers prevention and support activities. However, a number of authorities have failed to identify solutions for the future in these areas, possibly because the targets have been reached or because the problem may not currently exist or is considered difficult to measure. The increased use of B&B revealed in a small number of Strategies is a cause for concern. A few Strategies failed to identify plans to address the main causes of homelessness found in their areas.

Innovative activities on prevention included refocusing the housing register to reflect the main causes of homelessness, enabling assessment of potential homelessness when applications for housing are made (Paragraph 3.130 – 3.135).

Many authorities have improved housing advice services through triage systems that identify the housing problem and seeing if advice could prevent homelessness, before an appointment is made with homelessness officers (Paragraph 3.138).

Mediation schemes to prevent the loss of home from parents, relatives or friends have been or are to be set up in many areas. Some authorities have broadened this into family reconciliation, linking with support services including employment, education and training (Paragraph 3.140).

With loss of private sector tenancies featuring prominently as a cause of homelessness, many authorities have begun to tackle the problem by working with private landlords. Schemes are often linked to accreditation schemes and work to improve Housing Benefit (HB) systems (Paragraph 3.142).

Proposals to tackle domestic violence were also widespread, including actions by some authorities to try to prevent repeat homelessness among this group (Paragraph 3.146).

On repeat homelessness generally, most Strategies identified the provision of floating support as a prevention measure. One authority researched why tenancies fail and why clients leave B&B, calculated the public cost and considered how the money could be re-directed into prevention (Paragraph 3.149).

Access to settled housing, including access to the private rented sector, were also acknowledged as important aspects of tackling homelessness. Rent deposit schemes are recognised as crucial aids in this. Authorities in high demand/high pressure areas often included actions to support homeless people's access to social housing, and some have developed incentive schemes to free up under-occupied housing. In the same areas, most authorities proposed use of S.106 planning powers to increase the supply of new affordable housing (Paragraph 3.169 – 3.176 and Paragraph 3.181).

Authorities that addressed other priorities including health, or education, training and employment, worked in partnership with a health promotion team, primary care staff, and neighbourhood managers to develop more inclusive schemes (Paragraph 3.184 and 3.190).

DIFFERENCES AMONG TYPES OF COUNCIL AND DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

On most issues concerning Homelessness Strategies and their development, the researchers found no difference between single and two-tier districts. Social Services were no more likely to be involved where it was situated in the same council. Similarly, each type of council was equally likely to demonstrate corporate commitment and joint action with other bodies (Paragraph 3.193).

In general, districts and especially rural areas are less well developed in partnership working – though there are notable exceptions (see next paragraph).

Unitary and metropolitan councils were significantly more likely to have linked their Strategy in with wider authority strategies such as Community Plans and LSPs. The issue of resources in smaller districts is likely to play a part, though there are excellent examples of county-wide work in rural areas.

The researchers found no discernible impact of contracting out or transfer in the development of most Strategies. Stock transfer registered social landlords (RSLs) were active in developing Homelessness Reviews and Strategies in some areas, and less active in others.

Action Planning

DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS

Action planning is a weak point in many Strategies. Here, targets and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation need to be sharpened. Many authorities have not identified the resources needed to carry through their Strategy, or have made limited progress in this area. Many authorities would welcome more certainty over Government funding, which would allow them to plan further into the future.

Good practice in this area included a series of Action Plans supporting strategic objectives, which show the baseline position, what action is to be taken, timescales, how success will be measured, who will deliver, why the action was chosen, resources, and other Strategies the action will support. Others include an annual conference to feed back progress, use of performance indicators to monitor progress, and a traffic light monitoring system. Good practices also include reporting on progress to the LSP, a Scrutiny Committee, and to the wider group of housing agencies in the area, and involving homeless people in commenting on what has changed as a result of the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan (Paragraph 3.210 – 3.211).

REVIEWING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

The legislation requires LHAs to publish a new Strategy within five years, and to keep their Strategy under Review. The researchers have recommended that, in the light of the evaluations of the Reviews and Strategies, authorities undertake reviews of the Strategy after one year, and that ODPM guidance is revised to help with this process (Paragraph 3.211).

Recommendations

The researchers were asked to identify areas where further guidance or assistance could be helpful in improving the quality of strategies and services to homeless people.

The recommendations are divided into three categories: for the ODPM; for local housing authorities; and for other agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ODPM

The researchers therefore recommend the following:

Recommendation One: The ODPM should expand its guidance to LHAs to include:

- Reducing the amount of development time being spent by LHAs and Homelessness Forums by a) publicising the Shelter Multi-Agency Monitoring, the Centrepont model, and any other models for common monitoring of homelessness across all agencies, and b) working with these and other key national agencies to develop systems for recording and monitoring data which would be comparable across the country and could supplement PIE data.
- Collecting appropriate data for predicting future homelessness trends.
- Engaging effectively with BME groups, and identifying the scale and type of BME needs in their area.
- Examining and analysing data with a view to reducing homelessness among BME groups, especially where the data suggests these are over-represented among homeless people.
- Instructions on the minimum requirement for monitoring to ensure best practice on BME issues.
- Good practice in targeting initiatives to reduce homelessness among BME groups.
- Joint guidance with other Government departments, such as the Department of Health, strengthening other agencies' involvement in Homelessness Strategy development. This should include establishing standards for other agencies to collect and pass on data to LHAs, including applications and referrals, on an annual basis.
- More participation and involvement of service users, with specific advice on how to engage with service users effectively. Minimum user involvement standards could be helpful, such as consulting non-priority groups as well as those accepted as in priority need. Guidance on seeking service user views on improvements since the Strategy was implemented would be useful.
- Place extra emphasis on corporate engagement to ensure that the full council supports the Homelessness Strategy and takes a co-ordinated approach to Strategy development.
- Best practice examples covering all aspects of action planning. This would include promotion of joint working to monitor homelessness, developing workable outcome measures, engaging others in both implementing and reviewing progress, and reporting on progress to service users, the wider group of stakeholders (beyond the Homelessness Forum or Strategy Group), to the Housing Strategy Group, and to the LSP.

Recommendation Two: The ODPM should issue guidance to LSPs about Homelessness Strategies and develop targets for LSPs in achieving reductions in homelessness across their area.

Recommendation Three: The ODPM should undertake research to establish the constituent elements of prevention best practice in tackling the main causes of homelessness and should publicise best practice on preventing repeat homelessness beyond the LHAs faced with reducing the use of B&B.

Recommendation Four: Wherever possible, the ODPM should indicate likely or definite availability of resources from all funding streams for homelessness beyond the current financial year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LHAs

The researchers recommend the following to LHAs:

Recommendation Five: Bring forward plans for comprehensive reviews of the Homelessness Strategy to ensure that identified weaknesses are addressed before 2008, and aim to review what is known about the scale and nature of homelessness on an annual basis.

Recommendation Six: Take steps to ensure voluntary agencies are encouraged and enabled to be fully involved in Strategy development, and discuss with them the development of a solutions-based focus.

Recommendation Seven: Consider the benefits of cross-boundary, sub-regional and regional co-operation.

Recommendation Eight: Renew efforts to engage other agencies, particularly Social Services, Health, Probation, Youth Offending Teams, drug and alcohol agencies, and other housing providers.

Recommendation Nine: Work closely with Supporting People Authorities to ensure homelessness is properly addressed within SP strategies.

Recommendation Ten: Identify the implications of the Homelessness Strategy for other corporate and multi-agency strategies, and to identify how other strategies could help to achieve the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy and vice-versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER AGENCIES

The researchers recommend the following to other agencies:

Recommendation Eleven: The Department for Work and Pensions should set performance targets for authorities that prioritise delivery in cases of homelessness or threatened with homelessness, and encourage authorities to cut delays in the payment of HB. The Government should encourage the Audit Commission to investigate the role of HB services in contributing to reducing homelessness.

Recommendation Twelve: Government departments, such as the Department of Health and the Home Office, should work with the ODPM to produce joint guidance strengthening other agencies' involvement in Homelessness Strategy development.

Recommendation Thirteen: RSLs should undertake joint monitoring with LHAs of how nomination agreements and tenancy sustainment measures are working in practice, with a view to improving both access to housing and prevention of homelessness.

Recommendation Fourteen: The Housing Corporation should issue guidance to RSLs on tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention. It should, in discussion with the ODPM, consider strengthening its Regulatory Code and Guidance in respect to homelessness, and monitor its implementation.

Recommendation Fifteen: The National Housing Federation should hold discussions with the Housing Corporation and ODPM with a view to strengthening the Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance as it refers to homelessness, and ensuring its implementation.

CHAPTER 1

Purpose of this Report and Methodology

How to use this report

1.1 A key aim of this report is to provide authorities and others with practical assistance in improving their approach to homelessness services, and in particular to Review and Strategy development.

1.2 The report is divided into four chapters:

Chapter 1: Purpose of this report and methodology

Deals with the report and methodology.

Chapter 2: Policy background and requirements of Local Housing Authorities (LHAs)

Sets out the legislative framework and Government requirements.

Chapter 3: Findings

Sets out the evaluators' findings on development of the process and aspects of tackling homelessness, divided into separate sections on Reviews, Strategies and Action Plans.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

Sets out the research team's recommendations for the ODPM, LHAs and other agencies to improve aspects of Review, Strategy and Action Plan development.

1.3 Within Chapters 2 and 3, examples of good practice in each aspect of the findings are given within the various sections. The examples are chosen to cover a range of types of authority, urban and rural areas in all regions, and different approaches. The researchers have highlighted both innovative work, and schemes or approaches that are tried and tested, and can therefore demonstrate their effectiveness.

Objectives and methodology

1.4 The evaluation of LHA Homelessness Strategies was carried out by Housing Quality Network Services (HQNS) in early 2004, on behalf of the ODPM.

1.5 The objectives of the study were to:

- Review the content and coverage of Homelessness Strategies, including how they relate to Homelessness Reviews and other Strategies.

- Evaluate the overall quality of Strategies and draw out elements of best practice.
 - Review the process of undertaking Reviews and developing Strategies with LHAs, highlighting factors that may have had an impact on the content and quality of the strategies, and lessons that can be learnt for the future, including lessons about the guidance available from the ODPM and others.
- 1.6 All 354 LHAs were asked by the ODPM to take part in this research by submitting their Reviews and Strategies. Evaluations were completed for all 354 LHAs between February and June 2004. Self-assessment forms submitted for other monitoring purposes were also analysed in the evaluation, though these were not sent in by a small number of LHAs.
- 1.7 A further group of 14 authorities (covering each region) plus two outside agencies, attended a workshop held in May 2004 to discuss the process of strategy development and lessons for the future.
- 1.8 The template for the evaluation comprised a checklist of questions about the Homelessness Review, Strategy, and Action Plan, and also noted good practice examples. The template also contained a summary of the evaluation.
- 1.9 A number of LHAs worked with neighbouring authorities to produce joint documents. In all but two cases, these resulted in separate Strategies, and each has a separate evaluation. More detail on this is given in Paragraph 3.11.
- 1.10 The methodology for evaluating the Reviews and Strategies highlighted all aspects of the process laid down as statutory requirements, following particularly the statutory guidance set out in the Code of Guidance. The aspects of the Reviews and Strategies considered as a minimum requirement of each LHA are shown below in Box 1, and were specified as the key elements to be evaluated by the ODPM in the brief for this evaluation project.

- 1.11 Finally, the researchers gathered examples of good practice that others could usefully adopt in improving their own approach. These are shown throughout this report.

Box 1: Minimum requirements of LHAs**The Review**

- Understanding the main causes of homelessness locally;
- Making the Review available to the public;
- Including information about current and future levels of homelessness;
- Looking at prevention and support provision (taken to include supported accommodation);
- Involvement of Social Services in the Review.

The Strategy

- A clear corporate commitment to tackling homelessness;
- A Strategy based on the findings of the Review;
- A Strategy which identifies prevention and early intervention measures;
- A Strategy which addresses all forms of homelessness, including non-statutory homelessness;
- A Strategy which links in with wider authority strategies;
- Joint action within the Strategy, involving more than one agency, and collaborative work with partners;
- Clear arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the delivery of the Strategy.

- 1.12 This follows the checklist given in *Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR (2002) (pages 17 and 19) which has been used as the basis for the evaluation of Homelessness Reviews and Strategies. The checklist is reproduced below.

Box 2: Checklist for developing homelessness strategies

The Strategy must be based on a needs assessment including:

- An assessment of the current and likely future levels of homelessness.
- An analysis of the needs of different groups including, for example, families, young people and older people, with gender and ethnic breakdowns for each.
- An analysis of the most common routes into homelessness locally, for example family breakdown, evictions (and the reasons, such as rent arrears) and people leaving institutions such as local authority care, prisons and hospitals.

There should also be an audit of services including:

- An audit and evaluation of current provision for homeless people, including temporary and permanent accommodation, support and preventive services and services not directly targeted at homeless people, but whose clients will include homeless people, such as drug and alcohol services, or health visitors.
- An analysis of gaps in services, identified by comparing present and future needs with current provision.
- Identification of resources which might be available for filling these gaps.

Action on planning and implementing the Strategy should include:

- The involvement of partner agencies, public, voluntary and private in formulating and implementing the Strategy.
- Consultation with other agencies in contact with homeless people, even if not involved in service provision.
- Consultation with service users and other homeless people.
- Defining key aims and objectives of the strategy.
- Agreeing priorities for action.
- A timetabled and costed programme.
- Identification of which agencies will do what and when.
- Mechanisms for joint and partnership work.
- Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and individual elements in the programme, including targets and performance indicators.
- Mechanisms for regular review and amendment of the strategy in light of the monitoring and evaluation.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction and Policy Background

The policy background and requirements of LHAs

- 2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 is intended to bring about a step change in the way many local authorities approach the issue of homelessness. The Act requires Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to take a more comprehensive approach, promoting prevention over traditional responses, and taking an overview of future needs.
- 2.2 The aims are:
- To strengthen help to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
 - To develop more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness.
 - To encourage new responses to tackling homelessness.
 - To reduce the use of B&B hotels for homeless families with children.
 - To sustain the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.
 - To ensure the opportunity of a decent home for all.
- 2.3 The legislation requires LHAs to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of this review within one year of the Act coming into force – that is, by July 2003.
- 2.4 The Act also places a duty on Social Services to assist the authority with formulating a strategy. Authorities must ensure that a new Homelessness Strategy for their district is published every five years. Homelessness Strategies must include plans for:
- The prevention of homelessness.
 - Ensuring that there is sufficient accommodation and support available for people who are or may become homeless.
 - Ensuring that there is satisfactory advice, information and assistance for people who are or who may become homeless or who need support to prevent homelessness.

- 2.5 Strategies must cover all homeless people and not just those for whom the authority will have a duty to secure accommodation.
- 2.6 The Homelessness Directorate provided statutory guidance (the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*, ODPM/DH) in 2002, and good practice guidance (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR), also in 2002, on this requirement. Both are available from the ODPM website (see Appendix 1).
- 2.7 The Government's new approach to tackling homelessness, set out in *More than a roof: A report into tackling homelessness* focuses as much on the personal problems homeless people face, such as family breakdown, domestic violence, debt, substance misuse and poor health, as on the places where they live.
- 2.8 The Government set two overall objectives for tackling the worst manifestations of homelessness. These are:
- To cut the numbers of people sleeping rough to one-third of 1998 levels, or lower, by March 2002, and to sustain the reduction into the future.
 - To eliminate by March 2004 local authorities' use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children except in emergencies, and then for no more than six weeks (first established March 2002).
- 2.9 The B&B target was to be achieved by March 2004, when the ODPM reported that the target had been met. The rough sleeping target was met in November 2001.
- 2.10 From 1 April 2004 the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 has enshrined the B&B target in the homelessness legislation. The Order gives families the power to take local authorities to court if they are placed in a B&B for more than the six-week limit.
- 2.11 Examples of good practice by local authorities can be found in *Reducing B&B use and tackling homelessness: What's working* (see Appendix 1).
- 2.12 Authorities were allocated funding from the new Homelessness Directorate within the ODPM to support this work, in addition to funding for initiatives developed to implement the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, known as the Priority Need Order (PNO). From 2002/03 the Directorate allocated about £100 million to local authorities to tackle homelessness, and a further £260 million over the following three years. Funding is tied to authorities' work on Strategies, targets and outcomes. Revenue Support Grant was also enhanced by £8 million per annum from 2002/03 in recognition of the new duties on authorities. The funding supplements authorities' main income to enable them to put in place prevention measures in support of their Homelessness Strategies.
- 2.13 In submitting proposals for funding in 2004/05 and 2005/06 to the Directorate, local authorities completed a self-assessment form. This form provides information about authorities' services and aims, their Homelessness Strategies and the achievements made so far on homelessness in 2002/03 and 2003/04.

- 2.14 The ODPM advice note *Achieving positive outcomes in homelessness* issued in April 2003 restated these objectives. In addition, all authorities were invited (and those receiving more than £100,000 in grant in 2003/04 were required) to set at least one additional outcome to achieve:
- Reduced levels of repeat homelessness.
 - Reduced levels of homelessness against the main causes.
 - Reduced inappropriate use of temporary accommodation.
- 2.15 Another Government initiative concerns homelessness and health. In March 2004 the ODPM and Department of Health launched guidance on shared outcomes that they would like local authorities, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and other partners to achieve on health and homelessness. The document highlighted the role of PCTs in changing approaches to homelessness. *Achieving positive outcomes in health and homelessness*, part of *Tackling Health Inequalities - A Programme for Action*, first launched in July 2003, is available from the DoH and ODPM websites.

Guidance for local authorities

- 2.16 Guidance provided in the documents listed above was supplemented by visits from ODPM Homelessness Advisers, B&B specialist advisers, and publications and training provided by other organisations. In some areas, Government Office housing staff also acted to provide guidance, although this was not an expectation.
- 2.17 Shelter produced two booklets, one focusing on Homelessness Reviews and Strategies, and arranged seminars and conferences around the country in conjunction with the ODPM. In addition, a member of staff was appointed in each regional office to work with LHAs and their partners in the region, to advise on undertaking Reviews and developing Strategies. Help was usually targeted towards those LHAs without dedicated resources to carry out this work, and in some areas Shelter staff undertook service user consultation or helped with stakeholder events. Shelter also established a website devoted to the Homelessness Act 2002, with a section on developing Reviews and Strategies.
- 2.18 Organisations such as the Northern Housing Consortium and Housing Quality Network also arranged seminars and produced toolkits to help LHAs to prepare for the task.
- 2.19 A number of LHAs contracted others to carry out parts or all of the research for their Reviews, involving Shelter and other voluntary organisations, academic institutions, and consultants in this work.

CHAPTER 3

Findings

3.1 The Findings section of this report is divided into three sub-sections.

In Section A you will find discussion of the Homelessness Reviews, including the development process, coverage of issues and client groups, and involvement of homeless people and other agencies.

Section B covers the Homelessness Strategies, including publication, use of Review findings, priority issues and groups, prevention, responses to aspects of homelessness, and working with other agencies and departments.

Section C covers Action Plans, including monitoring and evaluation, and resources.

Key points from the findings

Box 3: Key findings – The process

- Every authority produced a Homelessness Review and Strategy within the timescales set out by the ODPM (Paragraph 3.21 and 3.91).
- The exercise was an impressive success in most areas, drawing in as never before the views of service users, other agencies and authorities, and other council departments to focus on tackling homelessness (Paragraph 3.2).
- The best authorities have been able to build on already good services by developing their strategic role within their region and sub-region.
- There were some excellent examples of authorities using information from their previous activities to develop strategic approaches to homelessness and consult others (Paragraph 3.25).

Introduction

- 3.2 Local housing authorities were asked for the first time ever to produce Homelessness Reviews, Strategies and Action Plans, as a result of the Homelessness Act 2002. The exercise has been an impressive undertaking that, at best, drew in the views of service users, other agencies and authorities, and other council departments as never before to focus on tackling homelessness. LHAs and their partners seeking to tackle and reduce homelessness were able to plan in their Strategies to make significant changes to their services and their responses, as a result of what was learnt during the Review of homelessness in their areas. Overall, it has been a very positive process, and the universal view among workshop participants was that, although the task had been quite a difficult one, it was highly useful and they felt much had been gained by it, making a difference to the homelessness picture across the country (see Box 4 for more details of workshop participants' views).
- 3.3 Having built these new relationships, strongest authorities have not considered the exercise finished, but have continued the process to fill the gaps in services that were identified, and extend the reach of prevention measures. The researchers commend this approach to all authorities: the benefits of a co-ordinated approach are already being felt in tackling Government priorities, and should impact upon other forms of homelessness and other user groups over time.
- 3.4 Authorities that are performing well, as well as those that are starting from a lower base and therefore have more work ahead, have told the researchers universally that the process of developing their Strategies has been highly worthwhile, however difficult. This report points out some of the benefits and outcomes from the process of developing the Strategies highlighted by authorities.
- 3.5 As described in Chapter 2, the ODPM and the Department of Health produced extensive guidance to support LHAs in fulfilling the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002. Referring to the Homelessness Strategies Good Practice Handbook and the Code of Guidance, workshop participants said the guidance was thorough and helpful, easy to use, and particularly useful for structuring their Reviews. There was comprehensive advice on the process and on project management, supplemented by the project timetable tool in the Shelter booklet. ODPM advisers provided advice where authorities needed a steer in the right direction, and seminars organised by Shelter, ODPM, HQNS, and others were felt to have been relevant and helpful. Workshop participants did identify a few areas where they would have benefited from further help from ODPM staff or in written guidance, such as in encouraging Social Services staff to collaborate on Homelessness Reviews and Strategies, and on identifying outcomes of prevention.
- 3.6 Shelter's Homelessness Act 2002 website came in for particular praise from all participants at the workshop.
- 3.7 Box 4 represents the main points made at the workshop held by the research team about the process of developing the Reviews.

Box 4: Summary from workshop participants

What worked well and was helpful

- ODPM guidance and Shelter website;
- Making use of Supporting People mapping as a starting point for mapping and reviewing services;
- Sub-regional work – developing better joint work with neighbouring LHAs, and learning from them, acknowledging the need for cultural change, open recognition of problems, sharing information and concerns, agreement to change;
- Being able to work in partnership with other agencies. Social Services helpful on strategy/planning, voluntary sector very helpful in most areas, secondments from other agencies helped the process by bringing in a wide range of experience, contacts and connections;
- Getting the right people involved;
- Identifying unmet need – LHAs learnt a lot through the Review process;
- Service users – getting positive feedback, and using voluntary sector to facilitate feedback;
- Being forced to look at a better use of resources, including frontline staff;
- Homelessness influence on other Strategies;
- Consultation – opened lines of communication (better planning to solve problems), positive where time allowed, and where already established;
- Highlighting the prevention agenda – and moving further to preventing homelessness (a solutions-based approach) rather than just processing homelessness applications;
- Building on good practice and developing new systems and structures;
- Identification of need for performance management information and evidence.

What worked less well

- Data collection – problems with continuous collection, P1E changes and reliability, agencies lacked other information to give, agencies had different methods of collecting information, depth of information not always available;
- Identifying future levels of homelessness – information came in a form that did not help to understand the nature or scale of homelessness;
- Deciding on the difference between the Review and Strategy, and whether a combined document was more helpful;
- Guidance – lack of feedback at critical times, not enough guidance on how to measure outcomes;
- Partnership work – Social Services has other priorities particularly implementation, homelessness is seen as a housing problem, limited commitment, structural problems, hierarchies, reluctance to share budgets, risk driven and not need driven, and too target focused; Health restructuring taking over strategy preparation; voluntary agencies small and over-stretched and may not see the joint agenda; engaging other parts of the council not always easy;
- Consultation – non-priority and non-accepted users not consulted, forums can be critical as well as positive, cultural change sometimes necessary, agencies deal with crisis response so consultation can take second place, staff not being skilled in consultation work, service users not being convinced that anything would change;
- Resources and time – not being able to dedicate enough time or staff to the task, not being able to persuade other agencies to put resources in, undertaking the task at the same time as stock transfer or CPA preparation, skills of staff undertaking the work, lack of strategy officers in smaller authorities.

Getting started on the process

- 3.8 A large number of LHAs followed the guidance and established multi-agency Steering Groups for guiding the work to carry out Reviews and to develop the Strategies. The degree of success of this approach is reported in the evaluation, but it is worth noting here that Steering Groups were set up in a variety of arrangements, including:
- Single LHAs.
 - Small groups of LHAs within a county/region.
 - A county-wide Steering Group.
- 3.9 This resulted in a separate Strategy for each LHA in all but two cases: the five Shropshire housing authorities worked together to produce one Review and Strategy document, with chapters for each of the five districts; and in County Durham, Teesdale and Wear Valley developed a combined Review and Strategy. In Cumbria, Action Plans were produced for each of the six authorities, and gathered into a single document with a county-wide Strategy and Action Plan.
- 3.10 In addition, some counties set up advisory groups for LHAs to learn from each other and to share research activities or to carry out joint service user or stakeholder consultation. In a few places, a county-wide strategy officer helped each LHA to develop individual Homelessness Strategies. Generally, shared approaches were very beneficial, although in one or two places, one district shouldered more responsibility than others in the process.

GOOD PRACTICE: CROSS BOUNDARY WORKING

- 3.11 LHAs worked together in a number of different ways and configurations. Particularly effective were the structures set up in the East Midlands. Several partnerships were established between authorities to undertake the Review and to develop Strategies, including the **Leicestershire** Partnership, the **South Nottinghamshire** Partnership, the **Lincolnshire** Partnership and the **Welland** Partnership. Of those, two have developed Partnership Strategies and Action Plans, namely the **Welland** and **Lincolnshire**. Also, as a result of the work of the **South Nottinghamshire** Partnership, Nottinghamshire County Council has developed a Social Services Strategy to tackle homelessness in line with the Homelessness Act 2002. The engagement of a large county Social Services department in this way is to be commended. A similar outcome was observed in **North Yorkshire**.
- 3.12 **The Lincolnshire Partnership** strategy has been built on a very good foundation of partnership working within the area through the Lincolnshire Housing Forum which has involved many key agencies including social services. The homelessness strategy is only one part of the Forum which has included development of the supporting people strategy. The main aims and objectives never deviated whether it was with regard to the overall county action plan or the local action plans for each district/borough whilst issues key to the individual areas were also catered for, from the City of Lincoln to the seaside towns in East Lindsey.

- 3.13 **Staffordshire** authorities worked together to discuss the best way to develop Reviews and Strategies, and then worked in smaller groups with near neighbours. This approach had some clear benefits, such as being able to explore both current and future use of each other's supported accommodation, provided authorities were aware of a general risk that if imperfections existed, Reviews would carry them in each district.
- 3.14 **Shropshire** districts undertook their work jointly, with one published document for the whole county. Similarly, **Cumbria** districts worked together to produce one document, with separate data pages and Action Plans provided as well as a joint Action Plan. In both cases, the joint work has enabled districts to identify common issues and common and joint solutions, as well as individual features.
- 3.15 **Teesdale** and **Wear Valley** produced a joint Strategy, signalling a move towards working more closely together in an area of the North East which has not focused resources on homelessness in the past. As in other areas, this joint piece of work also meant that the best use was made of an external resource to carry out the research and facilitated the development of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- 3.16 **Pendle, Rossendale,** and **Burnley** councils in Lancashire noticed that they shared several proposed actions in their Strategies, and agreed to work together on these. By pooling their resources, the three councils were able to appoint a full-time worker for each of the areas: a mediation officer working with young people at risk of homelessness; private tenants and landlords; and people with substance misusers needing housing advice to find good quality accommodation, or to keep accommodation in the private rented sector. The three members of staff are employed by Shelter, another partner in the venture, and the work with substance misusers helps people to access treatment services as well as housing, and to access activities during the day. Reductions in crime levels were also anticipated as an outcome.
- 3.17 All 12 **Lancashire** district councils have worked together to produce a joint protocol for helping 16 and 17 year olds into accommodation and support. Several of the LHAs were already working on this protocol, but the move to work together across the county emerged as LHAs and their partners realised that there would need to be support and sign-up from county-wide organisations, and there seemed no point in developing different agreements for each borough.
- 3.18 **Kent** local authorities have worked on a joint Resettlement Model, originally developed by **Thanet**, for responding to the needs of prisoners who receive services for less than a year. This acknowledged the need to ensure that services and working arrangements could respond to the needs of prisoners who had been placed within their area, as well as those wishing to return to Kent following a prison sentence (see also Paragraph 3.187).
- 3.19 **Penwith, Kerrier,** and **Carrick** LHAs in **West Cornwall** carried out a sub-regional Review leading to individual Strategies. A similar approach was taken in **Gloucestershire**.

A: The Reviews

3.20	This section of the report covers aspects of the Homelessness Reviews, including:	
	• Carrying out the Review	3.21
	• Using existing information to inform Reviews	3.25
	• Understanding the causes and current and future levels of homelessness	3.26
	• Learning about the main causes of homelessness	3.39
	• Mapping and auditing services	3.45
	• Reviewing prevention and support services	3.51
	• Reviewing the needs and issues affecting different client groups	3.56
	• Involving others in Reviews	3.68
	• Involving Social Services	3.70
	• Involving other agencies	3.75
	• Involving homeless people	3.80

Box 5: Key findings – Homelessness reviews

- Most authorities worked well at understanding the causes of and current levels of homelessness, but few estimated future levels of homelessness. Data availability, particularly about the scale and causes of homelessness for non-priority groups, was acknowledged as a difficulty (Paragraph 3.26 – 3.38).
- The main causes of homelessness were, almost without exception, found to be Paragraph 3.39):
 - Parents/friends/other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate;
 - Violent relationship breakdown with partner (in some cases authorities didn't distinguish between violent and non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner);
 - Loss of tenancy through the termination of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy.
- All LHAs provided some information about the current services provided. Most had gone further and mapped advice services provided in other sectors, and accommodation provision and support services across all organisations (Paragraph 3.45 – 3.50).
- Nine in ten authorities included prevention in their Reviews, though in some cases authorities had not taken a wide enough view of prevention as this was not considered as separate from housing advice or support (Paragraph 3.51 – 3.55).
- About four-fifths of authorities considered all forms of homelessness in their Reviews; the remaining one-fifth had focussed on priority need groups. However many missed particular client groups. The most frequently missed groups were: single homeless people and/or rough sleepers, ex-services personnel, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, former asylum seekers and refugees, and Gypsies/Travellers (Paragraph 3.56 – 3.57).

Box 5: Key findings – Homelessness reviews (continued)

- Many LHAs put a great deal of thought into how to get a full picture of homelessness in their areas, consulting widely with other agencies and groups. The involvement of Social Services at a strategic level was disappointing in many areas however, and other statutory agencies such as Health and Probation were also hard to engage. In general authorities found it difficult to engage with homeless people and service users but there were good examples where authorities had creatively addressed this problem (Paragraph 3.68 – 3.84).

Carrying out the Review

- 3.21 All authorities were required to complete and publish their Review as the basis for developing a Strategy. Virtually every authority achieved this, though a quarter did not appear to have made their Review fully available as a public document. A small number appeared to have published the Review only with the Strategy document; whilst this was quite acceptable within the terms of legislation, it did not always provide evidence that the Review had been carried out earlier, to provide the learning on which to base the Strategy.
- 3.22 Some workshop participants said they were not able to put in dedicated staff time to carrying out the Reviews and developing the Strategies. Smaller LHAs were less likely to have strategy officers to focus on the task. Where there was not a dedicated person, the task had to be carried out alongside normal duties. Although this did not necessarily result in a significantly weaker outcome, it is evident that authorities in this position were less likely to have analysed levels and causes of homelessness across all client groups, to have consulted widely with service users, and to have fed the outcomes of consultation effectively into the Strategy.
- 3.23 Participants acknowledged the additional funding made available by the ODPM to help with the task of carrying out Reviews and developing Strategies, though it was felt that ODPM funding could have been phased so that more money was available in the second year rather than the first. Some participants said there was not enough money to do the task as they would have wished. For example, in a number of larger authorities, ODPM funding for Homelessness Strategies (and for PNO tasks) was put into the corporate pot rather than being allocated to homelessness. In some areas this was at a time of an increase in homeless applications.
- 3.24 Other comments from the workshop included a note that other agencies did not put funding in to help with the task, with uncertainty over future resources making it harder to produce a meaningful Action Plan. There was felt to be a tight timescale (though it was good to have a timescale), and the scale of the process meant that gathering and analysing information was a major task. Several authorities noted the difficulty of carrying out the task at the same time as preparing for the transfer of their housing stock. The consultation exercise had proved very helpful, participants said. One commented that people were open, honest and frank, which helped to develop a strong Strategy (more information on the effectiveness of consultation exercises is to be found in Paragraph 3.68).

Using existing information to inform Reviews

- 3.25 It was expected that LHAs would build on their previous activities to develop strategic approaches to homelessness and to consult service users or other agencies. Authorities that did carry out Best Value Reviews of homelessness or housing advice generally built on this in their Homelessness Review and there were some excellent examples of previous work used to inform the Review. In a few cases it was clear that Best Value Reviews had been carried out but neither the outcomes, recommendations, nor consultation feedback was reported in the Homelessness Review.

Box 6: Good practice – Developing the review

The Stratford-on-Avon Review

This formed the first part of the Strategy document. The Review drew on the district's Single Homelessness Strategy, produced in 2001, a Housing Advice Audit carried out in 2001 and focus groups on housing advice carried out for a Best Value Review in 2002, and the Warwickshire Homelessness Conference held in 2002. Making use of these previous pieces of work, the LHA was able to focus on developing targeted objectives of the Homelessness Strategy to make real improvements in services.

Understanding the causes and current and future levels of homelessness

RESEARCHING THE CAUSES AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS

- 3.26 Authorities were required in the guidance to attempt as accurately as possible to gain an understanding of the main causes of homelessness locally. Most authorities did so: about four in five managed this exercise either wholly or at least in part.
- 3.27 Almost all authorities included current levels of homelessness in their Review, with about three-quarters covering the issue fully. Fewer councils included anticipated levels of homelessness, however. Only a little over half had explored this, with only a third tackling the issue fully.
- 3.28 Good quality data, comprehensive coverage and systematic collection are all central to Strategy development. Only when these are in place can authorities fully understand the causes of homelessness and record its scale. Planning for future services and monitoring progress towards targets can only be undertaken with confidence if the data collection process is sound.
- 3.29 Some authorities worked hard to expand the information base in order to provide a fuller picture of homelessness and its causes. However, most Reviews depended on P1E figures to develop the analysis of the main causes of homelessness. This limited approach comes as a result of a) most services recording and reporting causes of homelessness only for those accepted as homeless, and b) information not being collected about people who seek help from other agencies but who do not go to the homelessness service for assistance. This approach therefore does not take account of the causes of homelessness for many single people and couples,

including young people, people who are repeatedly homeless because of their challenging behaviour (often related to substance misuse), and older homeless people. A number of authorities' Action Plans identified the need to improve data collection.

- 3.30 On self-assessment forms the greatest single group (roughly one in five authorities) cited difficulties over data availability and developing knowledge of all aspects of homelessness as significant weaknesses or gaps in their Strategies, where further guidance from the Homelessness Directorate would be welcome. The results of an analysis of self-assessment forms on this point are shown in Table 3 (see Paragraph 3.77).
- 3.31 Workshop participants confirmed that obtaining data from statutory, voluntary and other agencies was particularly difficult. Information is collected by each agency in a different form, and there are different definitions in use. There is no standard method to eliminate double counting, and some agencies collect very low levels of statistical information. A great deal of the data collected by LHAs, RSLs, and voluntary agencies is collected for different purposes (i.e. to satisfy funders and monitoring organisations). It was hard to access information about landlord evictions.
- 3.32 Data collection was likely to be easier where there had already been a Best Value Review, or an Audit Commission inspection of homelessness and/or housing advice services, perhaps as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process. Where the authority was preparing for CPA which did not focus on homelessness, as was usually the case in district authorities, the data collection and analysis task was often given lower priority within the authority, and this coincidence of timing, as with stock transfer, meant that the task became more difficult for homelessness staff than it might otherwise have been.
- 3.33 Participants also noted a lack of a performance management regime in the voluntary sector. Being encouraged to consult widely resulted in lots of anecdotal information but this had to be evidenced or it would be given less weight.
- 3.34 Assessing future levels of homelessness was difficult; workshop participants noted that there are no accurate predictors, and said they would welcome more guidance on mapping future needs. The DTLR handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*) contained many useful ideas on identifying the scale of current and future needs (see handbook Chapter 4), but LHAs said that often the information was not available in practice. LHAs which had included a section on future levels of homelessness mainly used the following pieces of information:
- Population trends.
 - Indicators of need, demand, and aspirations from Housing Needs Surveys.
 - Trends in homelessness data (P1E and other) – for example, an increase in numbers of under-18s, people from outside the district, or people with particular needs.
 - Knowledge of planned closures of large institutions.
 - Plans for prevention through, for example, better pre-release advice for prisoners, new protocols for people leaving hospital or care, and addressing the needs of single homeless people.

- 3.35 Many Strategies contain proposals to develop common monitoring systems (using the same form to collect information about those seeking help to find housing across all agencies working with homeless people in the area), in an effort to improve the quality of data and its comprehensiveness, and to improve the ability to predict future levels. Those districts with common monitoring systems in place, or clearing house systems where all requests for temporary accommodation go through one central referral point, are generally able to provide a good deal of information about the scale of need, causes of homelessness, and other needs. Some had been able to commission research before the legislation was completed, so made a good start. Around one-third of all Action Plans contain proposals to develop common monitoring systems or clearing houses in the near future.

GOOD PRACTICE: USE AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

- 3.36 **Southampton** used data from its Supported Housing Monitoring System and **Newcastle-upon-Tyne** from the Newcastle Homeless Liaison Project which records referrals to all supported housing provision (voluntary and statutory) in the district. This provided a great deal of data about people seeking temporary and supported housing, their needs, and what had led to their homelessness.

Box 7: Good practice examples – Use and analysis of data

Authority	Activity
Wigan	Explored where people went to outside its boundaries if their accommodation need could not be satisfied within the district.
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Explored the numbers of people coming into the city from elsewhere, to feed into a regional discussion of homelessness. It also made the data available to other LHAs in the region wanting to see how many people had sought or found temporary accommodation outside their own boundaries.
Sandwell	Looked at where people came from within the borough, and from outside. A few LHAs explored the question of how much homelessness occurs in the rural parts of their area.
East Cambridgeshire	Plotted applicants across the district's parishes and highlighted variations across the district.

- 3.37 Some LHAs used local universities to carry out research for the Review. In a couple of examples, the work was not built upon by the LHA and the Review did not fully meet the requirements laid down. Good use of academic institutions was made by **Wigan** and **Hastings**, to research the views of agencies and homeless people in the borough, and seek out the key issues for the area.
- 3.38 A minority of LHAs sought data from other agencies to complement data from P1E reports. These included **Plymouth** – use of a Health Action Zone report – and **Eastleigh** – use of data from a college about students who had become homeless. Some Reviews comprehensively sought data about levels of homeless for all homeless people from a range of sources. In the best examples, this was usually

set out by each client group. **Shropshire** produced one report for the county which set out, for each client group:

- The extent and causes of homelessness.
- A description of joint working arrangements.
- Current initiatives for prevention.
- Current provision of accommodation and support.
- Resources.
- Future trends.

Learning about the main causes of homelessness

3.39 Across all nine regions of England, the three main causes of homelessness recorded were, almost without exception:

- Parents/friends/other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate.
- Violent relationship breakdown with partner (in some cases authorities didn't distinguish between violent and non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner).
- Loss of tenancy through the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy.

3.40 In some areas the relative placings of these three causes was reversed. In a small number of areas, loss of AST was the second highest cause of homelessness. In London and parts of the West Midlands, and in some coastal and university towns in the South East, for example, it was the highest cause recorded. Another variation was the highest frequency being recorded for violent relationship breakdown. In a few areas, this was recorded as the third highest cause, with loss of AST coming further down the ranking. Also in a few places, rent arrears were seen as a major cause of homelessness, whilst mortgage arrears do not appear as a significant cause, except in parts of the South East.

3.41 Although the PIE requires separate reporting, it should be noted that some Reviews reported aggregated figures. For example, the figure for what we have called "parental eviction" aggregated the figures for parents and other relatives/friends asking the applicant to leave, the relationship breakdown figure added together those for violent and non-violent relationship breakdowns, and the loss of tenancy figure aggregated the figures for the loss of private tenancies for both the end of ASTs, loss of tied tenancies, rent arrears, and sometimes the loss of tenancies in other sectors for rent arrears as well. This makes comparisons difficult, of course, but in addition, it means that in some LHAs the real cause of the highest reasons for homelessness in that area have not been explored.

- 3.42 In areas with more sophisticated monitoring systems for homelessness, the picture is not greatly different. The **Southampton** Review delved below the surface to look at triggers to homelessness going back over several years. This confirmed that previous evictions for rent arrears from council, RSL, or private tenancies was seen to be a feature for many people having to leave their parents' home. Allied to this, substance misuse was found to be a common underlying cause of the loss of a previous tenancy. In **Newcastle-upon-Tyne**, as in a few other areas where detailed research was carried out, poor health was seen to be a significant cause.
- 3.43 A further significant recorded cause of homelessness in some areas derives from the large numbers of refugees being given leave to remain and therefore asked to leave their NASS accommodation. Yorkshire and Humberside is a significant area for dispersal of asylum seekers and 12% of acceptances there were applicants leaving National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation, which is four times the national average of 3%. This is the highest number of acceptances in any region (1,850) where the reason for loss of last settled home was leaving NASS accommodation and accounts for around 50% of the total number of acceptances for this reason across England as a whole (source: ODPM, Quarterly P1E data 2002/03). **Wakefield** and **Bradford** experienced high numbers of applications from asylum seekers in this position who wished to join existing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. This had had quite an impact on the picture of homelessness in the area and therefore on the Strategies developed in those areas.
- 3.44 There was some very good work done on looking at the underlying causes of the most frequent routes into homelessness, including identifying triggers, identifying groups most at risk, and identifying factors causing a higher risk of homelessness (see examples below).

Mapping and auditing services

- 3.45 The legislation requires LHAs to base their Strategies on what has been learnt through the Review about the gap between current provision and needs for prevention, accommodation, and support. LHAs thus needed to map current provision, not just in terms of physical provision of temporary and permanent accommodation, but also covering the support provision, advice and other responses to homelessness, and prevention activities.
- 3.46 All LHAs provided some information about the current services provided. Some had restricted this to the services which formed part of the homelessness service, whether provided by the LHA or by a contractor. The majority had, as advised, gone further and mapped advice services provided in other sectors, and accommodation provision and support services across all organisations. A few described activities which were not specifically aimed towards homeless people but which helped to prevent and respond to homelessness, such as RSLs' advice for applicants for their housing, Social Services' help on welfare benefits, and Care & Repair services for older and disabled people.
- 3.47 As mentioned above, there were some examples of LHAs mapping only their own services, and some Reviews failed to fulfil the aim of this activity in helping to identify the need for additional services and activities.

- 3.48 Participants in the workshop noted the substantial help that Supporting People mapping had provided as a base for gathering data about services, in most areas, with just a few saying that the Supporting People database had not been particularly helpful in this process. The database provides quite basic information about which client groups are being catered for. A number of LHAs carried out the data collection task through a questionnaire to all agencies, asking for more detailed information about their services, as well as posing other questions to help with the Review process.

Box 8: Good practice – Mapping services

The Hastings Review

The authority mapped provision in a table format and covered the following information: Opening hours, staffing, accessibility, services offered, formal agreements, funding, geographical range of provision, charges for services, target clients, training, legal support (e.g. from Shelter aid), IT, measuring outcomes (i.e. monitoring undertaken), external services (i.e. services they provide to other organisations e.g. training), strengths, weaknesses e.g. lack of funding, duplication, gaps and opportunities.)

- 3.49 There were some good examples of mapping existing provision comprehensively and in a productive way.

Box 9: Other good practice examples – Mapping services

Authority	Activity
Staffordshire Moorlands	Identified the prevention and support work carried out by all agencies (including Social Services, Health, and RSLs) as part of their everyday work.
South Ribble	For each client group: described the service provision and figures for the scale of use and scale of need, summarised an independent audit of the temporary accommodation provided and recommendations for action; and identified current work on protocols, agreements, and new policies or services. Following sections on support services, advice and prevention work, and access to permanent accommodation, a section of the Review then summarises the gaps and improvements needed in a straightforward table setting out the actions proposed and who would lead. This formed the starting point for developing the Strategy.
East Cambridgeshire	Plotted homeless applications on a map showing which parish they came from and which were the areas with most homelessness.

- 3.50 The role of the Community Legal Services Partnership was referred to in many Strategies and Reviews. Mapping exercises had been carried out and gaps identified, and priorities for future investment were put forward. The importance of linking the two strategies was apparent, and helped to inform the Homelessness Review in relation to advice and prevention services. An example here is the Luton and South Bedfordshire CLS Partnership Strategy Plan which informed the **Bedford** Homelessness Review.

Reviewing prevention and support services

- 3.51 The Code of Guidance requires local authorities to look at prevention activities and the provision of support in their Reviews. Prevention is a core element in the 2002 legislation, and is seen by the Government as the key to better services, reduced cost and avoiding the damaging effects of homelessness.
- 3.52 Some nine in ten authorities included prevention in their Reviews, though about a quarter managed this only in part. A greater number included provision of support.
- 3.53 Almost all authorities did address prevention in their Strategies, even where they had been weak on this at the Review stage (see paragraph 3.128 below).
- 3.54 In reviewing the provision of services to prevent homelessness, some local authorities did not consider this as separate from housing advice or support. Commonly, Reviews listed the services which help to prevent homelessness but often did not examine what additional preventative services were needed, and most commonly did not evaluate the success of existing services. More considered approaches set out the preventative services provided by each agency, such as RSLs, Social Services, and Probation, and noted where there were gaps, and where services could achieve more to prevent the loss of homes.

Box 10: Good practice – Reviewing preventative services

The Telford & Wrekin Review

Tasks to audit prevention services included:

- A list of the strengths and weaknesses of preventative services.
- A summary of issues raised by service users who are asked what would have made a difference to them becoming homeless.
- Identified unmet needs and gaps from the service audit and consultation work with stakeholders.
- The gaps and unmet needs were listed for each of the risk factors (financial, social, health, behavioural, and the reality of responding to households with multiple needs). Two case studies were provided, looking at what would have made a difference for a couple with three children and for a single woman.

- 3.55 Most Reviews listed the support services provided (both supported accommodation and floating support) and noted the gaps which had been identified in support provision. This was taken from service user and stakeholder feedback from the various consultation activities, and occasionally from a service audit. As in the Review of other preventative services, however, the majority of Reviews did not

examine the effectiveness of support provision in preventing homelessness. In some cases, the link between tenancy support and prevention was not made explicit, and the Review simply noted the provision of services funded through Supporting People. Indeed, some Reviews did not question how much of the support provision related to homelessness and listed all provision other than sheltered housing.

Box 11: Other good practice – Analysing the effectiveness of prevention services

Authority	Activity
Staffordshire Moorlands	Tracked 30 households who had made homeless applications and wrote up pen pictures for each applicant, to identify how homelessness could have been prevented and what had happened to resolve their problem.

Box 12: Good practice – Reviewing support services

The Epping Forest Review

The review considered a project jointly commissioned by Epping Forest and Essex County Council through Cygnet Housing Association which leases 12 properties from the council at any one time. Nominations come through a multi-agency panel for people with a history of drug or alcohol abuse or mental health problems, who have been accepted by the council as being owed a full housing duty. Nominees are allocated assured shorthold tenancies with the intention of them being offered a secure tenancy with a two-year period. The Review reported a high success rate: of 29 people assisted so far, 15 had moved onto secure tenancies, one had left, one returned to family, and two were currently still in the scheme.

Reviewing the needs and issues affecting different client groups

- 3.56 About four-fifths of authorities considered all forms of homelessness, including non-statutory, in their Reviews and Strategies, either fully (just under half) or to some extent. Since this was a key requirement of the legislation and was set out very clearly in the guidance, the evaluators found it surprising that the importance of this element was missed by some LHAs. The guidance contained in the Good Practice Handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR) was quite detailed, setting out in Chapter 6 the groups to be considered, and the needs and potential solutions for each group, and in Chapter 5, those groups most at risk of homelessness.
- 3.57 The evaluations show, however, that one or more key client groups were missing from many of the Reviews and Strategies. Most frequently, the groups missed were:
- Single homeless people and/or rough sleepers.
 - Ex-services personnel.
 - BME groups.

- Former asylum seekers and refugees.
- Gypsies and Travellers.

3.58 Young people – both single young people and young families – are a key priority in most areas of the country, particularly the South West, London, South East, North East, and the West Midlands.

3.59 Young families were staying with parents, or other relatives or friends, for a variety of reasons, including the loss of a previous tenancy in the social or private sectors. Some Strategies have identified a need for further research on why they were asked to leave either the former home or their parental/friends' home, in order to learn how best to prevent homelessness amongst this group.

3.60 Single young people were also frequently homeless from their own tenancy as well as from parents, friends, or looked-after accommodation. Where discussions of stakeholders and service users are recorded in the Reviews, it is clear that general inability to manage a tenancy, as well as alcohol and drug misuse, are often at the root of the homelessness of young single people. In many areas, the key issue for young people was seen to be access to accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds; access to social housing is still limited for this age group in many parts of the country, and there were many discussions about how to work with social landlords to reduce the restrictions applied by requiring guarantees (or, exceptionally, deposits). Many Reviews highlighted the need for support to be made available, before landlords (social and private) could be persuaded that any risk associated with housing under-18s and other young people could be managed. A large number of areas have in place, or are developing, rent deposit and guarantee schemes which help homeless people to access private rented accommodation, and some of these are linked to the provision of support.

3.61 Preventing homelessness amongst young people and young families focuses largely on developing mediation schemes, but other approaches may also reduce the scale of homelessness amongst younger people. Other approaches suggested by local authorities to reduce homelessness amongst young people include work within schools to provide information on housing options, what it is like to be homeless, and what can be done to avoid homelessness, as well as housing advice sessions within schools and colleges.

3.62 Reviews also identified that, despite the law relating to young people who had been in the Looked After system being extended, there was still confusion between the roles of housing and Social Services authorities. As a result, many young people leave care to an unsatisfactory housing situation. In some cases, the arrangement made is temporary, with no settled housing solution in place, whilst in others the arrangement breaks down and the young person is left without housing or support. The Priority Need Order should help to resolve the homelessness problem in most of these cases, but Reviews found that it was important to seek the views of young people who had left care to see what housing issues there were for them. They also identified that responsibilities and communications between housing and Social Services needed to be clarified, and many Strategies contain proposals to develop or to improve protocols for dealing with homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

- 3.63 The second key group requiring attention is women and their children who are victims of domestic violence. Evaluations in the North West show that this is the main cause of homelessness in many districts in that region. Further detail on this subject is given at Paragraph 3.146.
- 3.64 A third group which appears in many Reviews is people with drug and alcohol problems. It was acknowledged in many Reviews that not enough was known about the scale and cause of rough sleeping in the area, but the Review process revealed a greater level of 'sofa surfing' and intermittent homelessness than previously recognised amongst particular groups, including young people, young and adult offenders, and people with substance misuse problems.
- 3.65 In addition, people with complex or multiple needs were picked out as a group requiring attention in many areas. This is particularly the case in larger urban conurbations, such as in the North West and West Midlands. One authority in the West Midlands used the term "serially excluded", and these are usually people with substance misuse, offending, behavioural, and mental health problems who are very difficult to accommodate in shared provision. As a result, they move around between temporary places, and occasionally permanent rented accommodation, and have difficulty maintaining contact with agencies for long enough to resolve their accommodation and support problems.
- 3.66 In a number of regions, Reviews had identified that BME groups were strongly represented amongst statutory (and occasionally non-statutory) homeless applicants.
- 3.67 Building on the use of data from the PIEs and from other organisations, LHAs then needed to identify unmet needs and gaps in provision. Some commissioned this work from academics, from voluntary organisations, or from consultants. Many LHAs made use of Supporting People Shadow Strategies and needs assessment for future Supporting People Strategies, as well as other needs assessment exercises. There was a danger here of Supporting People needs assessments being focused on support needs rather than the need for accommodation itself, but this data was well used in some areas.

Box 13: Good practice – Needs assessment across all client groups

The South Oxfordshire Review

The authority carried out a hidden households survey with a questionnaire given to all households applying for social housing to find out why this was their preferred choice, and the likelihood of any homelessness in the future. The exercise identified the experiences and difficulties households had had in finding accommodation, e.g. not being able to afford private rented accommodation because of the need for a deposit, and explored any risk of homelessness e.g. any threatened evictions and the timescale for this.

Box 14: Other good practice examples – Needs assessment		
Issue	Authority	Activity
Identifying unmet needs and gaps in provision	Newark & Sherwood	Commissioned research through the Emmaus Trust, a piece of work which provided extensive information about single homelessness.
	Derwentside	Made use of a County Durham-wide event for young people from the Looked After system, to learn about their experiences of trying to find suitable housing.
Data Collection	Bolsover	Snapshot survey of all households approaching all agencies in the district over a particular period.
	Ashfield	Annual survey of single homelessness.
	Cambridge	Used data from Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Strategies.
Case studies	New Forest	Carried out a desk-top survey of homelessness cases, focusing particularly on young people.

Involving others in Reviews

3.68 To carry out a comprehensive Review of other services, it is essential to involve other organisations. The Government expects LHAs to take a lead in developing and publishing Reviews, but not in isolation: other agencies, particularly Social Services, are expected to be fully involved. The Good Practice Handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR) recommends a number of types of agencies that should be involved. Indeed joint working was seen as so critical to the development of effective Homelessness Strategies, that a complete chapter of the guidance was devoted to this aspect of the process.

3.69 The next section of this report is divided into three parts: involving Social Services, involving other agencies, and involving homeless people.

INVOLVING SOCIAL SERVICES

3.70 The 2002 Act requires support needs to be addressed, and it is therefore essential for Social Services to be involved in the Review. The legislation requires the Social Services authority in two-tier districts to give the housing authority such assistance as may be reasonably required in carrying out a Review and formulating a Strategy. The Code of Guidance says joint protocols will be essential for reducing homelessness, for people leaving institutions and the Looked After system in particular.

- 3.71 It is clear that LHAs in many places failed to get over to Social Services managers the benefits that participating in the process could have for them and their service users. These benefits could include:
- Reducing costs through reducing delayed discharges from hospital.
 - Reducing costs of temporary accommodation for young people and others.
 - Overlaps with the development of the Supporting People Strategy.
 - Help in achieving DoH targets, e.g young people leaving care without accommodation problems, identifying needs of people with learning disabilities, addressing the needs of substance misusers.
 - Reduced re-offending rates.
 - Reduced stress for staff at the front line through better information, joint identification of accommodation and support needs, and improved access to accommodation.
- 3.72 Social Services departments were invited to be represented on most Strategy Steering Groups. Although Table 1 shows that 305 of the 354 authorities said in their self-assessment forms that Social Services were involved, this was often through attendance at consultation events. Where they attended meetings of Steering Groups, the contribution of Social Services to the Review was more likely to be at a higher level. It proved difficult, though, in many areas, to get staff along to the meetings. In evaluating the Reviews, researchers found that fewer than two-thirds of authorities showed clear evidence that Social Services had been involved in the Reviews. About another quarter of LHAs had involved Social Services to some extent but in many cases this was no more than the involvement of other agencies, and often consisted of asking Social Services to comment on the draft document.
- 3.73 It proved harder still to achieve a contribution to the Review through providing figures on the numbers of homeless people approaching different parts of the department, e.g. young people leaving care who had nowhere to go or who had lost accommodation afterwards, or people with mental health problems and/or substance misuse problems who were homeless. Since data on numbers of young people leaving care with accommodation difficulties is required to be collected by Social Services departments, it is surprising that this information could not be passed on for the Homelessness Review in many places. Other figures require particular exercises or activities to be put in place and this is not done universally. Where Social Services did provide data, this often proved to be very informative about what was happening to young people leaving care, or about how difficult it was for people leaving hospital or with substance misuse problems to resolve their housing difficulties.
- 3.74 Where there were focus groups, working or reference groups, or homelessness conferences set up for developing the Review and Strategy, Social Services staff from the various teams were very likely to be involved. This was, however, not always linked to their participation at a more strategic level, and it was participation at this level that was missing in many areas of the country. In **Walsall**, the LHA addressed this gap by putting into place a three-way strategic planning meeting

between housing, Social Services, and the Primary Care Trust (PCT), to take place every two months, to supplement meetings of the Strategy Group.

Box 15: Good practice – Involving social services	
Authority	Activity
South Nottinghamshire Partnership	As a result of the work, the Nottinghamshire County Council has developed a Social Services Strategy to tackle homelessness in line with the Homelessness Act 2002.
North Yorkshire	Districts worked in partnership with Social Services at county level and a county Social Services Homelessness Strategy was produced.

INVOLVING OTHER AGENCIES

- 3.75 Authorities' responses in the self-assessment forms to the question about which voluntary and other statutory agencies were consulted and engaged in the development of the Reviews and Strategies were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Self-assessment responses about involvement of other agencies	
Social services	305
Registered social landlords	253
Primary Care Trusts/other health agencies	244
CAB/ local advice agency	211
Shelter	204
Probation	193
Youth services/YOTs	161
Supported Housing providers	149
Drug and alcohol agencies	124
Connexions	119
Women's refuges	107
Homeless people and their representatives	92
Community mental health teams	90
Police	85
Education and employment programmes	62
Faith groups	43
BME groups	29
Local disability groups	27
Prisons	25

- 3.76 It should be noted that in their self-assessment forms, some LHAs referred only to participation in the Steering Group, whilst others listed agencies who attended the consultation events or responded to questionnaires.

- 3.77 It was also interesting to note that answers to the question in the self-assessment form about which aspect of the process had caused LHAs to be most proud, and what weaknesses were identified, both focused on working in partnership – see Tables 2 and 3 below. This was echoed in the workshop. It is evident that LHAs see the benefits of partnership working in addressing homelessness and found this both a challenging and rewarding part of the process (see also Paragraph 3.118).

Table 2: Pride in the homelessness strategy	
Multi agency working/ partnership	240
Action planning	68
Developing homelessness prevention	67
Consulting/involving users	35
Reaching specific client groups	33
Moving to a strategic approach	31
Quality of homelessness review	28
Reducing B&B	25
Understanding causes of homelessness	19
Communication	18
Developing links with private landlords	16
Improving quality of TA	14
More access to permanent accommodation	11

Table 3: Weaknesses in the process or where further guidance would be welcome	
Data availability/knowledge of aspects of homelessness	66
Resources for implementation	65
Involvement of homeless people	35
Partnership working	31
Homelessness prevention	15
Tackling complex needs	11

- 3.78 Many LHAs put a great deal of thought into how to get a full picture of homelessness in their areas, and invited to the consultation events such bodies as local colleges, schools, youth parliaments or councils, Building Societies, local councillors, the Fire Service, solicitors, the local Healthy Living Network, HB officers, parish councils, traveller liaison officers, and tenants' organisations. It was unfortunate for this exercise that some Reviews listed organisations by name or acronym, without specifying for non-local readers the role that those organisations have in the area. Nonetheless, researchers were able to see how each LHA had engaged other agencies, in many cases providing a much deeper view of homelessness than that gained from an examination of only those people approaching the homelessness service.
- 3.79 This level of involvement was not always translated into useable figures on the scale of homelessness (see Paragraph 3.31), or into feedback which was made use of in developing the Strategy (see Paragraph 3.87). In the best examples, however,

LHAs and Steering Groups made excellent use of data from other agencies (e.g. from agencies' responses to questionnaires) and to feedback obtained during conferences and workshops. In most cases, the feedback was summarised in the Review, and in the best examples, extracts from stakeholder (and service user) feedback were quoted in the Strategy alongside a proposal to address the point made.

Box 16: Other good practice examples – Stakeholder involvement	
Authority	Activity
Cheltenham	Worked as part of a county-wide group which had on board key agencies including the county council, Probation, Health, and Shelter. This group enabled key agencies to contribute to local strategies at a county-wide level. In addition, a large stakeholder conference was held at the end of the Review process and prior to Strategy development (this was good timing to share findings and prioritise responses). The conference was also used to help fill gaps in information required to complete the review.
Westminster	Carried out a postal survey of more than 150 agencies, and received a 52% response rate.
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands, and Newcastle-under-Lyme	Jointly held Reference Groups to consult agencies for the Review and to work on the Strategy for different client groups.
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	The Newcastle Homelessness Forum was involved in every stage of the Review and Strategy development process.
North Norfolk	Two homelessness conferences were held with 150 delegates attending, and the ideas and issues generated informed the Strategy and Action Plan. In addition postal surveys were carried out with past and current customers, support agencies, health and social services, councillors and parish councils.
East Cambridgeshire	Sought the wider involvement of the public and provided a Road Show that toured the district, and also promoted consultation on the council's website.
Ealing	Particularly effective in involving service users in the Review and Strategy development. Methods of involvement included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured interviews with 63 homeless people (10 rough sleepers, 12 in B&B, the rest in other hostels), with a good mix of ethnicities (38% Asian, 32% White, 25% Black African). The survey included information on causes of homelessness; perceptions of measures which could have prevented homelessness; and support and accommodation needs. • A survey of residents in two homelessness hostels, mainly concerned with the standards of the hostels and improving access to services for those in temporary accommodation. • An independent survey with young people living in the West London YMCA.

INVOLVING HOMELESS PEOPLE

- 3.80 Some 307 of the LHAs said in their self-assessment forms that homeless people were consulted, and Table 4 below shows some of the methods used. However, involvement of homeless people in Reviews at a deeper level was the exception rather than the rule. Many authorities said that they felt this had not been as successful as they would have hoped, and 50 authorities carried out no consultation with homeless households.

Unspecified survey/postal survey/exit survey	197
Focus groups	112
Face-to-face survey	112
Conference/workshop	53
Telephone survey	25
Users on the strategy group	20
Service user forums	16
Open day	12
Peer research	3
Arts event	1

- 3.81 In the workshop, participants spoke about how they had found it difficult to get service user feedback. Several said they thought that potential respondents were not confident their comments would be acted on, and so did not take part in events or exercises to seek their views. Another factor was staff not knowing what methods to use to encourage people to respond. Most difficult to do was consultation with people who did not come to the LHA for help, with non-statutory groups, and with people who were not accepted as homeless. As a result, it was most common for the LHA to consult only with those who had been accepted as homeless re-housed. In some cases, the response levels were very small, with authorities accepting as representative responses to questionnaires from a very small number of people who had been through the homeless system.
- 3.82 The good practice examples come from local authorities which used creative processes, went out onto the streets or into hostels and day centres to talk to homeless people, or made use of the experience of other colleagues. Other staff who could draw on their experience to help in this process were those involved in consulting on Best Value Reviews, on social care issues, or voluntary sector agencies whose role includes acting as a channel for service user views. On the other hand, some LHAs used voluntary organisations to speak on behalf of users, but did not enquire further.
- 3.83 Workshop participants were also asked what they thought had led to a number of Strategies not taking into account the feedback from service users; it was thought that time was the main issue, along with the lack of experience of staff involved. It was clear to the researchers that the lack of experience in both developing Strategies (i.e. knowing how to make use of consultation feedback in the Strategy)

and in setting up successful service user consultation events contributed to this part of the exercise not being as useful as it might have been in all areas.

- 3.84 Shelter took a key role in seeking service user views in some regions, and in many areas other voluntary organisations provided a channel for service user comments by undertaking specific activities to consult people who would otherwise have been hard to reach.

Box 17: Good practice – Service user involvement

The Tameside Review

The authority conducted semi-structured surveys with people who had experienced homelessness in the borough. In addition small focus groups were held to help understand the perceptions of homeless people about service provision locally – this was at local hostels and at the women’s refuge. The Strategy itself highlights key points from this and so makes use of the information gathered from the consultation exercises.

Box 18: Other good practice examples – Service user involvement

Authority	Activity
Westminster	Stakeholder consultation was matched by interviews with about 100 homeless people, which identified interventions which could be put in place to prevent and tackle homelessness.
Stratford	Made use of the Citizens’ Panel and the Best Value Review process.
Wolverhampton	Commissioned research with 23 people sleeping rough as part of a wider piece of work on street homelessness.
Bradford	Held a homeless ‘Speak-out’ which involved arts and music as well as workshop discussions.
South Ribble	Commissioned work by independent people or agencies through visits to hostels, exit surveys of people using the homeless service, telephone surveys, or focus groups.
Three Rivers	Planned a newsletter for homelessness applicants and those in temporary accommodation to inform them about services and encourage comments and suggestions to improve the service.

B: The Strategies

3.85	This section of the report covers aspects of the Homelessness Strategies, including:	
	● Making use of Review findings	3.86
	● Publishing readable and accessible Strategies	3.91
	● Making wider strategic links and demonstrating corporate and multi-agency commitment	3.100
	● Addressing all forms of homelessness	3.119
	– BME issues	3.122
	● Tackling priority issues on homelessness	3.128
	– Prevention	3.128
	– Improving housing advice services	3.137
	– Preventing loss of home from parents and other relatives/friends	3.139
	– Preventing loss of private rented sector tenancies	3.142
	– Reducing homelessness by tackling domestic violence	3.146
	– Preventing homelessness amongst particular groups	3.147
	– Tackling repeat homelessness	3.149
	– Reducing the use of B&B and inappropriate temporary accommodation	3.153
	– Reducing rough sleeping	3.160
	● Access to settled housing	3.166
	– Increasing access to the private rented sector	3.168
	– Maximising use of the existing stock	3.170
	– Impact of choice based lettings	3.176
	– New provision	3.179
	● Addressing other priorities	3.183
	– Meeting health needs	3.183
	– Reducing re-offending and addressing community safety issues	3.186
	– Access to education, training and employment for homeless people	3.189

- Differences among types of council and delivery arrangements 3.190
 - Regional differences 3.190
 - Differences between different types of council 3.193
 - The impact of contracting out. 3.197

Box 19: Key findings – The strategies

- The great majority of Strategies were clearly based on the findings which came from authorities' Homelessness Reviews, frequently showing that the consultation with service users and/or agencies had resulted in a new emphasis on prevention or approach being taken in the Strategy (Paragraph 3.86 – 3.90).
- Strategies were produced in a wide variety of formats and often in other languages (Paragraph 3.94).
- Only two in five authorities managed to address the issue of wider links clearly in their Strategies, and only about half demonstrated any level of corporate and wider commitment in their Strategy documents (Paragraph 3.100 – 3.118).
- Most authorities included all forms of homelessness in their Strategies, though non-statutory homelessness was a gap in a significant number, reflecting the lesser focus on this in some of the Reviews (Paragraph 3.119).
- Some authorities demonstrated excellent engagement with BME communities and groups locally but many authorities neglected BME issues. (Paragraph 3.122 – 3.127).
- The focus on a small, well defined set of Government priorities has produced results in tackling rough sleeping and use of bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B); and almost every Strategy considers prevention and support activities. Innovative ideas included: refocusing the housing register to reflect the main causes of homelessness; improved housing advice services; mediation and reconciliation schemes; work with private landlords; and improved Housing Benefit (HB) systems. Tackling domestic violence was also a priority, as were floating support to reduce repeat homelessness; improved access to settled housing; and attention to needs such as health and education (Paragraph 3.128 – 3.189).
- On most issues concerning Homelessness Strategies and their development, the researchers found no difference between single and two-tier districts. But the evaluation indicated that districts, and especially rural areas, are less well developed in partnership working, and unitary and metropolitan councils were significantly more likely to have linked their Strategy in with wider authority strategies (Paragraph 3.193 – 3.196).

Making use of Review findings

- 3.86 The great majority of Strategies were clearly based on the authority's Homelessness Review, with some two-thirds doing this in full. It was evident that an authority whose Review ended with a set of conclusions was more likely to be able to show that its Strategy was shaped by and responded to the findings of the Review.
- 3.87 Some authorities suffered at this stage from their Reviews being incomplete, or missing aspects of client groups or data on the extent and nature of homelessness,

or failing to engage with other agencies and service users. Some that recognised gaps in their Review sought to take a more comprehensive approach in their Strategy, so in some cases a failure to base the Strategy fully on the Review was not necessarily a weakness.

3.88 Around a quarter of the LHAs did not fully follow through on their Review work and did not demonstrate adequately that the Strategy was based on what had been learnt during the Review process. Only 12% completely failed to demonstrate that the Strategy was based on the findings of the Review. There are several possible explanations for a disconnection between the two publications:

- Not enough time was allowed for the process to be carried out in full (a few LHAs started the process very close to the expected publication date).
- The LHA and its partners in the Steering Group focused on what was already known about the nature and scale of the homelessness problem in the area, and did not take into account, or perhaps did not accept, what was said by other agencies or service users in the consultation process.
- Staff developing the Strategy did not have enough time alongside other work, or were not experienced enough to ensure that the Strategy was shaped by what had been learnt during the Review process.
- The LHA developed the Strategy on its own, without an effective consultation process.

3.89 In a few cases, it is evident that the Strategy was too heavily based on the Supporting People Shadow Strategy and recent Supporting People consultation, or was developed by a strategy officer with little reference to people working in the homelessness field.

3.90 The majority of Strategies made good use of what had been learnt in the Review, and translated the findings from the Review into a range of proposals for new schemes and new activities, or suggested further research to learn more about the causes of homelessness across all the groups, and what could be done to prevent homelessness.

Publishing readable and accessible Strategies

3.91 Every council published a Homelessness Strategy, as required under the 2002 legislation. This included three that produced joint Strategies with other authorities in their area.

3.92 Almost every council responded to the new legislation by focusing on the new agenda, improving information on homelessness and its causes, looking critically at services and focusing on prevention, as well as responding and engaging with others to develop Strategies and services, at least to some extent.

3.93 In general, Homelessness Strategies have provided a focus for LHAs and their partners on the priorities set by the Government. The advice note, *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness*, provided a strong lead for LHAs and their

partners in Strategy Steering Groups and Homelessness Forums, particularly by providing guidance on suggested outcomes.

- 3.94 The Strategies were produced in a wide variety of formats. Documents were often made available in other languages or formats, but this did not apply in a significant number of cases. A minority of Strategies were produced as council reports, with the majority being published in other more accessible formats. Examples of well-produced Strategies include **Telford & Wrekin**, whose Strategy is in a folder along with the Review, the service audit, and a summary of main points from each of the documents, and **North Hertfordshire**, where the Strategy was attractively produced mixing text with photos and charts, which made it accessible as a public document. There was clarity and good structure throughout which resulted in a focused and short document. **Colchester** published its Strategy in a ring binder which allows for easy updating of sections and ensures the whole document remains current.
- 3.95 There are a few other points to note about the presentation of Homelessness Strategies. A number of authorities helpfully referred to detailed figures or other appendices placed on their websites. Unfortunately, in a few cases these documents were not in fact available on the website; indeed some LHAs had missed the opportunity altogether of using their website to publicise and make available the Review or Strategy.
- 3.96 More than half of the Strategies were published separately from the Review, and in most cases key findings from the Review were succinctly summarised in the Strategy. Some authorities took the production of the Strategy as an opportunity to add to what had been learnt from consultation following the publication of the Review, although it was not always made clear that there was a difference between the Review and its summary in the Strategy.
- 3.97 A few Strategy documents were less easy to follow because they were either very long (usually where the Review was incorporated into the Strategy) or because they were very short and gave little clue as to what action was proposed as a result of the learning from the Review. Generally, the weaker Strategies were those which did not report findings from the Review and identify how these were to be acted upon, and a small number appeared to be lists of actions already proposed through the Supporting People Shadow Strategy. Where strategic objectives were used to set out the purpose of the Strategy, these were usually used effectively for example, linking the actions proposed for each client group to one or more of the strategic objectives. There was, however, less use of strategic objectives than might have been expected, given that these are commonly used in other strategic areas.
- 3.98 In each region, one or two LHAs had put very little in their Strategies other than a summary of the process for strategy development and notes about the monitoring and evaluation process.

3.99 The box below provides a checklist of ideas on what makes an accessible Strategy:

Box 20: Checklist of ideas for accessible Homelessness Strategies

- Keep the Review and Strategy separate – it helps to see how one has led to the other.
- Keep the Strategy fairly short.
- Help readers to use the document – make sure there is an index with numbered sections and pages (and that these are correct!).
- Summarise the process followed for developing the Strategy at the start.
- Summarise what was learnt from the Review, and show how these points have influenced the Strategy.
- Summarise the main points coming from all the consultation exercises – service users and stakeholders – and show clearly how these have influenced the Strategy.
- Identify your Strategic Objectives clearly at the start – show how each action proposed fits one or more of these objectives.
- Follow the order of the Strategy in the Action Plan (or explain how the Action Plan is set out, if it is in a different order from the Strategy).
- Use colour coding to show how the Action Plan relates to each section of the Strategy.
- Use case studies to show how what you are proposing should make a difference.
- Identify clear outcomes for each action – what difference will this proposed action make and how you will demonstrate this.
- Include plans for monitoring and evaluation in the Strategy – so everyone can see how you will ensure that it is implemented, how you will demonstrate the impact that the Strategy has had, and how progress will be reported to stakeholders including other agencies, service users, and the wider strategic planning community.

Box 21: Good practice – Producing readable and accessible Strategies

The Bury Strategy

The strategy is well presented, easy to follow, with use of charts and graphs making it more than just a corporate document. A separate summary document makes it even more accessible. A separate detailed and lengthy action plan helps keep the Strategy itself relatively concise and user-friendly.

Box 22: Other good practice examples – Readable and accessible Strategies	
Authority	Activity
Cumbria	With its colour-coded pages, it is readable and easy to follow, even though it contains Reviews and Strategies for the whole county. It is also available on CD.
Chester-le-Street	Produced a document based around a series of clear headings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is it important to improve this service? • What is in place now? • What are our priority objectives? • How will we meet our priority objectives? • How will we know we have achieved our priority objectives?
Cheltenham	Identified key priorities and stated “What we will do” next to each priority.
Wolverhampton	Summarises the points learnt about each client group and each issue in the Review, and sets out targets for actions to address the points made.
Calderdale	Extensive work undertaken to shape the Review, but the document is easy to read and understand. It has a core theme of social inclusion with four underpinning themes.

Making wider strategic links and demonstrating corporate and multi-agency commitment

- 3.100 The 2002 legislation emphasises the need for greater corporate commitment from authorities to tackling homelessness than in the past, and the need to work in partnership with others in order to resolve the problems of homeless people in the area, in recognition of the need for a multi-faceted approach to the problem. It is no longer enough for homelessness to be the sole concern of either the homeless section, the Housing Department, or the Council.
- 3.101 Two elements of the evaluation were focused on these issues: firstly, evaluators looked for evidence that Homelessness Strategies were linked in with wider authority and multi-agency strategies; and secondly, they looked for evidence of corporate commitment to addressing the area’s homelessness problem.
- 3.102 The Code of Guidance on Homelessness, jointly issued by the ODPM and Department of Health, requires Social Services to assist the housing authority in carrying out the Review and developing the Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy guidance (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR) stresses the need for partnership working, devoting a whole chapter to this, and envisaging that other bodies would take a lead on some issues. The guidance identified why joint working was desirable, what forms it could take, and ways to overcome any barriers to working effectively together. Another advice note, published by the Northern Housing Consortium, detailed the benefits to other agencies of getting

involved, and identified ways of helping other agencies and departments to see how they could participate in the process of carrying out the Review and developing the Strategy (Toolkit for *Developing Homelessness Strategies*, Northern Housing Consortium, 2002).

- 3.103 The Code and the Strategy guidance recommended that links were made to other strategic documents and groups such as Community Plans or Strategies, Regional Housing Plans, health strategies, and the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, as well as a range of other strategies, and the work of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). LHAs were expected to ensure that there is a good degree of consistency between the Homelessness Strategy and these other plans and strategies, so that there is a coherent approach to tackling homelessness, and that Homelessness Strategies are informed by and inform other strategies and actions. It is also expected that the Homelessness Strategy will form part of the Housing Strategy for each area, and this should be reflected in Housing Strategies written following the publication of Homelessness Strategies.
- 3.104 Developing effective links between strategies is clearly an area where authorities are finding difficulty. Only two in five managed to address well the issue of wider links clearly in their Strategies. District councils in particular are finding it difficult to engage at this level; this is likely to be more difficult in district authorities whose LSPs have not yet been established. At best, the different responsibilities of partners were identified and explicit links made with other strategic groups, providing each agency with a clear remit for reporting on progress to their agency and to the other strategic groups they represented, as well as ensuring that the Homelessness Strategy implementation was influenced by other policy and strategy directions.
- 3.105 Only two-thirds of Strategies propose joint action to address homelessness involving two or more bodies, e.g. involving Social Services or Probation in specific actions to address issues of joint concern. Collaborative working with relevant partners is better organised, however, with three-quarters proposing action at this level, e.g. through Homelessness Forums, or continuing the work of Homelessness Strategy Groups.
- 3.106 Reflecting what happened in carrying out the Reviews, Social Services input to the development of Strategies was weak in some places, sometimes falling short of the level envisaged in the guidance. Workshop participants reported difficulties in getting Social Services to commit resources, and LHAs commented on the readiness of Social Services to allow homelessness services to take responsibility for 16 and 17 year olds. LHAs said that Social Services did not always see homelessness as a priority, with work on child protection taking precedence.
- 3.107 Similar, though less extensive problems were reported in engaging Health Service organisations. In some LHAs, the homeless service has a low profile, and it was difficult to get commitment. Restructuring in Health Service agencies made the task less easy. Some difficulties were also reported with Probation, education, RSLs, and Housing Benefit; and with the voluntary sector in some areas, notably in the rural areas where the resources are likely to be less, with fewer voluntary and private sector homelessness agencies, and agencies dispersed over wider areas. Another obstacle was the contractual relationship with advice and other agencies: some workshop participants said that they found it awkward to get them involved in

reviewing and proposing new services at the same time as having expectations of them as contractors. Not all landlords (both private sector and social rented general needs RSLs) were willing to co-operate in developing the Strategy.

- 3.108 It was also noted in the workshop that involvement of other agencies tended to fall after the Review had been carried out; it was less easy to get other agencies engaged when their agreement in action planning was being sought, and perhaps when they might be asked to commit resources. It was difficult to establish and identify resources, particularly financial, of external agencies.
- 3.109 Self-assessments suggest a more optimistic picture, with a range of partners involved and engaged in planning strategies, as indicated at Table 2 above. More than two-thirds of authorities said partnership and collaborative working was the aspect they were most proud of in their Strategy. Some said the development of this type of working was new to their authority, and had been of benefit both in allowing better mutual understanding of the issues, and in improving services to homeless people. Workshop participants said this was especially important for small LHAs as they needed to have closer links between services, operationally and strategically.
- 3.110 Those with well-connected forums and groups already working on homelessness and housing issues were able to use these to identify issues for the Review and Strategy. The process also helped to improve the perception of the LHA by other agencies, who gained an understanding of processes and constraints which affected the homelessness service. An example was given of the launch of the Strategy including multi-agency guest speakers, which promoted ownership, trust, and further partnership work.
- 3.111 In some areas, staff from outside the LHA with a wide range of experience, contacts and connections were appointed or seconded to work on the Review and Strategy, and this was believed to help the process considerably.
- 3.112 The Audit Commission report *Improvement Drivers in Local Authority Housing*, published in 2004, identified six key factors in improvement, one of which was 'governance and member commitment'. The report noted:
- 3.113 'Where services have improved, members show leadership and renewed commitment to providing good-quality housing services and increased understanding of the importance of the service. Housing moves up the political agenda as a result. Active scrutiny committees and a good understanding between members and staff are also invaluable.'
- 3.114 The report built on the Audit Commission's earlier report *Changing Gear: Best Value Statement 2001*. This first demonstrated that the most effective public service bodies had the following in place:
- Councillors and officers committed to improvements.
 - Clear and consistent organisational priorities.
 - Sound performance management systems at the heart of financial and policy planning.

- 3.115 Evaluators looked for evidence of corporate commitment being expressed in the documents through, as a starting point, a foreword to the Strategy written and signed by the Cabinet or Executive member for housing, or by the Leader of the Council. This was taken as a sign that the Council had identified that reducing and preventing homelessness was a matter for the whole Council. About a third of authorities had a statement of this kind at the front of the document. However, evaluators were looking for more than this to demonstrate a commitment to tackling homelessness across the whole authority and its partner agencies, for example by describing how members had been involved in developing the Strategy, how corporate policy or strategy staff had participated in the processes, or by noting that outcomes of implementation would be reported to a Scrutiny Committee, to a multi-agency group such as the Housing Forum and/or Health Partnership Board, or to the Local Strategic Partnership. Strategies were a little disappointing on this point, with only about half of all authorities demonstrating any level of corporate and wider commitment in their Strategy documents.
- 3.116 A number of LHAs and Strategy Groups ensured that the Strategy was approved by the Executive as well as by the Council, that the Strategy Group involved staff from across the council, and that the Local Strategic Partnership was involved in some way. Few authorities were as yet able to demonstrate any practical benefits from securing corporate or wider strategic support for the Strategy. These are envisaged as:
- The ability to influence other strategies and plans in order to prevent and reduce homelessness – e.g. through action to ensure that good advice services are provided for offenders going into and leaving prison, the development of comprehensive housing advice services through the Community Legal Services Partnership, or developing actions to reduce domestic violence.
 - Encouraging partner agencies such as private landlords, the retail sector, churches, universities, colleges, and schools, to identify how they can contribute to reductions in homelessness.
 - Improving communication, for example where referrals need to be made between agencies, or where problems need to be resolved.
 - Identifying ways of increasing access to settled housing.
- 3.117 The high profile of Homelessness Strategies had meant that homelessness and housing needs officers were able to raise the awareness of members and senior staff about this area of work. In some areas the positive attitude of senior staff and members was noted as being most helpful in supporting the process. Some authorities found that having to fulfil this statutory duty forced members to face the issue of recurring homelessness as a day-to-day need, not something all elected members came across that often. Homelessness already had a higher profile in some areas as a result of stock transfer. Councils felt that they had to be proactive now, rather than being reactive, and this influenced the process and its outcomes.
- 3.118 Workshop participants highlighted the positive aspects of the process of securing corporate and multi-agency commitment, and some noted that they were careful to ensure that the document was not seen as a Council strategy, but was the community's document.

Box 23: Good practice – Wider links and partnerships**The Merton Review and Strategy**

Merton examined 26 strategies and plans in use in the Borough to see what the fit was with homelessness. In the Review, the strategic links were summarised at the end of each section. An appendix to the Strategy also summarises these links. The group monitoring the implementation is the Homelessness Strategy Team which includes a wide range of agencies within and outside the council, such as the PCT, corporate strategy staff, mental health staff, housing strategy staff, HB, and education and Children's Services, RSLs, and Shelter. This group will quarterly monitor reports, and will report to the larger Homelessness Forum with a bi-annual progress report and an annual review.

Box 24: Other good practice examples – Wider links and partnerships

Authority	Activity
Bedford	Bedford Strategic Housing Partnership is the key forum for developing the Housing Strategy and therefore the Homelessness Strategy. It can deliver partnership for new housing asset and stock management and joint commissioning (includes social services, SP, Bedford PCT).
Stratford	Links made through members of the Strategy Group having identified remit for feeding back to and from other strategy groups which they represent.
Bolton	Strategy focuses on wider partnerships as a tool for reviewing and tackling homelessness. The first eight pages of the Review outline the key relevant strategic partnerships that help tackle homelessness in the Borough.
Rugby	LSP was asked to identify agencies, particularly in the private sector, which could help to prevent homelessness.

Box 25: Good practice – Corporate commitment**The Solihull Strategy**

The Foreword is written by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety. The Strategic Service Directorate was involved in preparing the Strategy. Progress on the Strategy is to be reported to a Scrutiny Board, a thematic group within the LSP, and to the LSP.

The Foreword demonstrates the council's appreciation of the joint efforts of agencies in developing the Strategy, notes the importance of prevention and of partnership working to achieve this, and the link with the Council's vision of Solihull as a place "where well-being, pride and quality of life is enjoyed by all". The fact that corporate strategy staff were involved and that progress on the Strategy will be reported to the LSP demonstrates the value put on achieving links across the borough to implement change for homeless people.

Addressing all forms of homelessness

- 3.119 About four-fifths of authorities included all forms of homelessness, including non-statutory, in their Strategies, either fully (just under half) or to some extent. Authorities that managed to engage well with other agencies and service users during consultation had a distinct advantage in ensuring all groups were included. About one-fifth, then, were not seen by the researchers to have considered the needs of non-statutory homeless people in their Strategies.
- 3.120 Many Strategies are set out in a form that responds to the issues raised in the Reviews for each client group, generally using the headings set out in Chapter 6 of the Good Practice Handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR). As set out earlier, the evaluations show, however, that one or more key client group was missing from many of the Reviews and Strategies. Most frequently, the groups missed were: single homeless people and/or rough sleepers; ex-services personnel; BME groups (including former asylum seekers and refugees); and Travellers/Gypsies. Many Strategies considered the needs of substance misusers, either alongside offenders or separately, and referred to issues being raised about the needs of people with complex needs during the consultation. The needs of people leaving hospital were not always taken into account, but where they were, they were addressed well; and people with learning difficulties were sometimes considered, although this was not a group picked out in the guidance.
- 3.121 A further feature to mention is that some Strategies and Action Plans made proposals designed to improve matters across the board rather than for specified client groups. In some cases, this was rather too vague, and it was not sufficiently clear what the Strategy was aiming to achieve, but in others it was evident that the actions were intended to address the needs of a number of groups. The former was more likely to be the case where single homelessness was not adequately researched or addressed.

Box 26: Good practice – Addressing all forms of homelessness

Client group	Authority	Activity
Offenders and substance misusers	Camden	Intervention pilot at Pentonville prison involving a package of acceptable behaviour and other services to be developed pre-release.
	Canterbury	Drug and alcohol detoxification project – enabling access to services by single homeless people through partnership with outreach/resettlement project, DAT, Community Alcohol Services, Social Services Substance Misuse Team and Kent Council on Addiction.
	Wychavon	Housing staff to be trained in substance misuse issues, mentoring scheme for clients with substance misuse problems.

Box 26: Good practice – Addressing all forms of homelessness (continued)		
Client group	Authority	Activity
Young people	Leicester	Two weekly GP sessions at a project for young street workers.
	Lincolnshire	Supported Accommodation for Youth in Lincolnshire (SAYL), protocol for joint assessment between all Lincolnshire authorities and Social Services for young people to ensure appropriate accommodation and support is provided to sustain tenancies.
	Thanet	Kent County Council's Finding Your Feet project to assist 16 and 17 year old asylum seekers to find permanent accommodation.
	Hartlepool	Establishment of a 'personal adviser' post within Connexions to focus on advice and assistance to young people with accommodation problems.
	Bromley	A new assessment and resettlement service for homeless 16 and 17 year olds to carry out needs assessments and support young people in temporary accommodation and assist with resettlement into supported and permanent housing, and a multi-agency accommodation panel for young people.
Victims of domestic violence	Mole Valley and Gosport	Community Alarm Service: links victims of domestic violence/harassment to the Police.
	Oxford	An initiative to provide information and access to networks for victims of forced marriage.
Other groups	Reading	Challenges the assumption that older people are choosing to remain in their homes, instead being too afraid to move and needing support to do so. Housing Options Service for Older People, provided by Anchor Care and Repair, providing advice and support and linked to best use of stock.
	Croydon	Establishing a pilot corporate initiative to assess people with multiple needs and ensure a co-ordinated response.

BME ISSUES

- 3.122 This was an area where responses by LHAs varied between the extremes of excellent engagement with black and minority ethnic communities, and no mention of the issue at all. Most authorities noted the disproportionate effect of homelessness on BME communities, and some had identified that BME groups were strongly represented among statutory (and occasionally non-statutory) homeless applicants, yet few practical activities were included in the plans beyond carrying out further research. In self-assessment, only 29 authorities recorded that they had involved or consulted BME groups – the third lowest rating of the 19 groups recommended to be consulted in the good practice handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR).
- 3.123 As might be expected, some of the large conurbations with significant BME populations took great care to involve the various communities and respond to their needs. Some have excellent data recording and monitoring of services. However, there were some noticeable exceptions where cities with multi-ethnic populations did not demonstrate an in-depth understanding of BME issues in their Strategies. By contrast, one or two LHAs where there were small numbers of people from BME groups had included actions to address the needs of people moving to rural areas from larger conurbations.
- 3.124 Districts and rural areas with small BME populations were more likely to have ignored these issues or made only limited responses at Review stage as they did not perceive a problem existed, though service users in these areas may feel more isolated and need greater support. As a result, there was little consideration of these groups in service provision. This was also apparent in agricultural areas with an influx of migrant workers, resulting in potentially significant gaps in provision.
- 3.125 In particular, attention to services for Travellers and refugees was present only in those areas where the LHA was already engaged with these groups and recognised a significant problem.
- 3.126 **Wyre Forest** and **Malvern Hills** in Worcestershire both set out in their Strategies the aim of ensuring that the numbers and needs of Travellers presenting as homeless are recorded and considered, so as to build up a picture of the needs of this group. **Wyre Forest** extended the rent deposit scheme to include Travellers who were accepted as unintentionally homeless, or unintentionally homeless but in a non-priority group, and on a low income, who need to pay a deposit for a plot on a designated site.
- 3.127 Some Review and Strategy documents appeared to be made available only in English.

Box 27: Good practice – Addressing the needs of BME groups**The Leeds Strategy**

Leeds is currently developing a BME Housing Strategy. The council's recording of BME groups is excellent and clearly identified disproportionate levels of presentations across the city. Its Homeless Guidebook, service standards and guidances on how to make a complaint have all been translated into nine community languages and are within the Action Plan; these will be made available to all agencies in audio tape form. Also within the Housing Advice Centre there are specialist refugee customer service officers to assist customers. The council carried out extensive research to ensure that actions proposed were built on solid evidence of need. It also aims within the Action Plan to introduce common recording systems for which reference was made to Birmingham with a view to obtaining an even clearer picture of homelessness within this group and the council also aims to introduce supported accommodation for refugees leaving NASS.

Box 28: Other good practice examples – addressing the needs of BME groups

Authority	Activity
Bromley	Novas Overtures provides advice services for travellers in Bromley and Bromley Traveller project.
Hounslow	Working with Hounslow Race Equality Council to prevent repeat homelessness among BME communities by supporting people who are homeless due to racial violence.
East Staffordshire	Research to identify needs of people from BME groups moving from large conurbations into the area.
Rochdale	Conducted a separate piece of research into the "housing & support needs of women especially those from ethnic minorities".
Croydon	Carries out surgeries with marginalised groups such as Asian women, and builds links with faith groups.
Hackney	Worked particularly hard to raise awareness of BME groups in its borough about homelessness and the range of approaches taken by various agencies to tackle homelessness amongst its BME population.

Tackling priority issues on homelessness

PREVENTION

- 3.128 Virtually every Homelessness Strategy includes actions designed to prevent homelessness. Even those authorities that were weak on this aspect in their Reviews improved the position in their Strategy. In self assessments, more than four in five authorities said that a main aim of their Strategy was prevention of homelessness and development of advice services.
- 3.129 Responses vary from shaping the entire Strategy around prevention, to including prevention as one of the key themes or objectives, to mentioning prevention as a task for the housing advice service. A small number of authorities identified actions designed to prevent homelessness in general, or for one client group only.

- 3.130 Some authorities took a much wider approach. In **Nottinghamshire** in the East Midlands, Action Plans are based around an approach that identifies pathways and tackles homelessness through prevention, addressing the incidence of homelessness when it does occur, and preventing its repetition for people who have experienced it. **Chelmsford** called its Homelessness Strategy “Preventing Homelessness – A Strategy for Chelmsford” and its multi-agency homelessness forum was called the Homelessness Prevention Partnership.
- 3.131 **Slough** has refocused its Housing Register so that it reflects the main causes of homelessness (e.g. living with parents, living in AST etc). This enables assessment of potential homelessness when applications for housing are made. Homelessness in Slough has reduced as a result.
- 3.132 **Sedgfield** is developing a prevention strategy, building on existing co-operation between agencies, with a focus on early identification of households at risk.
- 3.133 Prevention is an integral part of **Manchester's** Strategy. All existing measures were evaluated to see how they contributed to prevention, and new outcome measures suggested. The Strategic Objective focusing on prevention suggests actions relating to provision of services, improving information and advice, evaluating support programmes, and collating information on what leads to homelessness e.g. evictions.
- 3.134 It should be noted that there was a good range of preventative initiatives found in the Strategies and Action Plans of many smaller authorities.
- 3.135 **Staffordshire Moorlands** identified resources of other organisations which help to prevent and support homelessness, and planned to review grants to voluntary organisations to ensure that they fit with the Strategy.
- 3.136 The rest of this section looks at the different elements of prevention activities and identifies good practice in relation to each.

IMPROVING HOUSING ADVICE SERVICES

- 3.137 About four-fifths of all LHAs identified the need to improve housing advice services as part of their preventative action. For more than 220 LHAs, this was planned to involve improvements in the way that people find out about housing advice services, making housing advice more accessible by producing leaflets, and websites, developing information for noticeboards and libraries, and using other routes to finding out about housing advice. Many rural authorities intended to develop advice surgeries, mobile advice services, or develop partnerships with other agencies to make it easier to get housing advice. Some LHAs were planning to target particular groups with housing advice, mainly young people and owner-occupiers; other groups are mentioned in the section below on targeting prevention towards particular groups.
- 3.138 Another approach was to reconfigure housing advice services so as to spend more time on prevention than on channelling people through the homeless system. This form of triage (identifying the housing problem and seeing if housing advice could prevent homelessness, before an appointment is made with homelessness officers)

has been adopted in many LHAs, and has been shown to have some impact on reducing the numbers of people needing to apply as homeless. Homelessness Prevention Officers were appointed in some areas, and this had already been shown to make a significant difference to the scale of homelessness. Housing advice services which are separated from homelessness services have also demonstrated that this works to prevent homelessness before it occurs. LHAs have been refocusing their priorities around prevention, although many now need to be able to measure the impact their new structures and activities have had on preventing homelessness.

Box 29: Good practice – Improving housing advice and access to housing advice	
Authority	Activity
Sunderland	Leaflets and posters targeted at a range of groups of homeless people, widely distributed and backed up by a hotline giving basic advice and referring them to other services, aimed at preventing homelessness by early intervention.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Identified resources of other organisations which help to prevent and support homelessness, and planned to review grants to voluntary organisations to ensure that they fit with the Strategy, in particular to prevent homelessness.

PREVENTING LOSS OF HOME FROM PARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVE/FRIENDS

- 3.139 This is a major cause of homelessness throughout the country. The main actions proposed to address this route into homelessness were mediation between young adults and their families, better access to housing advice, education about housing options, and improving routes into permanent housing. (This last point is dealt with in more detail in Paragraph 3.167 below.)
- 3.140 Mediation services are aimed at trying to resolve tensions between members of the family so that the crisis of actual homelessness is avoided. Around 240 Action Plans proposed to develop mediation schemes, in particular aiming to help to reduce youth homelessness. Many have based their plans on guidance issued by the London Borough of Harrow (Tackling Homelessness – A Good Practice for Local Authorities, LB Harrow, 2002). The model is based on the premise that airing and resolving differences between family members may result in a planned departure from the parental home. Advice can be given on other options which the family or the homeless person may not have been aware of, and this includes a discussion of the likely timescale for finding a home through another route than through making a homeless application.
- 3.141 Evaluators were concerned that in some cases there was great reliance on mediation as the only way to reduce youth homelessness, not always linked to other activities which could target this group, such as work within schools to look at housing options, increasing advice through other partners such as Connexions and youth services, or identifying young people at risk.

Box 30: Good practice – Preventing loss of homes from parents and other relatives/friends

The Croydon Strategy

Croydon identified in its Review high levels of applications for people excluded by parents, and an increase of 20% in 2002/03 resulting from the Priority Need Order. As a result, its Strategy focuses on supporting family reconciliation and linking with other appropriate support services including employment, education and training. It set up a one-stop shop for young people operated by Housing, Social Services and Croydon Association for Young Single People, linked to Connexions. Needs are assessed, and mediation arranged, along with accommodation and support where appropriate. The Council's strategy is to continue to visit all homes to assess homelessness, persuade parents, relatives and friends to keep applicants, and offer mediation where appropriate. A key priority has been to demonstrate to applicants that applying as homeless does not offer a quick route to social housing. These measures were already having an impact on the numbers of young people being accepted as homeless at the time of the Strategy.

Box 31: Other examples of good practice in preventing loss of homes from parents and other relatives/friends

Authority	Activity
Hertfordshire	Joint working with the Herts Young Homelessness Group has seen the development of a co-ordinated approach across the county for 16-25 year-olds, supported by ODPM funding. This provides a mediation service and crash pad scheme.
Sutton	Developing a Young People's Accommodation Strategy, and working with Connexions and schools to raise awareness of housing options for young people, and promote early intervention.
Harrow	Works with Relate – Central Middlesex Family Mediation Service – as its mediation partner, and has been able to demonstrate outcomes of a reduction of 89% in acceptances of statutory referrals.

PREVENTING LOSS OF PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR TENANCIES

- 3.142 Over 230 LHAs had plans in their Action Plans to improve the liaison with private landlords. Many Strategies address loss of private sector tenancies through the development of landlord forums and accreditation schemes. Landlord forums help to address the problem by educating landlords about the law and their responsibilities, providing them with advice, identifying and resolving difficulties they face with processes for HB, and troubleshooting where problems arise between tenants and landlords. These are often allied to accreditation schemes, which seek to recognise landlords demonstrating good practice and reward them, for example, by advertising their properties, and helping them to access fast-track HB systems. In areas with high numbers in temporary accommodation, these schemes may be linked to the provision of, or management of, private rented properties as temporary accommodation.

- 3.143 Evaluators had the impression, however, that in some areas the group developing the Strategy was not certain what could be done in practice to make a difference to the loss of assured shorthold tenancies, and landlord forums appear to be developed more in hope than with specific outcomes in mind. In a few areas, there were no actions designed to impact on the loss of ASTs, despite this appearing as a main cause of statutory homelessness.
- 3.144 Ensuring that HB is available to help private tenants to pay their rent is a highly practical way to prevent homelessness. As well as prioritising HB claims for residents in temporary accommodation, Homelessness Reviews identified that too many people were losing their tenancies because of difficulties and delays in claiming HB. Although there are statutory limits for the assessment and payment of HB for all tenants, LHAs have begun to realise the benefit of intervention where people would otherwise be at risk of losing their homes. Fast-tracking HB claims for this group is cost-effective, particularly where a need for temporary accommodation would arise otherwise.
- 3.145 Other prevention activities include work to reduce the likelihood of people accruing housing debt by ensuring that there is good advice on benefits and income maximisation. Multi-agency approaches to debt appear in the South East and elsewhere. These include agreements to provide loans or one-off payments to pay off arrears, thereby reducing the cost of temporary accommodation. Court advice services also help to reduce homelessness amongst private tenants, though they are more often aimed at owner-occupiers with mortgage arrears.

Box 32: Good practice in preventing the loss of private rented tenancies

Authority	Activity
Bexley	Introduction of a new management information system for private rent deposit scheme landlords.
Reading	Joint training programme for Thames Valley Police College to deal with illegal eviction outside Council opening hours.
Telford & Wrekin	Five day limit for HB and Council Tax Benefit claims for new tenants.
Colchester	Comprehensive action plan to improve tenancy sustainment. Good practice includes: vulnerable claimant register, designed to make sure claims remain continuous and are renewed; Housing Services funded assessment officer, to ensure council's private sector accommodation schemes are processed efficiently; and HB liaison officer accessible to landlords and advice workers to avoid problems and assist with problem solving.

REDUCING HOMELESSNESS BY TACKLING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 3.146 Around 220 Strategies contained proposals on addressing homelessness which occurs through domestic violence. In many cases, this was through closer work with the Domestic Violence Forum, but specific proposals included the use of alarms to make women feel safer, and work on identifying repeat homelessness amongst this

group. Many Strategies did not specify the actions which they proposed to take to reduce homelessness because of domestic violence, and this may be an area where good practice examples and showing how they have made an impact could be helpful.

Box 33: Good practice in tackling domestic violence	
Authority	Activity
Bolton	Planned to interview families who had experienced domestic violence to identify what might have helped to prevent homelessness.
Kensington and Chelsea	Supports the Sanctuary Project which involves the Police, the Law Centre and outreach support attached to refuge facilities, and close working between the housing resettlement services and PCT, Social Services, Community Mental Health Teams and substance misuse services.
Richmond-upon-Thames	Protocols for dealing with possession procedures and the impact on relationship breakdown, and reviews of management transfer policies as they relate to homelessness.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AMONGST PARTICULAR GROUPS

- 3.147 Many Reviews enabled LHAs and their partners to identify which groups are at particular risk of homelessness in their areas. Over 200 Strategies identified the need to tackle homelessness amongst offenders and just under 200 identified that homelessness was a problem risk for substance misusers. Other groups mentioned were people with mental health problems, young people leaving care (often manifesting itself some years after they have left the looked-after system and have had a number of breakdowns in accommodation arrangements), and people who have a tendency towards anti-social behaviour.
- 3.148 These issues were dealt with in a number of ways. For offenders, the keys to preventing homelessness were identified as: providing advice at the start and before the end of a prison sentence; ensuring that advice is available for people who have short term sentences (and therefore no Probation connection in most cases); tackling anti-social behaviour; and addressing any barriers to permanent housing. As with other groups such as those leaving hospital and care, many Strategies proposed that protocols for joint working and for referrals between agencies had the potential to reduce the likelihood of people becoming homeless when their stay in an institution or in care was brought to an end. Other examples of actions proposed included proposals to introduce a designated housing officer for offenders, to work with them before release and prevent people leaving prison to become homeless, or to provide targeted tenancy support. Many Strategies recognised the need to intervene to prevent vulnerable people from losing their homes, in all tenures. The threat of homelessness may come about because of rent arrears, but this may mask other problems that the individual is having in managing their tenancy. In several areas, Strategies propose trigger systems for making referrals to social care agencies, to benefit advisers, or to tenancy sustainment or support schemes. This may apply to social rented tenants who have built up rent arrears as well as to private tenants.

Box 34: Good practice examples – Prevention for specific groups		
Client group	Authority	Activity
Young People	Barking and Dagenham	A Children's Charter – a range of agencies at senior level working together to ensure that young people who are vulnerable are identified at an early stage, are "tracked" and receive appropriate support.
	Worcester	The Time 4 U drop-in service is aimed at providing confidential advice on health and well-being issues, including housing. It operates from health clinics, from one of the local hostels, and in the sixth form college.
Offenders	Southwark	St Giles Trust provides advice and support to prisoners at HMP Wandsworth and the training of resettlement advisors to provide peer group support for other prisoners.
Vulnerable people	Kensington & Chelsea	The crack house protocol is a multi-agency protocol with the police, Probation, housing resettlement services, and local landlords, to close crack houses, and offer alternative solutions to people who are vulnerable – often preventing repeat homelessness.
	Ashford	Cocoon Watch: similar to Neighbourhood Watch, emphasis on neighbours 'keeping an eye out' for vulnerable neighbours.
	Fareham	Early intervention protocol between the Council and Social Services identifies vulnerable families.
Tenants at risk of homelessness	Mole Valley	Joint work between Housing Officers and CAB debt advisers to enable repayment agreements to be made with tenants in rent arrears.
	Greenwich	Working with RSL partners to ensure that their rent arrears policies are consistent with good practice and measures in place to prevent homelessness where possible.

Box 34: Good practice examples – Prevention for specific groups (continued)		
Client group	Authority	Activity
Other	Bournemouth	Mr Fixit, developed as a move away from rights-based approach to early intervention with a real focus on prevention activities. The Mr Fixit toolkit is a fund available to Homelessness Officers which can be used to prevent homelessness.
	Reading	<p>'Precariously Housed Protocol': homelessness and Social Services provide housing for families who have been found intentionally homeless and a three-way support and behaviour contract is drawn up to support the family to address behaviour.</p> <p>Proposals to provide an advice service and information to older people to assist them moving house and a scheme to enable a move into more manageable housing. This would run alongside another proposed scheme run by Anchor Care & Repair to advise older people leaving hospital on the suitability of their home.</p>

TACKLING REPEAT HOMELESSNESS

- 3.149 Preventing repeat homelessness is a key aim of prevention, and many Strategies identify the provision of floating support as one of the activities aiming to prevent homelessness from recurring. The guidance refers to the need to measure and address repeat homelessness, particularly for families but also for other homeless people.
- 3.150 The evaluators were disappointed to find few evaluations of existing support provision in the Reviews; without evidence that floating support is reducing homelessness, agencies and service users could place too much reliance on this as a significant preventative measure on its own. Whilst the lack of assessment is inevitable as many floating support services have been developed and expanded recently through Transitional HB, the Supporting People review process is likely to be most helpful in identifying what works and what does not.
- 3.151 About 20 LHAs specifically refer to preventing repeat homelessness in their achievements up to autumn 2003, and some 10 or so have this as a specific aim in their Strategies.
- 3.152 Many LHAs have identified the need to collect information on repeat homelessness; P1E quarterly returns are collecting this data from April 2004 and the 2003 HIP return also asked this question, but a few LHAs had already started to measure the scale of repeat applications. Amongst those Strategies identifying the need to tackle

repeat homelessness, there are relatively few ideas on how to achieve this, beyond the provision of tenancy support. Actions designed to address repeat homelessness often overlap with actions to reduce homelessness amongst women suffering from domestic violence, prevention of the loss of private rented tenancies, and tenancy sustainment initiatives.

Box 35: Good practice – Tackling repeat homelessness

The Burnley Strategy

Burnley researched why tenancies fail and why clients leave B&B. The LHA concludes that the lack of support in temporary accommodation is crucial. The LHA then works out the cost of this to the authority and considers how this money could be used to directly tackle repeat homelessness. The strategy indicates a post will be created to achieve this – filling the gaps in support services is the first key objective and it is aimed at tackling repeat homelessness.

Box 36: Other good practice examples – Tackling repeat homelessness

Authority	Activity
Colchester	Tenancy sustainment in both the public and private sectors seeks to reduce homelessness and the risk of repeat homelessness; a range of actions includes effective information sharing, effective pre-tenancy preparations, improved tenancy support, creating a vulnerable tenants register.
Great Yarmouth	Identified a range of triggers of homelessness, through analysing homeless applications and applications to direct access hostels. The triggers were mental health, low incomes, substance misuse, crime, low educational attainment and lack of social skills, and factors such as youth, gender, and physical disability.

REDUCING THE USE OF B&B AND INAPPROPRIATE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- 3.153 The Government target, to be achieved by March 2004, was to eliminate local authorities' use of B&B for families with children except in emergencies, and then for no more than six weeks. The ODPM has also made clear that LHAs should seek to minimise inappropriate use of all temporary accommodation.
- 3.154 For the most part, LHAs that have made significant use of B&B for families with children have included plans in their Strategies to ensure that it is reduced and the reduction sustained (the ODPM reported in March 2004 that the target had been met). These authorities had already produced B&B Reduction Action Plans.
- 3.155 Authorities which did not use B&B had rarely identified actions in their Strategies and Action Plans to prevent its use in future. This may be because LHAs felt they did not have any need to do so. Evaluators were not entirely sure, however, that this was always the reason for not addressing the use of B&B, and would have expected to see a mention of B&B in all Reviews and Strategies, to acknowledge that it is one of the Government's key priorities, and to ensure that any rise in the use of B&B in the future is pre-empted.

- 3.156 A small number of Reviews provided figures which revealed an increasing use of B&B for statutory homeless households during 2002/03, and identified a clear need to address this growing trend. For the most part, these actions were clearly targeted, with measurable outputs (developing x units of new temporary accommodation) and less often measurable outcomes (reducing the use of B&B for families to x by March 2004). It was surprising that some LHAs with growing use of B&B did not identify this through their Reviews, or did not address it sufficiently through the Action Plan. Some Strategies proposed merely to monitor the use of B&B with no actions planned to control it. In some cases, no baseline figure was given, so it appeared that it would be difficult to measure progress by March 2004.
- 3.157 It is important, of course, for each LHA to ensure that they have an adequate stock of appropriate temporary accommodation to meet the needs of people who become homeless in their area. Proactive measures to achieve this which are most likely to have an impact, included developing new units of temporary accommodation, and making use of the private sector through landlord accreditation and leasing schemes. These were particularly successful in the South West and London, where there were also many initiatives to increase the stock of temporary accommodation in council and RSL housing. Other initiatives will reduce the need for temporary accommodation by preventing homelessness, and ODPM guidance on prevention for authorities with high use of B&B was well-received.
- 3.158 The use of B&B for groups other than families was notable in some areas. In parts of the North East, for example, poor quality B&B is still in use for young people and other single people and couples, and although some Reviews identified this as a problem, there was not always sufficient attention paid to tackling this through alternative provision. In addition, some LHAs make use of poorly-located low demand council housing as temporary accommodation, which can exacerbate problems for vulnerable people in the short term, and sometimes is the cause of repeat homelessness in the longer term.
- 3.159 The self-assessment forms recorded the incidence of plans to reduce the use of B&B as a key aim in just over a quarter of the Homelessness Strategies.

Box 37: Good practice – Reducing use of inappropriate temporary accommodation

The Colchester Strategy: Summarised extract

Home Finder scheme

Offers advice, information and support along with deposit guarantees, rent in advance and rent 'top-up' to families threatened with homelessness to whom a duty is owed. It has been especially popular with existing private rented tenants (who cannot retrieve their deposits until after they have moved); and women fleeing domestic violence (provides a settled solution quickly and legal matters can be sorted out at a later date).

Fast-tracking of HB payments with a 4-week promise of payment

A dedicated HB officer is being funded to fast-track HB claims for people we house in the private rented sector. We will pay a goodwill payment of £100 if HB is not received within 4 weeks.

Box 37: Good practice – Reducing use of inappropriate temporary accommodation (continued)

Negotiations and goodwill payments for family or friends prepared to continue housing the household

Payments will give staff more scope for negotiation with clients, their landlords, and family or friends to prevent or delay homelessness. 'Buying time' can often mean less disruption for the applicant and their family as well as easing the financial burden.

Development of crash pads as an alternative to B&B

A pilot scheme of two council-owned fully-furnished and equipped 'crash pads' aims to accommodate people for a very short time until other temporary accommodation can be found.

Supported lodgings scheme

'First Step' will offer young people accommodation with one-to-one support from their carer. This also helps to make use of 'spare' bedrooms people have and reduce under-occupation in the borough.

Family Mediation Scheme

The main aim is not just to get the young person back home but to rebuild family relationships, so that if the young person cannot return home they will still have the family network to rely on for other support.

Cross-agency advantages

When a family being evicted from council housing is intentionally homeless, Social Services prefer to keep them in their home until alternative arrangements can be made. This gives more time to look into the family's circumstances and work on alternative housing arrangements.

When an intentionally homeless family must be placed in B&B, a second incentive to act swiftly is available. If Social Services re-houses the family quickly, the council can give Social Services a proportion of the money it would have spent on B&B.

Box 38: Other good practice examples – Reducing use of inappropriate temporary accommodation

Authority	Activity
Gosport	Lodgings initiative – use of under-occupied council homes to house homeless households on a temporary basis.
Aylesbury Vale & Runnymede	Dedicated staff for rent deposit scheme, a resettlement officer for the private rented sector and a private rented scheme manager.
Barnet	New Start scheme, involving payment of £2,000 for resettlement of families into new areas outside the borough.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Daily notification of bookings into B&B.
Telford & Wrekin	Developing monitoring system to show time spent in TA by household type, and number of moves between TA.

Box 39: Other good practice – Providing new temporary accommodation

Camden works with private developers to create or procure self-contained temporary accommodation for families as an alternative to using RSLs.

REDUCING ROUGH SLEEPING

- 3.160 The Government set an overall objective concerning rough sleeping to cut the numbers of people sleeping rough to one-third of 1998 levels, or lower, and to sustain the reduction into the future. This target has been met and, to date, sustained.
- 3.161 High levels of rough sleeping were reported by only a small number of LHAs. These authorities are working with the ODPM and have plans in place to reduce the problem. Authorities are expected to gather data and monitor the situation to better understand the problem and ensure adequate provision for single homeless people is available in future.
- 3.162 In their self-assessment forms, only 10 authorities identified this as main aim of their Strategies, although 29 noted achievements in this area for 2002/03 or 2003/04.
- 3.163 There were some strong proposals for tackling rough sleeping in Strategies, many building on work already done to develop Rough Sleeping or Single Homelessness Strategies, but some starting work on what had been uncovered as a significant issue for the first time, as a result of the Review. Some LHAs noted in the Strategy that learning about the real scale of rough sleeping and 'sofa surfing' was one of the major benefits of having carried out consultation for the Review.
- 3.164 Firm actions to prevent rough sleeping include action to prevent people becoming homeless when leaving prison and hospital, identifying additional needs for tenancy sustainment work to prevent repeat homelessness amongst particularly vulnerable groups, befriending schemes, and schemes for fast-tracking access to drug and alcohol treatment.
- 3.165 Whilst many LHAs did address rough sleeping, a significant number of LHAs did not, either because of a very low count; or because there was no evidence of high numbers of rough sleepers in the area. The ODPM expects LHAs to carry out a count only where there are thought to be 10 or more people on the streets each night. Many LHAs did not have information to show the likely scale of this problem at the point that the Review was carried out. Much of the rough sleeping is intermittent, and would be difficult to count, but in some cases Reviews noted stakeholder views that it was a problem yet failed to address this in the Strategy.

- 3.166 Where rough sleeping was mentioned, only a minority have identified actions to address the problems, many through the proposed provision of additional temporary accommodation for single homeless people in general. A number of Strategies indicated the need to improve data collected about rough sleeping and are considering carrying out a rough sleeper count in the future. Some authorities pointed out the difficulty of carrying out a formal count. Several Staffordshire authorities plan to work with Parish Councils to gather this information on a regular basis.

Box 40: Good practice – Reducing rough sleeping

The Camden Strategy

Camden had published a Street Population Strategy in July 2000, and an implementation plan in 2001. Examples of actions which were already in its plans were to provide street outreach services in partnership with the voluntary sector, funding of Operation Kingsway (police disruption of street activity), provision of hostel accommodation to encourage access to employment and training opportunities – including efficient move-on, and rapid access to treatment programmes for street population and the development of clear pathways through treatment programmes and into resettlement programmes. Other actions supported these with a wet-day centre, and links with community mental health teams. The rough sleeping reduction target had been achieved and exceeded. The Homelessness Strategy reinforced the general aims, and committed the Council and its partners to go beyond the two-thirds reduction, and to further reduce begging on the streets and street crime.

Box 41: Other good practice examples – Reducing rough sleeping

Authority	Activity
Bournemouth	Diverting donations from the public, and funding a detox scheme.
Birmingham	Priority referral system for rough sleepers to get into temporary accommodation.
Wolverhampton	Development of services for serially excluded people.
Bromley	Floating support to former rough sleepers is delivered through Thames Reach Bondway.
Stoke-on-Trent	Identifies trigger causes of rough sleeping.
Southampton	Southampton Voluntary Services links volunteers with former rough sleepers to befriend and support them in the community. It also provides opportunities to former rough sleepers in local community projects.

Access to settled housing

- 3.167 The good practice handbook (*Homelessness Strategies: a good practice handbook*, DTLR) notes the importance of ensuring that access to settled housing is acknowledged and addressed in Strategies. Whilst a large majority of authorities did so at least in part, only about two-thirds were found to have addressed this fully.
- 3.168 This section covers: access to private renting, use of the existing stock, impact of choice-based lettings and new provision.

INCREASING ACCESS TO THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

- 3.169 Many Homelessness Strategies identified that increasing access to the private rented sector would be helpful, reducing pressure on council and RSL accommodation, and helping those who might not have priority for the social rented sector to find accommodation. In some cases, it was also seen as an important part of reducing the need for temporary accommodation, or part of a strategy for helping people to move on from temporary accommodation.
- 3.170 Around four-fifths of all Strategies proposed to develop or to strengthen rent deposit schemes. These are increasingly recognised as crucial aids to help homeless people access private rented accommodation. Without the funds to pay the deposit, or rent in advance, or both, homeless people may not be able to make use of property which could otherwise suit their needs well. The schemes also often act as leverage to persuade private landlords to house people who they might otherwise not be certain about, and some rent deposit schemes are now linked to support provision, or are developed as part of a scheme to increase the options for groups such as young people, offenders and substance misusers.

Box 42: Good practice example – Increasing access to the private rented sector

Havant's First Base advice and accommodation service for young people accredits landlords, matches landlord requirements with young people, and conducts police-checks on landlords, provides help to complete HB claims, deals with problems with the young person start-up grants for landlords and rent and damage guarantee schemes.

MAXIMISING USE OF THE EXISTING STOCK

- 3.171 Social housing is, of course, a vital component in authorities' responses to this issue. In self-assessment, authorities said they expected anything from 15% to 54% of council lettings in 2004/05 to be made to homeless households, the highest figures being in London and the South East. Very similar figures were recorded for 2005/06: authorities are not generally expecting the percentage to increase, even in high demand, high homelessness areas.
- 3.172 The percentage of lettings expected to be made by RSLs in the same years varied between 11% and 53%, again with London the highest, though East and South West regions were the second and third highest, respectively. Lowest figures for both LHAs and RSLs were from the North East and North West.

- 3.173 Authorities in high demand/shortage areas said they would monitor and review allocations policies. Relatively few intended to increase the priority for homelessness; it is not clear whether they had considered that there was any need to increase the proportion of homeless people being housed through RSLs, or whether they had achieved the right balance between lettings to different groups of applicants.
- 3.174 Not surprisingly, the highest expected levels of lettings to homeless people were in London and the South East. Some proposed under-occupation initiatives to free up larger accommodation for homeless families. Notably, however, these were less frequently proposed than the use of out-of borough relocation schemes to address shortages.
- 3.175 RSLs are expected to help local authorities to meet the needs of homeless people. The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code sets out the expectation that RSLs will "give reasonable preference to those in housing need" and "must work with local authorities to enable the latter to fulfil their duties to the homeless and people in priority housing need, to the vulnerable and those covered by the Government's Supporting People policy. The Regulatory Guidance accompanying the Code expects RSLs to be "able to demonstrate their co-operation with local authorities in homelessness Reviews, in the formulation of homelessness Strategies, and in the delivery of local authorities' homelessness functions." When asked to do so by the local authority, RSLs should "provide a proportion of their stock to local authority nominations and temporary accommodation to the homeless". In practice, as the figures above show, the proportion of RSL lettings made to homeless households is not always at a significant level, and a number of LHAs reported in their Homelessness Reviews that the figure is not always measured, despite the importance of access to RSL accommodation in satisfying housing need for homeless people and other vulnerable groups.
- 3.176 A number of Strategies recognised the need to take specific action to address this, firstly by improving the way that nominations and their outcomes are monitored, and next by reviewing policies and practices to increase the number of homeless households gaining access to this sector. In some cases, actions were proposed to increase the number being re-housed into council housing, particularly through better information about choices, and through incentives for tackling under-occupation by small households or those who may be able to release a council property by buying into the private sector.

Box 43: Good practice – Increasing access to settled Accommodation

The Waverley Strategy and Tandridge

Waverley runs an incentive scheme to under-occupying households – £1,000 and £1,200 to release a 2 bed and 3 bed house respectively. Also, grants for disabled adaptations are not available to people under-occupying when a move to smaller, more suitable accommodation will better address needs. Tandridge's Assisted Purchase Scheme has been in operation since 1996/7, and to date has enabled 36 households to access properties released through this scheme. Rising prices mean that the number has reduced from a peak of nine per year.

Box 44: Other good practice examples – Increasing access to settled Accommodation	
Authority	Activity
Southampton	Special Needs Quota: applicants referred by specific voluntary providers can be re-housed from the Housing Register out of turn, to free up bed spaces in the alcohol/drug rehabilitation and homeless resettlement projects.
Herefordshire	Advocacy worker to help vulnerable people access housing through the Choice-Based Lettings scheme.
Walsall	Review of RSL policies to seek to remove barriers to access to homeless applicants.
Three Rivers	Increased use of Mutual Exchange as a cheaper way of generating more sustainable lettings.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Links made with the Empty Property Strategy to increase stock available for homeless applicants.
Aylesbury Vale	This Strategy includes plans to increase the supply of homes through S106 agreements, make use of the Empty Homes Strategy, and use a Cash Incentive Scheme. There is a target set of the number of empty homes to be brought back into use each year.
Brighton	Home Wire scheme: Touch-screen kiosks in public places that enable households to search for new homes in Brighton or elsewhere, view council lettings and print out information free of charge.

IMPACT OF CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

- 3.177 The 2002 Homelessness Act requires authorities to consider including choice in allocations schemes. Authorities can, within CBL schemes, allocate a percentage of lettings to homeless applicants.
- 3.178 More than 200 authorities said in self-assessments that they were planning to introduce choice based lettings, or have already done so. Almost all are scheduled to have CBL running by the end of 2005. The evaluators examined Strategies for evidence of the possible impact of CBL on homeless people's access to social housing but found very little. A small number of authorities, mainly in the South East, had revised their allocations policies to increase the priority for homeless people, but this was not linked to CBL. **Kennet District Council** said in self-assessment that its CBL scheme had significantly reduced the number of households making homeless applications.
- 3.179 The issue would merit further investigation.

NEW PROVISION

- 3.180 The need for new provision of affordable housing was also highest in the south: one authority found that 1,000 new affordable homes were needed each year. Other areas also reported a need for new housing, and there were hotspots of high need even in some parts of the north which are experiencing high prices and shortages of affordable housing.

- 3.181 Most South East authorities proposed the use of S.106 powers to increase new affordable housing supply. Even in and around growth areas where the anticipated funding for new affordable housing is greatest, however, some authorities had not addressed the impact this designation might have on homelessness and housing supply.
- 3.182 In areas with lower overall demand for new housing, the supply of the right type of housing in suitable locations remained an issue. Many homeless people are young and single, and need support. The supply of suitable housing for them was not always adequate.
- 3.183 LHAs were not required to explore comprehensively the issue of the scale of need or locality of new provision of affordable housing for the district. However, Homelessness Strategies should influence and form part of the Housing Strategy, which would deal with this issue fully.

Addressing other priorities

MEETING HEALTH NEEDS

- 3.184 Housing authorities have begun to work much more closely with health partners, and it is clear that where Primary Care Trust or other NHS staff were involved in Strategy Groups, Homeless Forums, or stakeholder consultation, it was more likely that health issues would be considered. There are some excellent examples of action taken in this area, and in a small number of LHAs, the Strategy and Review were developed jointly with the PCT, with a view to improving public health.
- 3.185 About a third of Homelessness Strategies contain proposals for addressing the health needs of homeless people, other than providing accommodation and support for people with mental health problems. Another third of the remaining authorities addressed the issue to some extent. However, most did not – despite the attention paid to the issue in various national documents. Little attention was paid to identifying links with Health Improvement and Modernisation Plans or Local Development Plans.
- 3.186 In **Camden** all people accepted as homeless are to be given information about registering with a GP, they are also piloting health check-ups for homeless children; and ensuring that all children under 6 in temporary accommodation are put in touch with a Health Visitor.

REDUCING RE-OFFENDING AND ADDRESSING COMMUNITY SAFETY ISSUES

- 3.187 Rather more Strategies dealt with the link between homelessness and crime and community safety than looked at issues about access to health services. The majority focused on issues relating to domestic violence, and did not consider the contribution that resolving homelessness can make to helping offenders to address their offending behaviour.
- 3.188 As with health, where links were not identified between the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy or Community Safety Strategy and the Homelessness Review and

Strategy, it was less likely that actions would be identified for helping to address re-offending through tackling homelessness amongst offenders. This was picked up in a minority of Strategies, and there are some strong and clear actions within Action Plans designed to reduce homelessness amongst this group. In addition, the needs of women fleeing domestic violence were addressed through actions designed to increase their safety and security, to identify re-housing needs of male perpetrators, and to break the cycle of repeat homelessness that can occur.

- 3.189 Difficulties in engaging Probation were sometimes overcome by setting up separate Strategy Groups with them. Accommodation was recognised as a key issue from the inception of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), and they are already expected to have an Accommodation Officer to act as a link with housing providers and to provide advice to young offenders. Many YOTs have a person in this post seconded from a housing organisation, and these links have helped to identify key issues for young offenders and to develop good relationships with housing agencies. Housing officers in prisons were also active in some areas in the development of Strategies. It was quite difficult to engage YOTs in some areas and effective links with prisons are still to be developed in much of the country.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

- 3.190 Where authorities made the link with education, training and employment, it was usually done in an imaginative way, and showed the thought that some LHAs and Homelessness Forums are putting into trying to help homeless people to move away from homelessness and social exclusion. But very few Strategies addressed links with education, training, or employment, beyond the need to link education to the needs of children in homeless families in temporary accommodation.

Box 45: Good practice – Addressing other priorities for homeless people

Wolverhampton – electronic health services

The Wolverhampton Homelessness Strategy has a foreword from the PCT's Director of Public Health as well as from the Director of Housing, recognising that living without a home excludes people from good health as well as from society and opportunity. Working in partnership is seen as likely to improve health and well-being for this excluded group.

Health is one of the key themes of the Strategy. Proposals include:

- Explore feasibility and funding for a nurse-led team for homeless people.
- Examine training issues for primary care staff, and other health professionals.
- Link primary care services for drug users (GPs, nurses, and health visitors) to outreach support.
- Identify links into and between services.
- Examine the feasibility of an electronic directory of health services for helping homeless people to access services, with information on opening times, who does what, where services are, and so on.

Box 45: Good practice – Addressing other priorities for homeless people (continued)

Education, training and employment (ETE) links – Wolverhampton: *actions identified in the Strategy include:*

- Developing links between tenancy sustainment and education and employment facilities, so that homeless people have the same opportunities as the wider community.
- Proactively engage residents in temporary accommodation in education, training, and employment programmes, ensuring that the necessary advice and support is made available.
- Work with Neighbourhood Managers to identify ETE opportunities for homeless people and for those at risk of homelessness (e.g. victims of domestic violence).

Box 46: Other good practice examples – Addressing other priorities for homeless people

Client group	Authority	Activity
Health	Easington	Partnership with the Health Promotion Team, and introducing resource packs for people in temporary accommodation to help them access health and support services in the area.
	Wolverhampton	Electronic directory of health services for homeless people, identifying leads and links into health services to help homeless people access mainstream health services, and training on homelessness issues for GPs and other health care professionals.
	Ashford	Presented specific actions for health, education and community safety – agreed between PCT, LEA and Police to ensure access to services by homeless households and vulnerable people.
	Waltham Forest	Resources being applied to the prevention of homelessness, the Community Health Project, Health Link Worker and the health access team.
	Shepway	Partnership between Surestart Folkestone, Shepway PCT and the Health Promotion Service, provides a support service to families in temporary accommodation.

Box 46: Other good practice examples – Addressing other priorities for homeless people (continued)		
Client group	Authority	Activity
Other	Croydon	Local information packs for people in temporary accommodation providing information about services offering education, training and employment.
	South Bedfordshire	Sought to establish a referral mechanism where truancy appears to be a problem amongst children in homeless families.

Differences among types of council and delivery arrangements

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

- 3.191 Some differences in approach across the country mirror the relative scale of the homelessness problem, or differences in client groups. In the North East, for example, there is generally less shortage of social housing, and responses to homelessness tend to rely heavily on access to this tenure.
- 3.192 At the other extreme, the South East (where high prices and shortages of affordable housing are widespread) features many actions to maximise use of existing stock, prevention measures such as mediation, and work with the private sector to increase supply and standard of temporary accommodation.
- 3.193 Overall, there were few regional variations in the way LHAs had approached the task of producing Reviews, Strategies and Action Plans. Many authorities in the East and West Midlands have formed partnerships to undertake Reviews and develop Strategies, and this regional or, increasingly importantly, sub-regional working has proved effective.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF COUNCIL

- 3.194 In general, districts and especially rural areas are less well developed in partnership working. Notable exceptions are North Yorkshire and Cumbria, where the predominantly rural authorities have begun effective partnerships at county level. The main issues noted in rural areas are on supply and affordability.
- 3.195 The researchers examined the Reviews and Strategies for differences between two-tier districts, and those with a single unitary or metropolitan authority. On most of the key issues for Government, there was no difference at national level. Social Services were no more likely to be involved where the department was within the same council than if it was situated in a county council. Similarly, each type of council was equally likely to demonstrate corporate commitment to tackling homelessness, and to include joint action involving two or more bodies in its Strategy.

- 3.196 However, on the issue of linking the Strategy in with wider authority strategies such as Community Plans, LSPs and regional plans, there was a marked difference. Unitary and metropolitan authorities were significantly more likely to have achieved this. They were also somewhat more likely to have made arrangements to facilitate collaborative working with relevant partners. The researchers believe this could be because LSPs have not yet been established in many districts, and smaller authorities may find it more difficult to engage with regional planning. The issue of resources for smaller districts is likely to play a part, though as noted earlier (see Paragraph 3.194), there are examples of excellent county-wide work in rural areas.
- 3.197 Metropolitan and unitary authorities were slightly more likely to have identified resources to carry out their Strategies; though this is an area of difficulty for most authorities of all types, and larger LHAs seemed to be more likely to have seen their ODPM funding absorbed into the corporate pot.

THE IMPACT OF CONTRACTING OUT

- 3.198 According to the self-assessment forms, about 10% of LHAs had contracted out their homelessness services, just under a quarter (22%) had contracted out all or part of their housing advice services, and the same number had contracted out the allocations work.
- 3.199 In the evaluation of the Homelessness Reviews, Strategies, and Action Plans, the researchers considered whether contracting out any services to RSLs, ALMOs, or other organisations had any impact on the process of developing the Strategies or on tackling homelessness within each area. In the majority of cases, there was no discernible impact. Most of the RSLs contracted to provide social housing and homelessness/housing advice services appeared to take part in the development of the Strategy, and most were represented in the Strategy Steering Group. There were a few exceptions, with the RSL not active in the Strategy Steering Group and not mentioned in the Action Plan.
- 3.200 There were post-transfer areas where it was clear that homelessness and housing advice had received greater attention and resources since being taken over by the transfer RSL or another agency.
- 3.201 A significant number of Strategies in some regions contained plans to address the number of evictions from RSL tenancies, introducing protocols for intervention to try and prevent homelessness. Many also intended to review nominations agreements but few commented on what the outcome of this would be.
- 3.202 In a small number of cases, notes made in Homelessness Reviews led evaluators to conclude that relationships were not sufficiently strong between the LHA and the RSL. There were examples of deteriorating relationships, often already resulting in a plan to take the homeless and housing advice services back in-house. There was also evidence of post-stock transfer increases in the number of intentionality decisions, in numbers being placed in B&B or other temporary accommodation, and numbers of people in non-statutory groups being turned away without help to access temporary accommodation. One RSL had reduced access to its temporary accommodation, and in another case the LHA had retained the homeless service but without any temporary accommodation, and this had led to an increase in the use of B&B and other hostels in both cases. Strategies generally planned actions to work on these issues with the providers of homelessness services.

3.203 In general, then, the RSL partners have been taking an active part in addressing homelessness but there are noticeable difficulties with access to settled social housing. A significant number of Strategies noted that there are barriers to access to social housing for non-statutory groups, young people, or homeless offenders and substance misusers. A number of Strategies in the West Midlands and North West identified actions to address these barriers, for example by reviewing the allocations policies of all RSLs in the borough, reviewing the nominations agreement, seeking to ensure that support packages are available to support people when they first move in, and researching what impact there was from pre-tenancy criminal conviction checks on access to permanent social housing.

C: The Action Plans

3.204 This section of the report deals with action planning, including:

- Action planning, and monitoring and evaluation 3.204
- Good practice: Monitoring, review and evaluation 3.211
- Resources 3.213

Box 47: Key findings – Action planning

- Action planning is a weak point in many Strategies, and many authorities have not identified the resources needed to carry through their Strategy (Paragraph 3.204 – 3.222).

Action planning, and plans for monitoring and evaluation

3.205 The guidance provided to LHAs noted the importance of effective Action Plans, and effective arrangements for monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating Strategies. The evaluation of Strategies and Action Plans showed this to be the area with which LHAs and Strategy Groups had most difficulty, in many areas. Only about 5% of LHAs did not produce an Action Plan at all, with a further handful doing so in part. However, the action planning and arrangements proposed for monitoring and evaluating Strategies were not strong in quite a few areas.

3.206 About four in five Strategies contained plans to ensure Government homelessness targets were met and sustained, half of these doing so in full. Similar numbers had made arrangements to monitor and review the delivery of the Strategy including targets and outcomes, in collaboration with key partners – two-thirds of these in full.

3.207 Of the few that did not produce Action Plans, most had included actions within the various sections of the Strategy, but not pulled this together in a single document.

The use of measurable targets and outcomes has not been very widespread. Few authorities used SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related).

- 3.208 *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness* helped to guide Strategy Groups towards usable outcomes but this came quite late in the process, and fewer authorities made full use of it than might have been expected. Good examples include Strategies which have used the projected impact on preventing and reducing homelessness as a tool for prioritising actions for the Action Plan.
- 3.209 There was a variety of different mechanisms proposed for monitoring progress, with some using Key Performance Indicators, a few proposing outcome measures for all actions, and some intending to make use of feedback to see how effective the Strategy implementation was. Most noteworthy is the fact that relatively few LHAs set any outcomes against which progress could be measured. Many intended to report progress to the Strategy Group without such measures, and it is hard to see how progress could be monitored effectively other than by seeing achievements in developing new schemes.
- 3.210 Common problems with Action Plans were that timetables were very loose, for example covering the whole of the Strategy period or first two years, that timetables were far too short for actions to be implemented, or that no one lead agency was identified to take an action forward, but rather that the whole Strategy Group would be responsible for an action.
- 3.211 The following table shows items the evaluators consider good practice in writing Action Plans.

Table 5: Checklist of ideas for LHAs to consider in writing Action Plans	
Essential headings	Other useful headings
The action proposed.	Milestones – staged achievements (these may be called interim targets).
Who is going to lead on this action, and who else is to be involved.	How success will be measured.
When it is going to be completed.	Why the action is proposed.
Resources needed.	What the situation is now – the baseline position.
The outcome intended – what will be achieved (quantified if possible).	A comments column – so that people can see why progress has been slow or why targets were achieved early or outstripped.

Other tips:

- Ensure there is an end date for each action, which is realistic and achievable.
- Make sure each action has a lead person identified – tasks given to a group or forum may not be carried out by anyone.

- Review actions regularly, for instance every three months, and produce a progress report so all parties can see what has been achieved and where action is still needed.
- Update the Action Plan each time it is reviewed, clearly marked with the review date.
- Put the Action Plan on the council website so that all partners and members of the public can see what has been achieved and changed as a result of the Strategy.

GOOD PRACTICE: MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION

The Pendle Action Plan: extract

- 3.212 Pendle has produced a series of Action Plans devised from the results of the Review and supporting one or more of the key objectives of the Homelessness and Housing Strategies. The plans have been agreed and prioritised by the Pendle Homelessness Forum and Strategy Implementation Group. An example is shown overleaf.

Preventing homelessness – Providing support services

Baseline position	What will we do?	When will we do it by?	How will we measure success?	Who will deliver?	Why have we chosen to do it?	Which other strategies will this support?	Resources
No Support for Private Sector Tenants Suffering Alcohol and Drug Abuse	Make Application for Funding to Provide Support Worker	Apr-03	Bid Submitted	Housing Needs Manager	Identified as Problem as Part of Homeless Review	Supporting People Strategy	
Drug Action Team treatment Plan	Priority Needs Funding						
People moving from Hostel Accommodation Experience Delays in Obtaining Community Care Grant Funding	Bid for Resources to Establish Revolving Loan Fund	Apr-03	Bid Submitted	Housing Needs Manager	Identified as Problem as Part of Homeless Review	Supporting People Strategy	Priority Needs Funding
No Support Service Available to Support Young Single Tenants In Pendle BC Accommodation	Establish Support Worker Service for Young Single Tenants	Apr-03	Support Workers Appointed	Tenancy Services Manager	Identified as Problem as Part of Homeless Review	Housing Strategy	
Supporting People Strategy	Transitional HB						
No Rent Deposit Scheme in Place	Develop a Rent Deposit Scheme	Apr-04	Scheme in Place	Housing Needs Manager	Identified as Problem as Part of Homeless Review	Housing Strategy	
Supporting People Strategy	Priority Needs Funding						

- 3.213 Whilst **South Ribble** did not include specific measurable outcomes, a point of useful practice was to have a column in the Action Plan headed “target/outcome”. The council used this to identify where it wants to be after the action has been implemented e.g. “increased customer satisfaction with homelessness service”.

Box 48: Other good practice – Monitoring, review and evaluation	
Authority	Activity
Leicester	Used Key Performance Indicators of the council and local performance targets, as well as performance indicators for other key stakeholders such as health, social services, probation and the police, to monitor the progress of the Strategy and Action Plan in tackling homelessness.
Erewash	Annual conference for both the Homelessness and Housing Strategies, to enable feedback on the progress of the Strategies and action plans, the continuing or emerging gaps and what actions will enable these gaps to be filled.
Cherwell	Strategy targets include targets for reduction of homelessness against particular causes, service improvements, number of families in temporary accommodation and customer satisfaction.
Hastings	Strategy diagrams (based on targeted solutions) depicting how solutions to increase supply of permanent accommodation compare with needs of homeless households; reduction in acceptances as a result of preventative actions.
Telford & Wrekin	Monitor level of homeless presentations by risk factor to assess impact on prevention methods.
North Hertfordshire	Direct links to the council’s corporate management system, each Action Plan task has a status based on the council’s Best Value performance indicators, using a traffic light system with three main categories, which enables clear identification of progress.
Lichfield	Involvement of service users in monitoring progress on the Strategy and Action Plan.

Resources

- 3.214 Only three in ten authorities had fully identified the resources to support their Strategies, with the same proportion doing so in part. Districts were less likely to have identified resources than unitary and metropolitan authorities.
- 3.215 In self-assessment, not being able to identify resources for implementation was the second most frequent ‘weakness’ acknowledged by authorities. Many of those responding said it was difficult to plan when the amount of Government resources was unknown beyond the current year.

- 3.216 However, resources for tackling homelessness do appear to be increasing. Authorities' responses in self-assessment varied greatly, but in general staffing levels did increase between 2001/02 and 2002/03.
- 3.217 The grants made to voluntary organisations providing homelessness services also increased, as did the number of authorities making such grants. In 2002/03, 245 authorities gave £21.4 million, an average of £87,000 per authority. In 2003/04 this rose to 296 authorities giving £35.9 million, an average of £121,000. The proportion of these grants sourced from the ODPM Homelessness Directorate varied between nil (114 authorities) and 100% (42 authorities).
- 3.218 Authorities believe that large amounts can be saved through homelessness prevention. About half of all authorities estimated the savings they believe could be achieved, and this amounted to £29 million – an average of £162,000 per authority.
- 3.219 Of those that had identified a specific 'Invest to save' budget for 2004/05, the average was just under £150,000 each – making a total of £11.8 million.
- 3.220 Workshop participants welcomed the extra ODPM funding, and said they were willing to use it creatively. The funding built on money already received for rough sleeping services.
- 3.221 However, participants said they had had limited time for staff to learn and limited capacity to involve others and develop Strategies. There were concerns over the change in role for homelessness staff who did not necessarily have the right skills to develop strategies, and about action planning, delivery and progress chasing.
- 3.222 Participants would welcome adequate ring-fenced funding, and certainty, over funding to aid effective planning. They would prefer Homelessness Directorate funding to be based on performance and progress rather than a bidding process.
- 3.223 Evaluators noted that few LHAs researched the level of funds available to be spent on homelessness from sources other than the LHA's own funds, and relatively few looked beyond their own funds, those coming from the Homelessness Directorate, or Supporting People and Housing Corporation funding, for new schemes and actions in the Action Plans. There was less use than might have been expected of money coming through regeneration, crime and community safety, and health sources; this demonstrates that many LHAs and Strategy Groups were not thinking widely enough about how homelessness can be tackled through Strategies operating across the range of social policy programmes. The lack of attention to this aspect of Homelessness Strategies and Action Plans also provides evidence that Strategy Groups were not acting in a sufficiently strategic fashion: many Strategy Groups did not attract sufficiently senior staff; where this was the case, it was often as a result of the homelessness problem already having a high profile, perhaps because of high levels of expenditure on B&B.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 was intended to produce a step change in the way local housing authorities tackled the issue of homelessness, encouraging and requiring them to take a more comprehensive approach; promoting prevention over traditional responses; and taking an overview of future needs.
- 4.2 It is clear that many authorities responded with thorough Reviews that take account of and analyse the current situation in terms of understanding the causes and scale of homelessness, and what needs to change in the provision of services to meet the needs identified. The best authorities have been able to build on already good services by developing their strategic role within their region and sub-region.
- 4.3 Not as many LHAs as hoped looked beyond statutory homelessness at the scale of need and causes of non-statutory homelessness, and therefore what could reduce the problem among priority and non-priority groups. Further, even some of those LHAs that are performing well, as well as most other LHAs, made limited analysis of trends and future needs – despite the requirement to do so being set out clearly in the Code of Guidance. In addition, some authorities where homelessness is found at a relatively low level continue to rely heavily on access to social housing as a response. Authorities that do not project future needs and plan the availability of services must be vulnerable to economic changes in their region and, in the longer term, changing demographics, that could lead to greater demand for services and/or scarcity of suitable social housing.
- 4.4 The main causes of homelessness were, almost without exception, found to be:
- Parents/friends/other relatives no longer willing or able to accommodate.
 - Violent relationship breakdown with partner.
 - Loss of tenancy through the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy.
- 4.5 This finding was consistent across the country, though in some cases the order of magnitude among the three main causes varied.
- 4.6 Consistency among the causes of homelessness was part of a general finding that regional differences among authorities were few. As would be expected, authorities in high demand, high cost areas experienced higher pressures of homelessness while in lower demand areas the problem was seen as less pressing. Authorities in the Midlands and East of England had worked particularly well in cooperating at regional or sub-regional level.

- 4.7 Black and minority ethnic issues were neglected by many authorities. There is a clear need for better data collection, involvement of BME groups in strategy development, and better services to these communities.
- 4.8 Where a Review has been limited in scope, it follows that the resulting Strategy is likely to be equally limited. This is particularly true on the issue of non-statutory homelessness and the issue of its scale and causes, which many Reviews failed to address fully or at all. Some authorities have, however, continued to improve during the process of strategy development and have produced a better quality Strategy than the Review might suggest.
- 4.9 Here, engagement with other agencies is key – and joint working with Social Services is a requirement. The picture across the country is again highly varied on this issue: some authorities are clearly working well, and exhibiting leadership in their work with others, taking joint responsibility and establishing protocols that should ensure proper targets, monitoring and evaluation as the strategy progresses. Other Strategies point to an authority taking sole responsibility with little engagement from Social Services. Some of the self assessment forms include comments that the authority has had difficulty in engaging with Social Services, or with particular services within the department.
- 4.10 Similarly, some LHAs are working well with other agencies and with representatives of homeless people, whilst others have managed relatively little external input. Again, LHAs reported difficulties in engaging with other statutory agencies (health and Probation) or on occasions with the voluntary sector, particularly at the stage of moving from the Review to developing commitments for the Strategy and Action Plan. Some produced highly imaginative solutions that the researchers commend as good practice. However, in most authorities, there has been little direct engagement with homeless people across all groups, with authorities generally relying only on surveys of service users who have been accepted or re-housed through the homelessness service. This is an area that will need to be addressed as Strategies are updated.
- 4.11 The 2002 legislation prompted some authorities to work collaboratively across their traditional boundaries, producing joint Reviews, Strategies and services. This highly welcome move, particularly by smaller authorities where resources are limited, should deliver better services that respond to urban/rural issues, migration, and housing markets.
- 4.12 The focus on a small, well defined set of Government priorities has produced results in tackling rough sleeping and use of B&B; and almost every Strategy considers prevention and support activities. However, a number of authorities failed to identify solutions for the future in these areas, possibly because the targets have been reached or because the problem may not currently exist or is considered difficult to measure. The increased use of B&B revealed in a small number of strategies is a cause for concern. Monitoring of Strategy targets will need to include continued vigilance on rough sleeping and B&B use.
- 4.13 Almost all Strategies demonstrated that homeless prevention is now seen as a priority, not just in words but also in practice. There were some excellent examples of new developments in preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness, and many authorities have recognised the need to re-focus housing advice and homeless services to prioritise ways of preventing people becoming homeless. In the best

authorities it was evident that some of these initiatives and new ways of working have already begun to pay off. More work is needed to identify useful outcome measures, so that authorities can quantify the benefits and provide evidence of tangible outcomes.

- 4.14 Action planning, as noted earlier, is a weak point in many strategies. Here, targets and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation need to be sharpened. Many authorities have not identified the resources needed to carry through their strategy, or have made limited progress in this area. Self-assessments reveal that many would welcome more certainty over Government funding, which would allow them to plan further into the future.

Recommendations

- 4.15 The researchers were asked to identify areas where further guidance or assistance could be helpful in improving the quality of strategies and services to homeless people.
- 4.16 The recommendations are divided into three categories: for the ODPM; for local housing authorities; and for other agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ODPM

- 4.17 The existing guidance proved helpful in promoting a new approach by LHAs to tackling homelessness and coordinating action. Most workshop participants said they found it useful and clear.
- 4.18 Some areas could benefit from further clarification, strengthening or extra emphasis. These are:

Understanding the causes of homelessness: Data collection and analysis

- 4.19 This is an acknowledged area of difficulty for many LHAs. Forecasting of future homelessness levels has proved particularly weak. The ODPM has covered the issue in its existing guidance but workshop participants said the information needed was sometimes not available. A number of systems are in common use across the country (see Paragraph 3.28 for discussion of this issue).

BME issues

- 4.20 This is a neglected area, with few LHAs even comparing the ethnicity of homeless applicants and acceptances or comparing the incidence of homelessness amongst BME applicants with population data for the area (see Paragraph 3.122).

Working with other agencies

- 4.21 LHAs in many areas found difficulty in engaging with other agencies. Even the involvement of Social Services, which has a statutory role in Homelessness Reviews and Strategies, was patchy. RSLs were not always co-operating fully with LHAs in tackling homelessness (see Paragraph 3.68).

Service user involvement

- 4.22 This is an area that most authorities had difficulty with, and only a minority showed clearly that there had been any significant involvement by homeless people in developing Reviews and Strategies. In particular authorities generally lacked service user views on the future direction of services at the strategic level, with a reliance on representative bodies' views. Many LHAs recognised this problem and said they wanted to improve (see Paragraph 3.80).

Corporate commitment

- 4.23 Most LHAs failed to show a clear corporate commitment to and endorsement of the Homelessness Strategy. Links to other strategies were made, but not always clearly (see Paragraph 3.100).

Tackling the main causes of homelessness

- 4.24 Most authorities have stepped up their work on prevention and responding to homelessness as required under the 2002 Act. Some have adopted innovative solutions and many are using techniques such as family mediation. However, there is relatively little evidence so far on the effectiveness of some approaches. There is a need for further research in this area to identify what works best, in what circumstances and for prevention activities to be publicised to all LHAs (see Paragraph 3.119).

Action planning

- 4.25 This was acknowledged as a weakness by many LHAs. Some clearly needed further help to strengthen this aspect of strategy development and service improvement (see Paragraph 3.204).

Resources

- 4.26 Many LHAs found difficulty in producing a full Action Plan with SMART targets in the absence of firm knowledge about future funding levels (see Paragraph 3.213).

- 4.27 The researchers therefore recommend the following:

- 4.28 Recommendation One: The ODPM should expand its guidance to LHAs to include:

- Reducing the amount of development time being spent by LHAs and Homelessness Forums by a) publicising the Shelter Multi-Agency Monitoring, the Centrepoint model, and any other models for common monitoring of homelessness across all agencies, and b) working with these and other key national agencies to develop systems for recording and monitoring data which would be comparable across the country and could supplement P1E data.
- Collecting appropriate data for predicting future homelessness trends.
- Engaging effectively with BME groups, and identifying the scale and type of BME needs in their area.
- Examining and analysing data with a view to reducing homelessness among BME groups, especially where the data suggests they are over-represented among homeless people.

- Instructions on the minimum requirement for monitoring to ensure best practice on BME issues.
 - Good practice in targeting initiatives to reduce homelessness among BME groups.
 - Joint guidance with other Government departments, such as the Department of Health, strengthening other agencies' involvement in Homelessness Strategy development. This should include establishing standards for other agencies to collect and pass on data to LHAs, including applications and referrals, on an annual basis.
 - More participation and involvement of service users, with specific advice on how to engage with service users effectively. Minimum user involvement standards could be helpful, such as consulting non-priority groups as well as those accepted as in priority need. Guidance on seeking service user views on improvements since the Strategy was implemented would be useful.
 - Place extra emphasis on a corporate performance framework that would better ensure the full council supports the Homelessness Strategy and takes a co-ordinated approach to Strategy development.
 - Best practice examples covering all aspects of action planning. This would include promotion of joint working to monitor homelessness, developing workable outcome measures, engaging others in both implementing and reviewing progress, and reporting on progress to service users, the wider group of stakeholders (beyond the Homelessness Forum or Strategy Group), to the Housing Strategy Group, and to the LSP.
- 4.29 Recommendation Two: The ODPM should issue guidance to LSPs about Homelessness Strategies and develop targets for LSPs in achieving reductions in homelessness across their area.
- 4.30 Recommendation Three: The ODPM should undertake research to establish the constituent elements of prevention best practice in tackling the main causes of homelessness, and should publicise best practice on preventing repeat homelessness beyond the LHAs faced with reducing the use of B&B.
- 4.31 Recommendation Four: Wherever possible, the ODPM should indicate likely or definite availability of resources from all funding streams for homelessness beyond the current financial year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LHAs

Strategy development

- 4.32 New homelessness strategies must be produced by 2008, and many authorities plan to produce updates annually in the meantime. Given the gaps in many Reviews and Strategies, however, there remains a more urgent need to produce more comprehensive work on homelessness.

Working with the voluntary sector

- 4.33 Voluntary sector organisations have a crucial role to play in ensuring strategies get to the root causes of homelessness, in mapping and analysing homelessness, and in service provision.

Cross boundary working

- 4.34 Some areas, particularly in the Midlands and rural northern areas, have benefited from cross boundary working. In other areas, including London, this has not materialised.

Joint working with other agencies

- 4.35 Many LHAs have either not involved other agencies in review and strategy development, or have found difficulty in engaging them in the process. Yet their involvement is crucial both in mapping and analysing patterns of homelessness, and in improving services.

Supporting People

- 4.36 An opportunity currently exists to ensure homelessness issues are adequately and properly reflected in the Supporting People strategies being developed for publication by March 2005.

Strategic links

- 4.37 Most LHAs identified the strategies with which there was a connection with homelessness, but many failed to identify how the Homelessness Strategy could influence other strategies and help to achieve their objectives, or how the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy could be assisted by actions contained in other strategies. Some LHAs looked only at corporate i.e. council-wide strategies and did not look beyond for the way that, for example, tackling homelessness could help to reduce crime, drug use, domestic violence, or mental ill health.
- 4.38 The researchers recommend the following to LHAs:
- 4.39 Recommendation Five: bring forward plans for comprehensive reviews of the Homelessness Strategy to ensure that identified weaknesses are addressed before 2008, and aim to review what is known about the scale and nature of homelessness on an annual basis.
- 4.40 Recommendation Six: take steps to ensure voluntary agencies are encouraged and enabled to be fully involved in Strategy development, and discuss with them the development of a solutions-based focus.
- 4.41 Recommendation Seven: consider the benefits of cross boundary, sub-regional and regional co-operation.
- 4.42 Recommendation Eight: renew efforts to engage other agencies, particularly Social Services, Health, Probation, Youth Offending Teams, drug and alcohol agencies, and other housing providers.
- 4.43 Recommendation Nine: work closely with Supporting People teams to ensure homelessness is properly addressed within SP strategies.

- 4.44 Recommendation Ten: identify the implications of the Homelessness Strategy for other corporate and multi-agency strategies, and to identify how other strategies could help to achieve the objectives of the Homelessness Strategy and vice-versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER AGENCIES

Housing Benefit

- 4.45 HB performance plays a crucial role in averting homelessness – and poor performance can significantly worsen the situation within a district.

Joint working

- 4.46 LHAs in many areas found difficulty in engaging with other agencies. Even the involvement of Social Services, which has a statutory role in Homelessness Reviews and Strategies, was patchy.

RSLs

- 4.47 RSLs are central to the delivery of homelessness services and have a key role to play in prevention. Liaison panels and forums involving associations and councils could be used more widely to support strategy development and achievement of outcomes. In some areas RSLs' involvement via nomination agreements could be improved.
- 4.48 The researchers recommend the following to other agencies:
- 4.49 Recommendation Eleven: The Department of Work and Pensions should set performance targets for authorities that prioritise delivery in cases of homelessness or those threatened with homelessness, and encourage authorities to cut delays in the payment of HB. The Government should encourage the Audit Commission to investigate the role of HB services in contributing to reducing homelessness.
- 4.50 Recommendation Twelve: Government departments, such as the Department of Health and the Home Office, should work with the ODPM to produce joint guidance strengthening other agencies' involvement in Homelessness Strategy development.
- 4.51 Recommendation Thirteen: RSLs should undertake joint monitoring with LHAs of how nomination agreements and tenancy sustainment measures are working in practice, with a view to improving both access to housing and prevention of homelessness.
- 4.52 Recommendation Fourteen: the Housing Corporation should issue guidance to RSLs on tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention. It should, in discussion with the ODPM, consider strengthening its Regulatory Code and Guidance in respect to homelessness, and monitor its implementation.
- 4.53 Recommendation Fifteen: The National Housing Federation should hold discussions with the Housing Corporation and ODPM with a view to strengthening the Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance as it refers to homelessness, and ensuring its implementation.

APPENDIX 1

Website addresses for further information

ODPM documents – check the homelessness publications page for additions

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=865&l=2

Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=869&l=3

More than a roof: a report into tackling homelessness

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601520.hcsp

Housing associations and homelessness briefing

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_027314.hcsp

Homelessness Act 2002 – summary of provisions

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601519.hcsp

Funding arrangements – letter from the Homelessness Directorate to LHAs

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_023552.pdf

ODPM advice note Achieving positive outcomes in homelessness

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpmhomelessness/documents/downloadable/odpm_home_609541.pdf

Homelessness strategies: a good practice handbook

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601517.hcsp

Reducing B&B use and tackling homelessness: What's working

www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_023783.hcsp

Achieving positive shared outcomes in health and homelessness

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_027792.hcsp

OTHER INFORMATION

Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Consultation

<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/docs/consultation/pdf/code.pdf>

Shelter's Homelessness Act 2002 website

www.homelessnessact.org.uk

Improvement drivers in local authority housing, Audit Commission report

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=english^1628&ProdID=DDEE95A2-63BC-4709-8C29-92FDB1EF8D06&SectionID=sect2#>

This publication will provide Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) and other agencies with feedback on how LHAs have met requirements under the Homelessness Act 2002 and to provide good practice to inform first year reviews and future service delivery.

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