



House of Commons

ODPM: Housing, Planning,
Local Government and the
Regions Committee

Homelessness

Third Report of Session 2004–05

Volume I – Report



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Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 18 January 2005*

The ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee

The ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its associated bodies.

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Summary

Every person has the right to a secure home; there is no place for homelessness in today's society. The Government should aim not to reduce homelessness but to eradicate it. Clear and ambitious targets should be set to achieve this aim.

Estimates show an increasing number of people who are being left without a settled home. We welcome the reduction in numbers of both rough sleepers and families housed in bed and breakfast accommodation. These are major achievements and show what can be done by setting stretching targets and making resources available.

It is important that ODPM does not lose sight of the fact that homelessness is more than rooflessness. We are concerned that the number of people in temporary accommodation has risen to intolerable levels and urge the Government to address this trend with as much vigour as it tackled the rough sleeper problem.

We are concerned about the shortage of social housing and the low level of investment in additional provision. There is no way of moving people out of temporary accommodation if they have nowhere to go. Increasing the stock of social housing should be a priority in the next decade.

New housing should be built in areas where it is needed, rather than concentrating new build in Growth Areas. We welcome the new powers for local authorities to bring empty homes in their areas back into use.

We welcome the extension of the priority need categories, although we are not convinced that tests for vulnerability and intentional homelessness are being fairly or consistently applied.

We urge the ODPM to issue updated guidance to help local authorities develop consistent good practice in the implementation of legislation.

We recognise that prevention is an important part of reducing homelessness but note that prevention schemes have to run strategically. Value for money needs close monitoring.

We have heard various criticisms of the Supporting People programme in the course of our inquiry. We intend to return to this issue.

Despite the aims of the Homelessness Act 2002, it appears that many local authorities still display a lack of strategic thinking when dealing with homeless people.

1 Introduction

A home for all?

1. The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes the right of every person to have “an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing”. It is our view that there should not be homeless people in the UK in 2004. A home is a fundamental right which should not be denied to anyone living in as affluent and ambitious a society as our own. The Government has set targets to reduce the levels of homelessness. Mr Tarig Hilal of Crisis, one of the largest homelessness charities, told us “we live in ambitious times and we live in times when we want to end child poverty and there is no reason why we cannot at the same time want to end homelessness”.¹ Failure to tackle homelessness seriously undermines the Government’s other social objectives, for example in health care, education, employment, poverty, and social inclusion. We believe the Government should treat homelessness as seriously as that of child poverty, and aim to eradicate it entirely.

Background

2. The Homelessness Act was passed in 2002. It was a major piece of legislation which aims to promote joined-up thinking by placing an obligation on local authorities to devise homelessness strategies. At the same time as the Act came into force, the Government expanded the list of those categorised by local authorities as in “priority need” of housing, to include more people who have become homeless through no fault of their own, and have specific needs which mean they are more likely to be vulnerable as a result. By extending the priority needs groups, the Government created a statutory duty for local authorities to secure accommodation for them.

3. In 1998 the Prime Minister launched the Rough Sleepers Initiative, which was designed to reduce the number of those sleeping on the streets by two thirds by 2002: in 2001, the Government announced this target had been achieved. In March 2002 the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate at the ODPM announced a Bed and Breakfast (B&B) programme, to remove families with children from temporary accommodation in B&Bs for more than six weeks. By March 2004, almost every local authority in England had complied.

4. These measures reflect a recognition dating from the early 1990s that the number of homeless people had reached unacceptable levels. Yet, despite positive results with target groups, the number of those accepted by local authorities as homeless has risen again to levels comparable with those which triggered such measures. In addition, there is a widespread belief among those working in the sector that these figures only represent part of the problem.

5. The ODPM has a Public Service Agreement (PSA5) on Housing, which was amended by the 2004 Spending Review. The technical note states

¹ Q 259

“our policies aim to reverse the current upward trend in this indicator [Numbers of statutory homeless families with children in temporary accommodation] by 2007 and reduce the numbers of homeless households with children in temporary accommodation by over 30,000 in comparison with current levels by 2016”.²

Such a reduction would merely bring numbers back in line with 1997 levels. We felt that these targets are not ambitious enough, and that homelessness will still remain unacceptably high even if the targets are met.

6. We decided to examine how effective the 2002 legislation has been and what barriers remain to reducing the number of homeless people. We announced our inquiry on 2 July 2004. The terms of reference were to consider:

- a) the overall level and the nature of need for housing for homeless people;
- b) the success of policies meeting the needs of homeless households, in particular:
 - i. families,
 - ii. single people, and
 - iii. those who are intentionally homeless;
- c) the adequacy of investment in housing for homeless people and the quality of accommodation available for them;
- d) factors affecting the successful implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002;
- e) the location of provision for homeless people relative to where they live;
- f) the balance of public investment in housing for key workers and homeless people;
- g) priority for the homeless within the overall allocation of social housing;
- h) whether the non-housing services provided for homeless people are adequate and are coordinated with housing provision; and
- i) whether public agencies are effective in preventing people becoming homelessness.

7. We received sixty eight written submissions and held four evidence sessions, in the course of which we heard from five ministers. We made two visits: one to Birmingham, where we met representatives of the City Council and local voluntary organisations, and one to the site of the Crisis Urban Village project in East London. We would like to thank our two specialist advisers, Professor Steve Hilditch and Mr Bob Blackaby, for their expertise and assistance, and all those organisations and individuals who made written submissions or gave oral evidence to this inquiry.

² PSA 5 Indicators, Targets And Trajectories –Technical Note

Legislative background

8. Local authorities were first given responsibility for providing accommodation to people who were homeless under the National Assistance Act 1948. That Act obliged local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for ‘persons who are in urgent need thereof.’³ Accommodation was often extremely poor and was often only provided for women and children, with husbands excluded and families separated. Homeless families were normally not given any specific priority for social housing. At that time the issue was seen more as one of social welfare provision, rather than housing. However, in 1974 the former Department of the Environment issued a circular, which said that local authorities should transfer responsibility for assisting homeless people from social services to housing departments.⁴

9. A full legal duty on housing authorities did not arise until the implementation of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which gave housing authorities a duty to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people who had a local connection in the district and who were in priority need.⁵ (That is, those who had or were expecting children, were homeless as a result of a fire, flood or other disaster or who were vulnerable in some way, for example because of old age, illness or disability.)

10. Homelessness legislation was consolidated by the Housing Act 1985. Subsequently, the definition of homelessness was widened in the Housing and Planning Act 1986.⁶ Ten years later, following a major review of homelessness, the Housing Act 1996 reduced the main duty on local authorities for securing accommodation for homeless people to a period of two years.⁷ After that time, cases had to be reviewed and permanent housing could then be provided but not by virtue of homelessness—the households concerned had to qualify on some other grounds under the authority’s housing allocations scheme.

11. The 1996 Act removed eligibility for local authority housing assistance from most people from abroad, including most asylum seekers. It also gave local authorities a new duty to ensure that advice and information about homelessness and preventing homelessness was available.⁸ The Homelessness Act 2002 restored the main duty to secure permanent accommodation for homeless people in priority need and introduced a new duty on local authorities to conduct homelessness reviews in their districts and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy.⁹

12. This Report is mainly concerned with the situation in England. Housing, and therefore homelessness, is a devolved matter. In Scotland, legislation was passed in 2003 which will lead to a dramatically different approach to the assessment of, and services provided to, those presenting as homeless. Although the Welsh legislation does not differ so greatly,

³ National Assistance Act 1948, part III, section 21 (1) (b)

⁴ Circular 18/74

⁵ Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, chapter 48, section 4

⁶ Housing and Planning Act 1986, Part I, section 14

⁷ Housing Act 1996, part VII, section 207 (1)

⁸ Housing Act 1996, part VII, section 179 (1)

⁹ Homelessness Act 2002, chapter 7, section 1

there are growing divergences of policy and practice between England and Wales. As part of our inquiry, we have considered what can be drawn from these models.

2 Who are the homeless?

Definitions

13. Defining homelessness is not straightforward. There is an intrinsic problem for many in finding a definition of a homeless person. Rt Hon. John Prescott MP, the Deputy Prime Minister, has discussed the confusion about the matter. In a speech in 2004, he said

“when I look at it, I see homeless people as people on the streets. I want to put this phrase into a proper context. Obviously, I want to get people out of B&Bs and temporary accommodation and into council homes, but then you have to question if this is still classed as homelessness”.¹⁰

14. The statutory definition of a homeless person, as set out in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, is:

(1) A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which he-

(a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court,

(b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or

(c) occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

(2) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but-

(a) he cannot secure entry to it, or

(b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.

15. Popular interpretation however often restricts the label to street sleepers and perhaps includes those families living in one room in a B&B, or people living in hostels. We asked Lord Rooker, Minister of State for Regeneration and Regional Development at ODPM, whether the ODPM was happy with its definition of ‘homeless’. He told us that Mr Prescott, in his speech, had been trying to address the fact that ODPM was aware of the problem of the number of people in temporary accommodation and had not been seeking to dismiss them. He did however add:

“it is a question where if a spade is a spade, describe it as a spade and not a fork, so it was a question of describing the circumstances and the shorthand that we have to

¹⁰ As reported by Housing Today, 26 November 2004, p 7

use because in terms of homelessness, without a home, without a roof, without a place to sleep at night is not the same, for example, as people who are in temporary accommodation”.¹¹

16. Statements such as these go against the concerns of many working with the homeless who feel strongly that the Government should continue to see those in temporary accommodation, even if there have been major improvements in the quality of such accommodation, as homeless, in the sense that they are lacking a secure and settled home. We believe that any attempt to narrow the definition of homelessness to bring it closer to the concept of ‘rooflessness’ would be a major step backward. We also accept the view expressed by many of the agencies that tackling homelessness and preventing the ‘revolving door’ syndrome, by which people become homeless recurrently, has become more complex. For example, Broadway, a charity working with rough sleepers, commented that a

“key achievement [of recent years]...the approach to homelessness is now recognised as requiring ‘much more than a roof’ and the complexity of people’s support needs has been recognised”.¹²

17. Almost all our respondents brought up the problems of those living in temporary accommodation, arguing that a move from the streets is not the end of the story. Given that the Government published its major policy document in 2002 with the title *More than a roof*, it would be ironic if it were now to lose sight of this fact.¹³ **We recommend that the Government continue to acknowledge that homelessness is more than ‘rooflessness’.**

Numbers

18. It is not easy to determine how many people are homeless at any one time. Local authorities are expected to collect several sets of statistics: those who make homelessness applications, those who are accepted as homeless, those accepted who are in priority need, those who are considered to be intentionally or unintentionally homeless and those with or without a local connection.

19. The headline figures usually published by local authorities are based on people ‘accepted’ as homeless and in priority need. Someone who considers that they are statutorily homeless ‘presents’ themselves to the local authority. Their claim is then assessed and successful applicants are ‘accepted’. Figures exclude those who are homeless but either do not approach their local authority or those who are judged by their local authority not to meet the statutory criteria. There are also significant regional variations which are not always immediately apparent.

20. One thing that became evident to us over the course of this inquiry is how difficult it is to know how many people could be called homeless in England. Crisis said

¹¹ Q 386

¹² Ev 53

¹³ *More than a roof*, published June 2002 by ODPM

“there is now a widespread recognition of the fact that homelessness is a larger problem than official statistics allow for and Crisis and the New Policy Institute have estimated that there may be as many as 380,000 Hidden Homeless people in the UK today”.¹⁴

21. Shelter told us

“the number of households accepted as homeless has been rising in all regions since 1997-98, with the largest relative increases in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber. However, this masks different regional patterns. Broadly speaking, acceptances rose significantly in London and the South in the late 1990s before levelling off more recently. The largest increases in recent years have occurred in the North, where acceptances have risen by 43% since 2001-02, and where the trend is still upward”.¹⁵

Figures published in December 2004 for the third quarter of 2004 showed the first overall decrease in the number of households accepted, with a rise in only one region. However, this was also the period in which the number of households in temporary accommodation reached 100,000 for the first time.¹⁶

The “Hidden Homeless”

22. In July 2004, Crisis published *Hidden Homelessness: Britain’s Invisible City*.¹⁷ This describes the hidden homeless as living in “hostels, squats and bed and breakfast accommodation or staying with friends and family”.¹⁸

Crisis also suggest reasons why many people may not present themselves as homeless to their local authority:

“Because of their experiences, single homeless people in particular often choose not to approach their local authority. Some do not bother because their entitlements are so slight. Others are unaware of their entitlements or are simply too vulnerable to deal with what can be a complex and bureaucratic system of support”.¹⁹

23. Other people may not regard themselves as homeless, even though they do not have a permanent home. The phrase ‘sofa-surfers’ is used to describe those who live with friends and family, often moving frequently from one to the other. The Revolving Doors Agency, a charity which works with mentally ill people who have been arrested or imprisoned, pointed out another problem with the Government’s use of acceptance figures to assess the number of homeless households.

“This excludes those who, for whatever reason, have not approached their HPU [Homeless Person’s Unit] for assistance. More significantly it also excludes homeless

¹⁴ Ev 161

¹⁵ Ev 186

¹⁶ ODPM Homelessness Statistics, 2004-05, 3rd quarter

¹⁷ *Hidden Homeless: Britain’s Invisible City*, research paper produced by Crisis, July 2004

¹⁸ Ev 138

¹⁹ Ev 161

people who have had their application for housing rejected. Some of these people will end up sleeping rough on the streets, where they may be picked up by the rough sleepers count. But many more join the ranks of the “Hidden Homeless” living in derelict buildings and squats, staying with friends or relatives without any explicit right to do so and frequently in unreasonably crowded conditions”.²⁰

Daventry District Council pointed out

“the downside of our reduction in applications from people who are intentionally homeless and/or do not have a priority need is that we currently have little information on the size, needs and circumstances of this client group. It would be easy to assume that we have fewer homeless people that we actually have”.²¹

When we asked Lord Rooker if the ODPM had carried out research on the possible number of hidden homeless, he replied “well, you tell me how many hidden homeless there are”.²² He continued

“the only figures I have got are the [third quarter figures] which were published [on December 13]. All kinds of fanciful figures were issued in the press, but if you can tell me the source of those and the research, fine”.²³

Rough sleepers

24. The rise in the number of homeless acceptances should be set against the success of the Rough Sleepers Initiative. The number of people sleeping rough decreased between 1998 and 2001 and the reduction has been maintained since then. ODPM told us that just over 500 people now sleep rough each night, which is a 70% reduction on 1998 levels.²⁴ The reduction in rough sleepers is recognised and welcomed by those working in the sector. There is however some concern whether this reduction can be sustained.

Bed and breakfast accommodation

25. In *More than a roof*, published in 2002, the Government declared its intention to end, except for emergency situations, the accommodation of families in bed and breakfast accommodation; an issue which was a national talking point at the time. This target has almost been met: the number of families with children in B&B accommodation has fallen from 6,700 to just over 1,000. Legislation now means that local authorities cannot place families with children in B&Bs for more than six weeks.²⁵ Although this is a success, we have heard that the use of bed and breakfast for single homeless people, many of whom are extremely vulnerable, has grown to unacceptable levels. **We believe the Government should now set a target to end the use of bed and breakfast for any homeless household except as a short term emergency response.**

²⁰ Ev 158

²¹ Ev 102

²² Q 413

²³ Q 414

²⁴ Ev 169

²⁵ Ev 169

What factors can lead to homelessness?

26. Much of the written evidence we received describes the kind of problems likely to lead a person to become homeless. Shelter gave us the ODPM's statistics recording causes of homelessness in 1996-97 and 2003-04. The leading cause was friends and family no longer able to accommodate. This has risen from being the cause in 29% of cases in 1996-97 to 38% in 2003-04. Relationship breakdown has gone from causing 25% of homelessness in 1996-97 to 20% in 2003-04.²⁶ Bury Metropolitan Borough Council said

“Statistical data...shows that the reasons for homelessness in Bury mirror national trends and that the three main causes of homelessness therefore are:

- relationship breakdown (violent and non violent)
- ending of assured shortholds
- family/friends unwilling to continue to accommodate homeless people”.²⁷

Salford City Council gave us a breakdown of the reasons given for the loss of last settled home by those it accepted as homeless in 2003-04:

Parents/friends no longer willing to accommodate	422
Violent breakdown of relationship	201
Non-violent breakdown of relationship	152
Harrassment (of which was racial)	124 (9)
Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	84 ²⁸

27. We received evidence that in some areas the rise in house prices made housing unaffordable for some people, who instead sought social rented housing instead. Ms Janice Bennett of South Ribble Borough Council told us

“it is obviously very high house prices, and wages and salaries have not gone up to match them, and demand where a very, very low percentage are social rented housing, less than 10 per cent for the borough and nearly 90 per cent are owner/occupation and that is a traditional thing...in the local area, so I think that those things have contributed to rising homelessness”.²⁹

This has lengthened waiting lists and times. We asked if this had encouraged people to try the homeless route as a way to obtain priority and get a house more quickly. Ms Janice Samuels of Salford City Council said

²⁶ Ev 186

²⁷ Ev 29

²⁸ Ev 39

²⁹ Q 120

“We are also finding that people are thinking that the route into certainly the public sector stock is by the homelessness route and not by the housing register because the choice is not there at the moment”.³⁰

The North West Regional Housing Forum said that the

“reduced supply of affordable (and appropriate) housing (both for rent and to purchase) brought about through: increased house prices; increases in Right to Buy sales...”

had been recognised as one of the reasons why the number of homeless applications has been increasing.³¹ A proportion of applicants applying for these reasons will be rejected on the grounds of intentional homelessness or may not take up any offers made to them if they consider the housing to be unsuitable.

28. Broadway gave us a breakdown of the problems faced by the 776 people housed by them between August 2003 and August 2004. Broadway is a London based charity, so its figures are slightly different to the national trend, but give an idea of the situation in central London.

Physical health issues:	301 people (39%)
Mental health issues:	306 people (39%)
Alcohol issues:	227 people (29%)
Drug issues:	155 people (20%)
Disability issues:	132 people (17%) ³²

29. Broadly speaking, the evidence we received pointed towards definite groups of people who could be said to be more at risk of becoming homeless. In many cases, once a person becomes homeless, they acquire further problems, making them more likely to remain in or return to homelessness. The most significant groups were:

- a) those with drug and/or alcohol problems; people with mental health problems, ranging from relatively slight socialisation problems to severe mental illness (especially those who go untreated);
- b) young people leaving care;
- c) physically disabled people;
- d) ex-offenders;
- e) ex-service personnel;
- f) young people who have run away from home;

³⁰ Q 120

³¹ Ev 75

³² Ev 55

- g) those fleeing domestic violence;
- h) refugees, those granted asylum and immigrants from the EU accession nations;
- i) people in the black and minority ethnic (BME) population; and
- j) those whose circumstances change for the worse, prime examples being elderly widow/ers and adults with learning difficulties who lose their parents.

Drug and alcohol use

30. Drug use in particular is a rising problem among both rough sleepers and those in temporary accommodation. Thames Reach Bondway, which works in London and is leading a rough sleepers initiative in Westminster, told us “at least eight out of 10 people begging on the streets of London have a problem with heroin or crack cocaine”.³³ The Connection at St Martin’s, a voluntary organisation which has worked with homeless people for 60 years, stated “there is a complex relationship between mental illness, drug and alcohol use and homelessness. For some (including young people) such issues can predate homelessness. For others, they are a consequence”.³⁴ The Salvation Army told us “in 2003, 61% of [our] homeless clients had an alcohol dependency and 54% had problems with Class A drugs. Data also shows that 27% of the clients had significant mental health problems”.³⁵

Ex-offenders

31. The National Probation service, Northumbria, told us that “nationally 40% of all prisoners are effectively homeless on release” and that “32% of prisoners are homeless on reception into prison”.³⁶ These figures rise disproportionately if the prisoners have mental health problems. The Revolving Doors Agency informed us that a study in 2002 had revealed “before imprisonment half [of prisoners with mental health problems] were in temporary accommodation and one in three had been sleeping rough. On release, half of those serving a sentence of less than 12 months had no home to go to”.³⁷

Ex-service personnel

32. Those leaving the armed services are also vulnerable to becoming homeless. Some, having joined up as teenagers and lived a great part of their adult life as part of a mobile and structured institution, lack life skills and connections to any particular place. Others find that long-term relationships fail when they leave the services and they are left, some years down the line from leaving, unable to access support from family or friends. Younger people who may have spent less of their life as service personnel may also be affected. Indeed, some may have joined up in the first place as a solution to a difficult housing situation.

³³ Ev 3

³⁴ Ev 33

³⁵ Ev 141

³⁶ Ev 145

³⁷ Ev 158

People with disabilities

33. The Disability Rights Commission told us

“there are no definitive statistics on the numbers of disabled people who are homeless or are likely to become homeless. The ODPM provide figures on disabled people who are in priority need and accepted by local authorities as homeless. However these figures underestimate the severity of the problem, because many more homeless disabled people have either not applied to the local authority or not been accepted by the local authority as homeless in priority need.

There is also ample evidence of a potential time bomb of disabled people who are likely to become homeless...Government figures set out in *Valuing People* estimate that 29,000 people with a learning disability live with carers aged 70 and over. One frightening statistic to come out of research by Mencap in 2002...is that only half of local authorities in England and Wales were aware of the number of people with a learning disability living with older carers. Only 227 housing places per year were being planned for people with a learning disability. Only one in four local authorities had planned alternative housing in 2002-03 for those people with a learning disability living with parents and carers 70 and over”.³⁸

Elderly people

34. Five per cent of homeless acceptances across England are attributed to vulnerability due to old age. Major Harris, of the Salvation Army, told us

“We have 18 residential homes for the elderly...It will become more of a problem as more and more people grow older and are unable to sustain their independence”.³⁹

When visiting the Focus Homeless Services Centre in Birmingham, we spoke to a representative from St Eugene’s hostel for men aged over 55. He told us that the elderly homeless tend to fall between two stools, being excluded both by strategies for homeless people and the elderly.⁴⁰

Young people

35. The greatest increase in acceptances is seen in the 16-25 age group, especially among those aged 16-17. Salford City Council reported “the increase in 16-17 year old homeless presentations to the Service, sometimes from children who have only just reached their 16th birthday and are still in school”.⁴¹ In 2003-04, Salford accepted more 16-17 year olds than any other group other than households with dependent children.⁴² There is little doubt that this increase mostly can be accounted for by the introduction of 16-17 year olds into the priority needs categories. However, South Ribble Borough Council told us “[we] accepted

³⁸ Ev 142-143

³⁹ Q 307

⁴⁰ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

⁴¹ Ev 37

⁴² Ev 38

[16-17 year olds] as being in priority need prior to the Act as best practice, however the legislation coming into force has increased the number of presentations from this group”.⁴³

36. Ms Janice Samuels, of Salford City Council, told us “there is an awareness [among 16-17 year olds] of where you can go to get housing services and the services that you need”.⁴⁴ Ms Julie Watson of South Ribble Key, an organisation which works in partnership with South Ribble Borough Council to provide housing advice and support for 16-25 year olds, felt that there had been a change in society, which in part accounted for the increases.

“I think there is a vast difference in expectation both of the young people and also of their parents. I do not think that leads into collusion issues but I think there is a vast difference in what people expect to be able to do. Their parents expect that when a young person gets to 16 they can say, "Right; fine. We have gone through this for a number of years. We have actually had enough now. If you think you can stand on your own feet you go and do it", and they cut off the support. That is a change”.⁴⁵

The London Borough of Lewisham also pointed out

“as predicted changes in the borough suggest a growth in the population of 15 to 24 year olds over the next 10 years of 21%, it is likely that this trend will contribute to growth in the number of 16 and 17 year olds accepted as homeless. At present, young people account for a relatively modest 9% of all homelessness applications”.⁴⁶

The Foyer Federation, which provides high support housing for homeless under-25 year olds, told us “the needs presented by young people seeking to join Foyers are increasingly severe, and apparent at a younger age”.⁴⁷

Problems in the black and minority ethnic (BME) population

37. A disproportionate number of those accepted as homeless are from the black and minority ethnic (BME) population. We have not received any evidence which points to discrimination against the BME community, on the part of local authorities or others. The reasons for the high level of homelessness in this section of the population may be the same as those in the rest of society. Shelter told us “research is desperately needed if the causes of the sharp rise in BME homelessness are to be fully understood and tackled”.⁴⁸ We endorse this call. **The Government must commission research to look at why the rates of homelessness are disproportionately high among the black and minority ethnic population.**

38. ODPM statistics for 2002-03 show that, of 89,261 households which had accommodation arranged for them under the 1996 Housing Act, 30,620 were from the BME population.⁴⁹ The Greater London Authority told us that BME households make up

⁴³ Ev 15

⁴⁴ Ev 123

⁴⁵ Q 125

⁴⁶ Ev 82

⁴⁷ Ev 48

⁴⁸ Ev 188

⁴⁹ ODPM analysis of household type, gender and ethnic background 2002-03, found at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

22% of London's population in the 2001 census, yet formed 58% of homeless acceptances in 2003-04.⁵⁰ The Salvation Army told us that one of their central London hostel had 70% BME occupation.⁵¹ Shelter stated

“Homelessness among BME households has risen twice as fast as in the general population in recent years. By the end of March 2003, BME households accounted for 30% of homelessness acceptances, whilst making up only 9% of the general population. The disproportionate increase in BME homelessness could have been caused by a number of factors, including a failure of homelessness prevention services to meet the developing needs of particular ethnic groups and a reduction in the availability of appropriate housing for BME households”.⁵²

The BME community is also disproportionately represented in the prison population, another section of the population at high risk of becoming homeless. Around 24 per cent of male prisoners and 31 per cent of female prisoners are from BME backgrounds.⁵³

39. During our visit to Birmingham, the city council told us the trouble it had placing some BME households due to their need for large family houses.⁵⁴ Many areas lack this type of social housing provision. Westminster City Council told us that their shortage of larger units of accommodation “is becoming more of an issue as an increasing proportion of the households accepted for re-housing come from BME communities, some of which have traditionally large families”.⁵⁵

Refugees and asylum seekers

40. Within the BME community, there is a rising problem in homelessness among refugees and asylum seekers. Broadway commented

“over recent years the number of refugees and asylum seekers within the homelessness sector appears to be increasing. There are no clear figures on this and it is very difficult to access the views of this specific population for a variety of reasons”.⁵⁶

Broadway also outlined three main problems for recent immigrants who may become homeless. Summarised, they are:

a) Those who sleep rough are likely not to have other problems, for example alcohol and drug problems, and therefore may not be picked up by street outreach teams. The danger here is that they will have developed other problems before they can be helped.

⁵⁰ Ev 93

⁵¹ Q 316

⁵² Ev 188

⁵³ Q 316

⁵⁴ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

⁵⁵ Ev 123

⁵⁶ Ev 59

b) There may be significant language problems. Broadway's recent language audit of its clients revealed that 25% of them did not have English as their first language, 16% of whom had English which would be called 'basic' and 9% had 'little or no' grasp of the language.

c) The number of EU accession country nationals accessing the Broadway centre since May 2004 had risen from four to 40. As they had come to the UK to seek work, legislation limits the amount of help homeless agencies can give them.⁵⁷

Mr Terry Moore of Westminster City Council told us that the Council had brought the number of rough sleepers "down to 144 rough sleepers, excluding the EU Accession States cases, of which there were a further 24 rough sleepers".⁵⁸

Priority Need

41. Until 2002, local authorities were obliged to consider four broad categories of people as in priority need of re-housing. These were:

- a) A pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- b) A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- c) a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason or a person with whom such a person resides; or
- d) a person who is homeless...as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.⁵⁹

42. The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 added the following categories:

- a) homeless 16 and 17 year olds, with the exception of those in care;
- b) care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20;
- c) those vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody, and
- d) those vulnerable as a result of having to leave home through violence or the threat of violence.

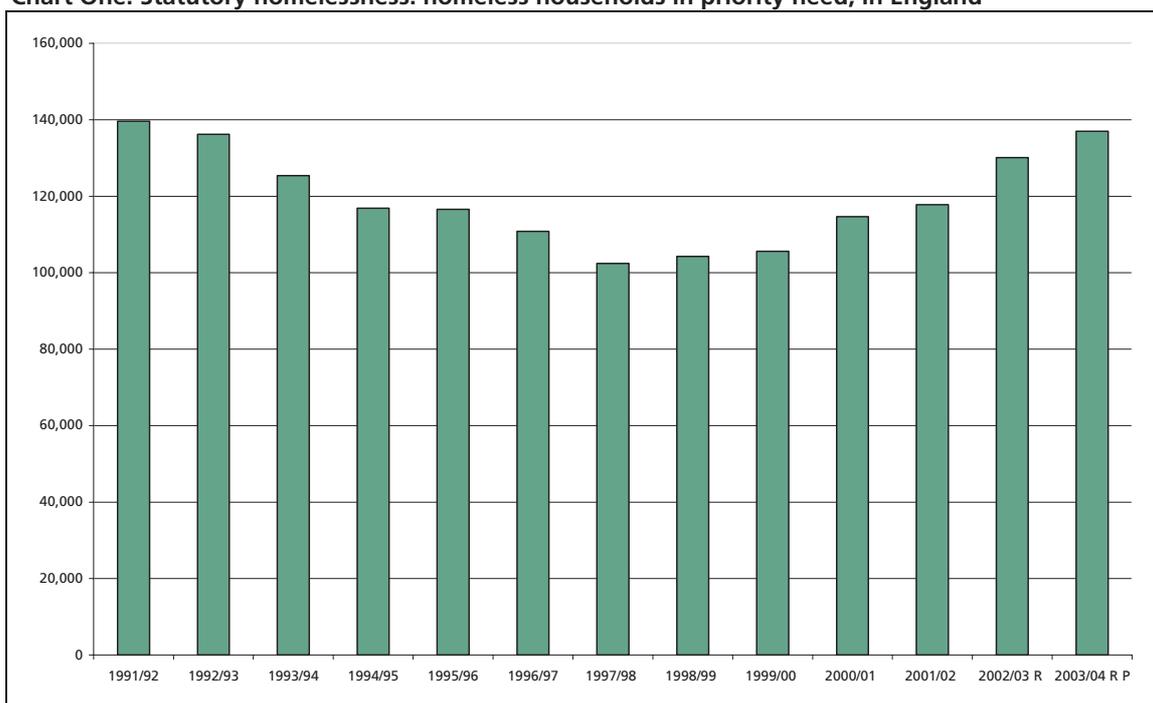
Chart One shows the number of households accepted as homeless in priority needs in England each year since 1991-92.

⁵⁷ Ev 59

⁵⁸ Q 108

⁵⁹ Housing Act 1996, section 189

Chart One: Statutory homelessness: homeless households in priority need, in England



Source: http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/page/odpm_house_604142.xls

Impact of the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002

43. ODPM sees the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 as a vital part of its new approach to homelessness, to be viewed in conjunction with the 2002 Act. The department's memorandum stated:

“Taken together, these legislative changes have ensured that more people are assured of homelessness assistance and will receive help when they need it. In the short-term, this has meant more people being accepted by local authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need and so has added to the numbers placed in temporary accommodation pending a settled home. But many of these are people who would have been left to fend for themselves under the previous legislation”.⁶⁰

44. The principle of broadening of the priority need categories has been welcomed on the whole by both local authorities and voluntary agencies. The London Borough of Lewisham told us

“in extending the priority need safety net, the [Government] has helped to ensure that the most vulnerable people and those who have been found to be most at risk of ending up on the street are given maximum protection”.⁶¹

In the context of the success of its domestic violence prevention work, the London Borough of Harrow said

⁶⁰ Ev 171

⁶¹ Ev 82

“the broadening of [the priority needs categories] to include not only those at risk of domestic violence from an associated person, but anyone who is at risk of violence or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out, had an immediate impact on the scope of our Sanctuary Project, to deal with victims of domestic violence”.⁶²

Among the voluntary bodies, Centrepoin, working with young people, felt

“the inclusion of 16 and 17 year-olds in the priority needs categories was a sign of recognition that this group is vulnerable by virtue of their age alone”.⁶³

The Revolving Doors Agency, a voluntary organisation which works with people with mental health problems who have been arrested or imprisoned, said

“someone who is vulnerable on account of leaving prison may now be considered to have a “priority need” for housing support. This is a welcome development, which has the potential to significantly improve our clients’ access to housing”.⁶⁴

We welcome the extension of the priority need categories and the protection that this has offered to those previously outside the statutory homelessness provisions.

45. The extension of the priority need categories has had some negative consequences, which are also reflected in the evidence we received. As the ODPM admitted in their evidence, the greater number of categories has led to a substantial increase in the number of acceptances.⁶⁵ Local authorities complain that they have not been given adequate resources to cope with this foreseeable ramification of the 2002 Order. Norwich City Council said that the successful implementation of the Order was being affected by a “lack of appropriate/suitable temporary and permanent accommodation”.⁶⁶ St Mungo’s thought

“the extension of ‘priority need’ categories induced a general ‘feel-good’ haze, but overlooked the struggles by London local authorities to meet existing statutory requirements for re-housing. This is an example of good policy, bad practice”.⁶⁷

New categories?

46. Other criticism of the new priority need categories surrounds the limitations of the new categories. Some bodies believe important groups have been left out of the new legislation. The Salvation Army argued that there should not be any priority need designation at all: “there should be a return to the statutory obligations to house everyone who is homeless, regardless of vulnerability”.⁶⁸ The Connection at St Martin’s suggested an additional category could be

⁶² Ev 100

⁶³ Ev 113

⁶⁴ Ev 159

⁶⁵ Ev 171

⁶⁶ Ev 133

⁶⁷ Ev 128

⁶⁸ Ev 141

“a person who is vulnerable as a result of having become entrenched in a pattern of street living through a sustained period of rough sleeping”.⁶⁹

The argument for this move is that a continued reduction of the number of rough sleepers can only be achieved

“if we have access to the additional resources and services which extending the categories of vulnerability would bring. There are also clear arguments to show that introducing this would cost less than the current crisis-led system”.⁷⁰

Ms Jenny Edwards of Homeless Link, the umbrella body for over 500 organisations working in the homelessness sector, supported this idea.

“I think there are some additions that could be made to priority needs and you could end up with a very long list, but rough sleepers clearly are very vulnerable”.⁷¹

47. The reasons for having priority need categories are relatively self-explanatory. As Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council pointed out

“homeless/threatened with homelessness households’ needs vary greatly: from relatively comfortable lodging arrangements; through overcrowding; insecurity; to immediate threat to life and limb. To award all the same relative priority would firstly be perverse and secondly unworkable (in particular against a back-drop of rationing)”.⁷²

48. We support the concept of prioritisation in the acceptance of homelessness. Nevertheless we recommend that the Government review the priority needs list with a view to ensuring that all vulnerable groups are included. We would in particular like to see the list include all elderly people, whether or not they are vulnerable.

Vulnerability

49. The greatest number of complaints about the priority need categories involves the concept of ‘vulnerability’. The Housing Law Practitioners Association explained the problem as far as the legal interpretation of the word is concerned:

“The definitions [of priority need categories] exclude homeless single persons or couples of any age unless they are included [in the legislation] as ‘vulnerable’. Apart from that the other definitions are relatively easy to apply (pregnant women etc.). [Legislation] involves the exercise of a value judgement to the facts in order to determine whether an applicant is ‘vulnerable’ as a result of one or other of the reasons stated. This is emphasised by the Courts’ definition of ‘vulnerable’ as ‘whether [the Applicant] is, when homeless, less able to fend for himself than an

⁶⁹ Ev 35

⁷⁰ Ev 35

⁷¹ Q 224

⁷² Ev 85

ordinary homeless person so that injury or detriment to him will result when a less vulnerable person would be able to cope without harmful effects.⁷³

It is to be noted that not even the elderly have a priority need under the definition unless there is vulnerability as a result of old age. This is confirmed by the ODPM's Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (July 2002). 'Old age alone is not sufficient for the applicant to be deemed vulnerable' (8.14).

Our view is that the definition of priority need should be widened. Homelessness and its effects is not confined to families and the definition should reflect this".⁷⁴

50. This point of view is echoed by many of the voluntary organisations working with homeless people, especially those whose main clients are the single homeless. Citizens Advice said

"[bureaux] also report concerns about the quality of decision-making where homelessness applications are made. Advisers are often involved in homelessness reviews following a negative decision, because the officer has failed to investigate properly whether people are in priority need, or has applied the wrong test...an 18 year-old man had received a medical discharge from the armed forces. He had joined the forces at age 16 and had no prior experience for fending for himself. The investigation had failed to consider whether he was vulnerable as a result of his time spent in the armed forces".⁷⁵

Women's Aid stated

"The Homelessness Code of Guidance encourages local authorities to demonstrate sensitivity to women fleeing violence, [but] the Code is not mandatory, and local authorities are not bound by the Code when making decisions on homelessness. The decision of vulnerability is at the discretion of the local authority to which victims of domestic violence apply. We believe that all women fleeing domestic violence are vulnerable and should be regarded as such by homelessness legislation".⁷⁶

The Disability Rights Commission told us

"Housing authorities have a duty to provide housing for people with mental or physical illnesses if they can prove that they are 'vulnerable' but many have problems registering with a GP, who needs to provide proof that they are 'vulnerable'".⁷⁷

51. Sheila Spencer, a member of the Housing Quality Network Services team which has just evaluated the 354 local Homelessness Strategies, told us in detail of the problems regarding the definition of vulnerability. She concluded

⁷³ R v Camden LBC ex p Pereira, 1999 31, HLR 317 @ 330

⁷⁴ Ev 109

⁷⁵ Ev 78

⁷⁶ Ev 88

⁷⁷ Ev 143

“there are clearly likely to be differences at times between the views and interpretations of workers in advice and advocacy agencies and those in statutory homeless services, but there are worrying signs that all too many LHAs or contractors do not consider the question of vulnerability fully, and are too quick to assume that someone with a substance misuse problem or an offending history is unlikely to be vulnerable”.⁷⁸

52. Homeless Link raised the worrying suggestion that some authorities were using the vulnerability criteria to keep the numbers of successful priority need applications down.

“Proving vulnerability is often extremely hard. A narrow interpretation can be used as a gatekeeping device. Our members in England, working directly with homeless people, report high instances of clients being denied housing on vulnerability grounds and difficulty in mounting successful appeals”.⁷⁹

The Housing Law Practitioners Association suggested that local authorities were abusing the system to the disadvantage of applicants.

“when deciding whether it is reasonable for an applicant to continue to occupy accommodation (and consequently whether the applicant is homeless or homeless intentionally), authorities consistently adopted a harsh line requiring applicants to remain in what is plainly unsuitable accommodation...When deciding whether a person is in priority need by reason of vulnerability through physical or mental health, authorities pay little attention to consultant reports supplied by the applicant and shore up their decision that an applicant is not in priority need by obtaining favourable decisions from their own (in-house) district medical officers who will invariably (with some notable exceptions) provide negative advice despite their own lack of expertise, the limited information before them and the absence of any attempt to meet the applicant to assess his medical condition first-hand”.⁸⁰

53. We think there is enough evidence to conclude that any guidance on the interpretation of vulnerability is insufficiently clear, leading to poor practice in some places and even injustice. Legislation should provide the same rights, wherever it is implemented. **We recommend that Government issue clear and authoritative guidance on the assessment of statutory vulnerability as a matter of urgency, and certainly within three months of the publication of its response to this Report.**

54. A particular problem in the assessment of vulnerability occurs when the applicant suffers from mental health problems. Evidence suggested that those charged with assessing applicants are often unaware of mental health issues or untrained in dealing with those suffering from them. For example, the Revolving Doors Agency told us

“Under the new legislation, a person may also be considered to be vulnerable and a priority need on account of their mental illness. We have particular concerns over the application of this part [of the legislation]. Many of our clients have a ‘personality disorder’ or ‘dual diagnosis’, both of which are now recognised as sufficiently serious

⁷⁸ Ev 155

⁷⁹ Ev 200

⁸⁰ Ev 108

to trigger a statutory duty to provide mental health services under the National Service Framework for Mental Health. However Homeless Person's Units commonly refuse to accept these diagnoses as sufficient evidence of vulnerability on account of mental illness. Local authorities require clear subsidiary guidance on the Homelessness Act 2002".⁸¹

55. Some local authorities now use trained mental health practitioners in the assessment process, which we regard as good practice. Again, we feel that the degree of confusion and uncertainty reported to us means that the **guidance should be stronger and more authoritative on the range of mental health and learning disability issues which might lead to vulnerability. The guidance should stress co-operative working between housing, social services and the mental health agencies to ensure that people are fairly assessed. The guidance should also identify good practice such as the use of trained mental health practitioners as part of local authority assessment teams to ensure that vulnerability due to mental health problems can be properly recognised and dealt with.**

56. Some organisations pointed out the difference between English and Welsh legislation in this area. The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001 has removed all requirements for applicants to prove 'vulnerability' over and above their qualification for a priority need category. Both Women's Aid and Homeless Link would like to see this system implemented in England. The scale of the homelessness problem in England is far greater than that in Wales, particularly in the large conurbations. In 2003, for example, Welsh local authorities accepted only 8,551 households as homeless in priority need.⁸² As a result, any removal of the vulnerability criteria in the assessment of applicants would have far greater resource implications for English local authorities. Nevertheless, given the administrative and practical complexities in applying the vulnerability criteria, the attractiveness of the Welsh approach is apparent. **We recommend that the Government commission and publish a cost-benefit analysis of the removal of any vulnerability criteria in the assessment of homelessness applications to English local authorities.**

57. Homelessness legislation in Scotland has diverged substantially from English law. The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 has changed the focus of homelessness applications entirely. By 2012, the priority need test will be abolished. Homeless Link told us

"instead of using resources to test whether someone fits a narrow criteria of homelessness, they will be regarded as a person with a problem that needs solving. This uses resources more effectively to help people rather than to administer a rationing system and plans for the long-term to ensure necessary housing is available".⁸³

Local authorities must find a short tenancy with an agreed support package for households found intentionally homeless. We will be interested to see how this legislation works in practice. Although the scale of the problem in England would not allow this approach to be introduced at the current time, the OPDM must monitor the implementation of the new legislation, and see if there are lessons to be learned.

⁸¹ Ev 159

⁸² Welsh Housing Statistics: Homelessness October –December 2003, Welsh Assembly Government, June 2004

⁸³ Ev 200

Intentional homelessness

58. An issue of great concern to many of our witnesses was the lack of consistency among local authorities concerning decisions on intentional homelessness. Under the 1996 Housing Act local authorities have no responsibility for those they consider to have intentionally made themselves homeless, for example those who have accrued rent arrears leading to eviction, or have left an existing home for no apparent reason. Housing Justice told us

“ODPM figures show that in 2003-04 almost 13,000 households applied for re-housing who were deemed to be in priority need but not eligible for re-housing due to being found to be ‘intentionally’ homeless. The work of the Housing Justice network of advice centres show that there is a fine line between being found to be intentionally and unintentionally homeless and this varies across the country. Clearer guidance from the ODPM would lead to greater consistency in the way that intentionally homeless people are treated across the country”.⁸⁴

These concerns were repeated in evidence both from local authorities, who call for clearer guidance, and voluntary and other organisations who feel that the ‘intentionality’ test is being applied without consistency or adequate care. The Nottingham Hostels’ Liaison Group told us

“we are also seeing a more rigid interpretation of intentional homelessness, particularly in relation to people with mental health and drug problems who have both experienced and caused difficulties in previous tenancies resulting in eviction or abandonment. A strict interpretation of intentionality is resulting in very vulnerable people having no option but to stay for long periods in temporary accommodation. One local hospital is discharging people who have been in hospital with drug-related issues without accommodation because they are being declared intentionally homeless by the local authority”.⁸⁵

The Salvation Army told us that some homeless people are penalised for the consequences of their condition or lifestyles. It argued that

“It is difficult to see how people who are mentally ill or individuals who are heavily addicted to drugs and alcohol could ever be described as ‘intentionally’ homeless”.⁸⁶

59. As we have mentioned, local authorities have also told us that families may make themselves homeless as a route into social housing. This is an issue of concern to us. The National Housing Federation stated that the “distorted market” created by local authority prioritisations “creates a perverse incentive to go down the homelessness route to obtaining re-housing despite the social, economic and health risks”.⁸⁷

60. Representatives from the National Housing Federation told us they felt guidance on the application of the intentionality test would be very useful. When we asked whether any

⁸⁴ Ev 139

⁸⁵ Ev 96

⁸⁶ Ev 141

⁸⁷ Ev117

guidance on the 2002 Act had been promised, Ms Diane Henderson replied “It was mooted when I first started working for the Federation about two and a bit years”.⁸⁸ Again, we find that the degree of variation in the interpretation of the intentionality provisions between authorities is not acceptable in the context of national legislation which is supposed to be providing a safety net for homeless people. **We recommend that the Government should produce improved guidance on the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002 regarding the definition of intentional homelessness as soon as possible, and certainly within three months of the publication of its response to this Report.**

Ex-offenders

61. Those leaving offender institutions appear to have a particular problem. Although those vulnerable due to leaving prison were added to the priority needs categories in 2002, it seems that not only do they not gain access to the right services in sufficient quantities, but they are ruled intentionally homeless for committing crime in the first place. The Revolving Doors Agency told us that only 250 people had been re-housed as priority need under the new category since 2002.⁸⁹ The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales told us that young offenders were being ruled to be intentionally homeless, regardless of the offence, by some local authorities.⁹⁰ Citizens Advice also told us

“bureaux are reporting that they are seeing an increasing number of clients who are being judged intentionally homeless when released from prison. There seems to be no consistency in determining whether someone who has lost their home due to committing an offence which led to a prison sentence is intentionally homeless, but many bureau advisers feel that the obligation to house those considered vulnerable means that some councils will use ‘intentionality’ to avoid re-housing ex-prisoners if resources are tight”.⁹¹

62. We understand that many people waiting for decent housing might feel it unfair that someone with a criminal background might get priority for housing. However, the Government made an explicit decision that vulnerable homeless ex-offenders should have priority and it is wrong that another part of the legislation should be exploited to prevent this happening in practice. The evidence before us demonstrates that providing assistance with housing is one of the most effective ways of preventing re-offending and rehabilitating people back into a productive life — and helps to achieve one of the Government’s key aims of combating crime. If this is the Government’s view, it should not allow the policy to be undermined through manipulation of the intentionality provisions.

63. It may be that a distinction is drawn, as evidence from the Revolving Doors Agency suggested, between those who lose their homes while in prison as a result of committing a crime and those who leave prison without a home, but this is far from clear. It is unacceptable for such confusion to continue. **Guidance on the interpretation of**

⁸⁸ Q 215

⁸⁹ Ev 159

⁹⁰ Ev 47

⁹¹ Ev 80

intentional homelessness should include an explicit explanation of its application to ex-offenders.

Intentionally homeless families

64. We were extremely concerned about the evidence we received concerning homeless households with children which are deemed to be intentionally homeless. In addition to the general duties placed on Social Services Departments to protect the welfare of children under the Children Act 1989, which may lead to them offering financial assistance or temporary accommodation, the 2002 Act requires Housing departments to refer families with dependant children to whom a re-housing duty is not owed to Social Services Departments (or their successors) but only with their consent.⁹² There is also a duty on the two departments to co-operate in the development of strategies. Shelter told us that the response of social services in this area had been “patchy” and that

“social services sometimes offer no assistance at all, regularly fail to carry out children in need assessments and frequently limit their response to “offering” to take the children into care. This forces many families into inappropriate and unsuitable housing situations. One recent caller to our Shelterline service had been sleeping rough in a local park with her three children rather than have them taken into care”.⁹³

65. Since ‘Cathy Come Home’, the 1966 drama which highlighted children being taken into care because of their parents’ homelessness, there has been a consensus that policy should seek to keep the family together. However, parents have a responsibility not to behave in a way that threatens family unity. Dr Stephen Ladyman MP, Minister for Health at the Department of Health, told us

“I certainly think that making people aware of the consequences of their action and making people aware of what their responsibilities are is a vital part in dealing with not just ill health amongst our communities but also anti social behaviour. I entirely concur that it might be necessary to step in and take children into care in order to deal with the situation”.⁹⁴

Mr Chris Pond MP, Minister for Work at the Department for Work and Pensions, supported this view. Lord Rooker then told us

“trying to legislate and make people good neighbours is very, very difficult, if not impossible. There are cases where - and I have not got any figures - the threat of separating the children from the family works”.⁹⁵

66. There is a clear policy tension in this area. Some families are evicted because of a consistent pattern of deliberate anti-social behaviour and it is easy to see why, in many

⁹² Homelessness Act 2002, Chapter 7, section 12

⁹³ Ev 190

⁹⁴ Q 368

⁹⁵ Q 445

circumstances, housing authorities decide that these families have made themselves intentionally homeless.

67. We received evidence that intentionally homeless families were on occasion ‘bounced’ between Housing and Social Services, with Social Services saying that they did not have the resources to deal with them and sending them back. South Ribble Borough Council told us

“the Housing Service may refer an intentionally homeless family to social services. In reality social services do not have the means to accommodate the family and in turn request the assistance of the local authority. This does not solve the problem for the family”.⁹⁶

68. This is a very sensitive area of policy where the welfare of children is at stake. Guidance must be clear and explicit on the roles and responsibilities of the various departments and confusion must be eliminated. The aim should be to avoid families being split up as a consequence of homelessness through a mix of better prevention services and support packages and the use of other means of intervention such as anti-social behaviour orders where appropriate. We accept that the success of such measures depends on the co-operation of the families involved. The Government has already produced guidance on joint working and the Department of Health circulated further information in 2003, but this appears to have had little effect. **The Government should produce explicit guidance for social services of the action that should be taken following referrals of intentionally homeless families with children, and draw attention to good practice.**

Non-priority homelessness

69. People without permanent homes who do not fit into the priority need categories are still homeless. Single homeless people in particular will not fit into a priority need category unless there are additional factors increasing their needs. Philip Foster, a homeless man, told us

“I went to my local council...I was asked three questions:

Am I single – I replied yes.

Do I have any children – I replied no.

Do I have any mental problems or use of substances – again the answer was no.

They were the three criteria that aided the council in telling me they would not help”.⁹⁷

70. Concern for the single homeless population is growing among voluntary agencies. We heard more than once that those who are not judged to be in priority need stand very little chance of being placed in permanent housing in many parts of the country. Ms Jenny Edwards of Homeless Link told us “many people need low or even no support and could go into general needs housing, but only seven per cent of local authority nominations go to

⁹⁶ Ev 17

⁹⁷ Ev 13

non-statutory homeless people. There is nowhere for them to move on to”.⁹⁸ Mr Richard Adamson of the Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Forum told us “realistically the only chance anybody has got of getting a tenancy is to be statutorily homeless”.⁹⁹ He added “for the first time since the late eighties/early nineties every single letting in Scarborough borough in the last year has been to somebody who is statutorily homeless with a family. Whether it is a house or a flat it has 100 per cent gone to homeless families”.¹⁰⁰

71. The 2002 Act introduced new duties for local authorities in respect of non-priority homeless people who are actually homeless or who are threatened with homelessness. The Act strengthens the *power* to house non-priority homeless people, but there is no duty to do so. However, it also strengthens the *duty* to provide advice and assistance and it is explicit that this duty requires authorities to make an assessment of the applicant’s housing needs before deciding what advice and assistance to provide, and that advice should include information about the availability, location and sources of accommodation in the district that are appropriate to the applicants needs.¹⁰¹ Once again, the evidence suggested that interpretation of the advice and assistance duty is highly variable from place to place and that services are often virtually non-existent. Crisis stated

“Single homeless people are one of the most vulnerable and neglected populations in our society. Despite reforms to the homelessness legislation and some improvement in support services, thousands of single homeless people continue to slip through the net each year”.¹⁰²

72. Crisis is not the only organisation to make this point. Many of the problems that single people encounter are covered elsewhere in this report. However, we are concerned that the increase in homeless acceptances following the widening of the priority needs categories is resulting in a corresponding growing number of single but non-priority homeless people whose needs are not addressed and who have limited access to housing. Local authorities have a responsibility to help people who find themselves unintentionally homeless, whatever their needs. **ODPM guidance should be much clearer about the Government’s expectations of local authorities in relation to non-priority homeless people and should aim to achieve much greater consistency of practice, and a significantly better quality of service. It is not acceptable for a section of the homeless population to go unassisted because their needs are not as great as others.**

73. One danger of neglecting the needs of non-priority homeless people is that some may become priority need through lack of support. A young person who ends up living long term in a hostel may develop drug or alcohol problems. Someone with mental health problems which are not causing them difficulties when they become homeless may find their state deteriorates. It is important that those who may need no or little support at first are not allowed to become high need clients. **The Government should ensure that the needs assessments local authorities undertake for non-priority need homeless people**

⁹⁸ Q 238

⁹⁹ Q 176

¹⁰⁰ Q 175

¹⁰¹ Homelessness Act 2002 Schedule 1

¹⁰² Ev 160

lead to advice, assistance and even support that are designed both to prevent them developing further problems and to help move them out of homelessness altogether.

Homelessness acceptances

74. Local authorities tend to measure their rates of homelessness by the number of people that they have accepted as statutorily homeless (see para 18). We have also discussed the fact that authorities use their discretion in deciding whether people meet the priority needs categories or are intentionally homeless. We were struck by the variation in acceptance rates, that is, the proportion of those presenting themselves as homeless who are accepted as such, between local authorities. The Greater London Authority stated

“more than one in five homelessness acceptances in England are in London. In 2003-04, there were nearly 69,000 decisions on homelessness applications in London, of which 30,500 (44%) were accepted as homeless. A further 14,400 (21%) were found to be homeless but not in priority need”.¹⁰³

75. Ms Jenny Edwards of Homeless Link told us

“the highest [rate of claims rejected] in the last quarter's list was in fact Doncaster with 91 per cent of people who present as homeless having their claims rejected, and there is a whole variety of reasons behind that. That is not saying that all of those are illegitimate reasons, but it is a sign that out of all those people, only one in ten then gets the result that they had gone there seeking”.¹⁰⁴

Westminster City Council representatives told us that the Council had an acceptance rate of 21%. When we asked why their rate was less than half the London average (44%) they replied

“I think we apply the law and we apply it correctly. We obviously have finite resources and we want to make sure that those people who do get the benefit of the legislation are people who properly qualify, so we have a stringent gatekeeping policy, but a fair gatekeeping policy. Occasionally we are judicially reviewed and I have to say that most of the time our judicial reviews are upheld, but we work very closely with the local law centres etc., in making sure that our decisions are transparent and people can see that they are fair”.¹⁰⁵

76. In oral evidence, South Ribble Borough Council and Salford City Council told us they both had acceptance rates of between 50 and 55%.¹⁰⁶ We cannot help but suspect that acceptances may indeed be used a gatekeeping method to keep numbers down in some parts of the country. It is extraordinary how the same piece of legislation can result in such different outcomes in different parts of the country. In evidence, Andrew Arden QC and Caroline Hunter QC put the argument very forcefully. “There is no part for local policy to

¹⁰³ Ev 93

¹⁰⁴ Q 226

¹⁰⁵ Q 95

¹⁰⁶ Q 134-135

play in the national policy that the homeless (in priority need, not intentionally homeless) should be housed”.¹⁰⁷

77. Inevitably the higher the number of rejections, the higher the number of appeals. We are concerned that the quantity of appeals that such a policy could give rise to is a serious drain on the taxpayer. **We recommend that ODPM should scrutinise the homelessness acceptance rates of local authorities with a view to intervening where they depart from the average by a considerable margin. Those authorities whose rates are out of line for no clear reason should be referred to the Audit Commission to account for the difference and if necessary, their procedures should be reviewed. Public money should not need to be spent on legal appeal costs.**

¹⁰⁷ Ev 14

3 Prevention

78. Preventing people becoming homeless is one of the key elements in reducing the overall rates of homelessness. The 2002 Homelessness Act obliged local authorities to develop local homelessness prevention strategies. Our evidence demonstrates that many organisations are involved in prevention work, especially in relation to priority needs groups. Nightstop UK, a charity providing emergency accommodation for 16-25 year olds, told us “public agencies are not effective in preventing people becoming homeless. Currently their role is like ambulances going around picking up the casualties after the event”.¹⁰⁸

79. Prevention is one of the areas where the Government is working in close partnership with voluntary agencies. The ODPM told us

“direct funding has helped authorities to pump-prime schemes targeted towards the main causes of homelessness in their particular areas. Around £100 million was available in 2002-03; £60 million in 2003-04; and £60 million in 2004-05. Of this, around £15 million - £20 million was allocated direct to voluntary sector agencies who were providing national or cross-borough services”.¹⁰⁹

Shelter stated

“The funding and support given to local authorities ... linked to specific targets and guidance on achieving positive outcomes, has been very successful in encouraging a more preventative approach to tackling homelessness. We would therefore like to see [the Government] continue its current level of resource allocation to local authorities. This will help sustain progress and ensure that development of innovative services to prevent homelessness continues to be possible”.¹¹⁰

80. We welcome the Government’s pump-priming funding to local authorities for prevention work. We recommend that the Government continues to support the efforts of local authorities and voluntary organisations in projects to prevent homelessness, and evaluates the need for future funding beyond the scope of initial pump-priming.

Performance indicator?

81. Ms Jenny Edwards of Homeless Link, suggested that the operation of prevention schemes be introduced as a local authority performance indicator. Mr Jeremy Drew, representing the Foyer Federation, supported this suggestion.¹¹¹ Ms Genevieve Macklin, of the Association of London Government (ALG), told us

“I think [the level of acceptances] would have increased more significantly but for the work that boroughs have been doing around prevention strategies and there has

¹⁰⁸ Ev 6

¹⁰⁹ Ev 173-74

¹¹⁰ Q 194

¹¹¹ Q 232

been some real success in that area. We carried out recent research at the ALG and the prevention strategies, particularly around rent deposit schemes and mediation for young people, 16- and 17-year-olds, have shown to be very effective in terms of preventing, and, for example, the mediation services for young people have had an effect of almost 45 per cent in those young people who have been presenting themselves not then being accepted as homeless and alternative options there”.¹¹²

82. We recommend that the operation of prevention schemes should be introduced as a local authority performance indicator.

Prevention amongst young people

83. Prevention work with young people should have high priority, given the rising number of homelessness acceptances among 16-17 year olds. We visited St Basil’s in Birmingham, an organisation working with under 25s who are homeless or threatened with becoming homeless. We heard there that programmes in schools, in which those who had experienced homelessness spoke to children long before their sixteenth birthday, were considered very effective in adjusting perceptions of what a homelessness application would lead to. Workers also went to housing centres to talk to those making applications and suggest alternatives. Family mediation services were often extremely effective. Funding constraints prevented them from running as many of these schemes as they wanted to. St Basil’s also suggested that the Government consider introducing housing issues to the citizenship curriculum for secondary schools.¹¹³

84. We heard examples of effective prevention schemes. The Foyer Federation works with people under 25 across the country. In written evidence, the *Safe Moves* programme is described in detail.

“Safe Moves is a project run by the Foyer Federation, developed in partnership with the Connexions Service National Unit. It is a new initiative to create a national network of projects aimed at preventing youth homelessness. ..The projects are based around peer mentoring, family mediation and life skills training. The intention is that some young people will be assisted to continue living at home, by improving relationships with their parents or carers. If this is not appropriate, for example because of abuse, they will be helped to make a safe transition to independent or supported accommodation, without the risks involved in an unplanned departure from home”.¹¹⁴

Pilots are now being expanded nationwide. Centrepoint told us that

“The evidence from our work with the Peabody Trust on our the successful joint “Safe in the City” action-research on preventing youth homelessness in London is that early work to prevent young people becoming homeless will combine work on

¹¹² Q 91

¹¹³ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

¹¹⁴ Ev 50

family mediation with the personal and social development of young people through youth-work, and more specific education and training interventions”.¹¹⁵

Ex-offenders

85. Prevention is also a key issue with ex-offenders. We had evidence from three organisations deeply involved in working with ex-offenders, one of which was a regional branch of the National Probation Service. This group is seen as important in part because the rates of homelessness are so high, and in part because the risk of a prisoner re-offending is far higher if they are homeless, whether on the streets or in temporary accommodation. Mr Paul Cavadino of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) told us

“one study indicated that those released from prison with settled accommodation had a likelihood of re-offending less than half that of similar offenders who were released homeless. It is an issue of homelessness but it is also an important issue in relation to crime reduction”.¹¹⁶

The prison population is controlled and it is possible for the Home Office to make some assessment of how many prisoners its prevention programmes may be reaching.

86. The crucial issue for many prisoners is finding or keeping a place to live while in prison. Many prisoners lose tenancies while serving their sentences. A client of the Revolving Doors Agency said

“Work should be done before leaving prison, if possible, because when you lose your tenancy, you don't just lose your tenancy you lose the contents of your home - they take as well. You come home to nothing—that's supposed to keep someone out of trouble is it?”.¹¹⁷

87. The National Probation Service Northumbria told us “virtually all prisoners living in the private sector lose their homes and the majority of owner occupiers have their homes repossessed”.¹¹⁸ Prisoners in local authority accommodation often do not realise that they need to surrender tenancies and end up with rent arrears, leaving them liable to being declared intentionally homeless on release. The Revolving Doors Agency told us

“Given that on entering prison, many of our clients face the prospect of a combination of deteriorating mental health and the effects of withdrawal from drug or alcohol dependency they are unlikely to consider relinquishing a tenancy as their top priority. Moreover, in the absence of appropriate support, it is unlikely that they will have sufficient knowledge of the housing system to do so”.¹¹⁹

88. Housing advice centres in prisons can provide trained staff aware of the issues facing those entering and leaving prison, and this appears to reduce the number of those leaving

¹¹⁵ Ev 111

¹¹⁶ Q 265

¹¹⁷ Ev 159

¹¹⁸ Ev 145

¹¹⁹ Ev 159

prison to no fixed address. NACRO told us “housing advice services should be established in every prison. Advice should be available to every prisoner who requires it (at present many such services only cater for a proportion of the prison’s population)”.¹²⁰ Mr Nick O’Shea, from the Revolving Doors Agency, told us

“When we did the national rehabilitation strategy we went to a lot of prisons to see what they were doing in terms of getting housing advice in there and there were some excellent examples and there were some very poor examples where the local authorities ignored what was going on”.¹²¹

Mr O’Shea also told us that 47 of 138 prisons had advice centres, which he considered too few. He told us that in his opinion “it is the local authorities because at the end of the day they are the ones who can provide the housing when they are released”.¹²² He felt that this responsibility extended to the provision of advice while imprisoned.¹²³

89. We asked Mr Paul Goggins MP, Minister for Correctional Services and Reducing Re-offending, how many prisons provided housing advice services. He thought that 70 prisons (from 137) provided housing advice.¹²⁴ We cannot explain the discrepancy in these figures. Mr Goggins told us what he saw the housing advice centres role to be:

“dealing with this issue starts right at the beginning of the prison sentence as part of the induction process. There is now a common assessment tool that is used right across the 70 prisons that have housing advice and support within the services they offer, so that right from the beginning a person’s housing need can be established and then through the forward planning that takes place while somebody is in prison we can try to deal with housing need on release. Obviously liaison and communication with housing providers—local authorities and also other social housing providers as well—is absolutely critical”.¹²⁵

We asked if the other prisons did not provide housing advice. Mr Goggins replied

“All prisons would offer housing advice. I am talking about a specific housing advice service which is fully staffed and so on. The most important thing to emphasise here is that every local prison - and these are the prisons mainly in our big cities where many prisoners come and go with great rapidity has a well developed housing advice service now”.¹²⁶

He also told us about the funding of this advice.

“£3 million in the Custody to Work programme is spent on providing housing advice. We will have to show in the medium to long term that that actually produces higher numbers of ex-prisoners moving into accommodation and sustaining that

¹²⁰ HC 61-II, Ev 123

¹²¹ Q 308

¹²² Q 312

¹²³ Q 313

¹²⁴ Q 319-320

¹²⁵ Q 319

¹²⁶ Q 321

accommodation but also of course reducing the rate of offending because that is the purpose of this investment”.¹²⁷

90. Mr Goggins also told us about other prevention projects run in English prisons, for example the Bridge Project in Doncaster Prison.

“A feature of that is a rental bond scheme for people who might be able to access private accommodation but do not have the up front rent in order to be able to achieve that tenancy, so there is a £400 rental bond paid as part of this project which is repayable after six months, again providing a very practical bridge from prison into accommodation”.¹²⁸

In Birmingham, local housing advisors go into prisons and deal directly with prisoners.¹²⁹ Housing will be a key aspect of the Reducing Re-offending Action Plans that must be developed by each area by March 2005.

91. We believe that all prisons should have a specialist housing advice centre, or, at the least, ready access to specialist housing advice, in order to reduce the number of prisoners who leave without settled accommodation and thereby reduce the rate of re-offending.

Ex-service personnel

92. The work that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) does with ex-service personnel was praised by Ms Jenny Edwards of Homeless Link. “There has been a really determined effort recently and that is really starting to show dividends in pre-discharge cases”.¹³⁰ Mr Tarig Hilal of Crisis reinforced this. “Anecdotally, our experience is that there has been a big impact and that they have helped a lot of people, especially on the prevention side”.¹³¹ We asked whether the MoD was working with those who had left the services some time ago as well as those who were leaving or had recently left. Mr Hilal thought that they covered both areas.¹³²

93. We asked Mr Ivor Caplin MP, Minister for Veterans at the Ministry of Defence, about the MoD’s prevention work. He told us that, since 2004, everyone leaving the services had undergone a transition interview, enabling the MoD to identify those at risk of homelessness before they left. Previously only those with more than three years service had had such an interview.¹³³ He explained that the MoD was taking a long-term approach to tackling homelessness among ex-service personnel, assessing housing needs in advance so it did not come as a surprise in their last year. Those who are able are encouraged to buy homes, and two years rotations were being phased out, in part to allow people to put down

¹²⁷ Q 330

¹²⁸ Q 323

¹²⁹ Q 321

¹³⁰ Q 244

¹³¹ Q 246

¹³² Q 249

¹³³ Q 319

roots in areas.¹³⁴ When asked about those who had left the services some time ago, Mr Caplin referred to a recently produced leaflet on veterans' rights, produced with the Department for Constitutional Affairs, which was aimed at the 13 million veterans in the UK.¹³⁵

94. Both Crisis and Mr Caplin referred to a study at King's College, London, commissioned by MoD, looking at the causes, geographical distribution and possible prevention methods of homelessness among ex-veterans. The results of this survey are expected early in 2005. **We recognise the efforts that the Ministry of Defence has already made to reduce homeless levels among veterans. We hope that the results of the survey into homelessness among ex-service personnel will be used to design further prevention schemes.**

Rent Deposit Schemes

95. A frequent barrier to the move into permanent, or even some temporary accommodation, is the lack of deposit money. Rent deposits schemes lend or give the money to applicants, to help them into accommodation. The money is held either by the landlord or the deposit scheme. Rent deposit schemes are one of the Government's prime examples of prevention work, although they are perhaps more designed to prevent people falling back into homelessness rather than becoming homeless in the first place. The National Rent Deposit Forum, a charity which represents local rent deposit schemes and encourages new ones, told us "we estimate that our members advise 60,000 people and house 14,000 each year, using over 8,500 private landlords, and held over £2.75 million for bonds, cash deposits and rent in advance in 2001-02".¹³⁶ Several respondents to our inquiry welcomed rent deposit schemes as a very useful solution to a longstanding problem.

Use of prevention schemes

96. Some agencies expressed concern about the purpose of the ODPM's prevention programmes. Shelter, for one, said

"preventative services must be focused on improving outcomes for potentially homeless applicants rather than artificially reducing the number of homeless acceptances or 'demand managing' access to social housing. However, housing advisers are raising concerns about the approach to practice in some areas where, for example, vulnerable applicants are being pushed into private rented tenancies without support".¹³⁷

The Connection at St Martin's was also wary:

"Homelessness prevention has become an increasingly popular objective in recent months and years. Like all other "trends", it suffers from a lack of precision and definition. For young people in care, for example, are you preventing them going

¹³⁴ Q 336

¹³⁵ Q 338

¹³⁶ Ev 195

¹³⁷ Ev 194

into care, preventing them leaving care and becoming homeless, preventing them rough sleeping if they become homeless, or preventing them from misusing drugs if they are rough sleeping?...Any prevention strategy has to be linked to causes. Homelessness, however, does not always distil down to neatly identified causes, as there is often a random element as to why some people end up as homeless and others do not. For example, softer factors like the extent of friendship, the ability to network, to live independently, manage anger, use services and presentational skills can all make a difference, as can location, self-esteem, ethnicity and gender. Prevention strategies therefore do need to encompass these wider life-skills issues”.¹³⁸

97. We agree that ‘prevention’ can cover many things. Indeed distinguishing ‘prevention’ measures from gatekeeping measures has proved problematic throughout our inquiry. We feel that many of the individual prevention schemes are well-focused, working with well-defined groups, but it is clear that we should be cautious about over-reliance on prevention strategies. **Prevention work should not be viewed in isolation. The ODPM should keep in mind that prevention work alone cannot solve many of the problems that lead to homelessness. We hope that the useful work being done on prevention schemes continues, but it should only be viewed as one element in an overall strategy to tackle homelessness.**

Housing Benefit

Processing delays

98. One subject which arose when talking about prevention, across several different areas, was Housing Benefit. Some evidence suggest that the current system does not help people stay out of homelessness and may in fact lead to it, or prevent people from moving on. The first issue is the delay in payment of Housing Benefit. Crisis told us a report by the Audit Commission stated that, in 2000-01, new claims for housing benefit took an average of 51 days to process.¹³⁹ The National Rent Deposit Forum told us “with mortgages and bills to pay, landlords are reluctant to wait for up to six months to start receiving any rent. This discourages landlords from letting to anyone on benefits, hence the number of adverts stressing ‘No DSS’”.¹⁴⁰ It can also result in the eviction of the tenant. Thames Reach Bondway told us:

“the variable nature of performance across local authorities in this area is frankly staggering and sadly we have examples of tenants abandoning accommodation and returning to the street or a hostel as a result of rent arrears that are not the fault of the tenant but entirely due to administrative bungling and delay in the processing of housing benefit claims”.¹⁴¹

99. We explored the issues of processing times for Housing Benefit with Mr Chris Pond MP, , Minister for Work. He assured us

¹³⁸ Ev 33-34

¹³⁹ Ev 163

¹⁴⁰ Ev 197

¹⁴¹ Ev 4

“The efforts that we have been putting in, in partnership with local authorities to improve the processing time for claims for housing benefit, are very important and we have reduced quite considerably the amount of time it takes local authorities, especially in London and especially among the 60 worst-performing authorities to process those claims to make sure people do not find themselves homeless”.¹⁴²

Moving into work

100. We were also concerned at the ‘tapering’ of Housing Benefit when recipients move into work. This can create a gap in income between the last benefit payment and the first wage packet. High cost temporary accommodation means that many feel unable to make this move. We asked Mr Pond about this problem. We also questioned whether he thought accommodation could be subsidised, rather than the tenants, in order to help more people into work. He told us

“that it is not automatically the case that high rents in themselves make it difficult for people to move into work. Because housing benefit is payable for those in work as well as out of work very often when Job Centre Plus runs through the calculations with an individual it is clear that they would be better off in work even with a high rent. However, the perception is there that people cannot move into work because they would never be able to afford the rents, and I think that is important in itself. In terms of the high level of rent in temporary accommodation, this is something that we are discussing with ODPM and other interested parties to see if there is a way in which we can reduce the amount of rent which is supported by housing benefits payable by the individual and perhaps to look at a block grant approach in terms of the subsidy and in trying to improve the subsidy system making sure also that we continue to discourage bed and breakfast accommodation wherever possible”.¹⁴³

Housing Benefit for prisoners

101. Housing Benefit is only payable for 13 weeks for sentenced prisoners. This compares with 52 weeks’ entitlement for those on remand. The Revolving Doors Agency and NACRO both brought this issue to our attention. This policy should apply only to those serving sentences of over 26 weeks, however NACRO told us “in practice frontline staff sometimes apply it to people serving shorter sentences”.¹⁴⁴ Coupled with problems with resigning tenancies, this system means that prisoners “will be almost certain to continue to owe rent even though their benefits were stopped on the day of sentencing. Even if they were in a position to act immediately they would still accrue substantial rent arrears because they would be expected to pay rent for the notice period on their tenancy (typically four-six weeks) without receiving any benefits”.¹⁴⁵

102. We were pleased to hear in evidence from Mr Pond that Housing Benefit will shortly be payable to prisoners for the notice period on a tenancy. He told us that this, in

¹⁴² Q 372

¹⁴³ Q 371

¹⁴⁴ Ev 159

¹⁴⁵ Ev 159

partnership with the 13 week allowance, was intended to keep people in housing after prison. “It makes no sense at all that the rules on housing benefit should force people to leave their accommodation when they emerge from a relatively short spell in prison”.¹⁴⁶ When asked about the length of receipt of Housing Benefit for sentenced prisoners, he explained “for people who are in prison for a longer period of time of course there is going to be a potential problem of housing debt which is why we seek to limit the payment of housing benefit to that 13 weeks so that people do not find themselves committed to rent for a longer period of time”.¹⁴⁷ **We welcome the Government’s decision to pay Housing Benefit to sentenced prisoners for the duration of a tenancy surrender notice period of 4 weeks. We hope consideration can be given to covering tenancy notice periods of up to 6 weeks in future reforms.**

The 16-hour rule

103. The Foyer Federation raised the problem of Housing Benefit for those aged 19 and over who wish to study over 16 hours a week. It stated that “this rule is a significant impediment to Foyer residents, and others in a similar position, fulfilling their economic potential. Our research shows that around 50% of young people affected by this rule simply abandon their attempts to gain qualifications at Levels 2 and 3”.¹⁴⁸ This appears to us to be a barrier to homeless adults who wish to acquire an education that could take them out of homelessness.

104. Mr Pond told us that the Department for Work and Pensions had been discussing the issue of the 16 hour rule with young people and the Foyer Federation. “I hope we are going to be able to come up with something in the next few weeks...It is something that we have been looking at very carefully over the past few months. Clearly there are practical implications and there are financial implications which we consider very seriously, but we do recognise the problem”.¹⁴⁹ **We await the Government’s announcement on potential reform of the 16 hours of study Housing Benefit rules with interest. We believe that this rule should be rescinded in order to help and not hinder those who wish to gain qualifications to move themselves out of homelessness.**

105. We understand that Housing Benefit is to be the subject of a Government consultation. **We welcome the Government’s consultation on the Housing Benefit system. We hope that eventual proposals will result in the faster processing of claims, and the removal of barriers into work for those in temporary accommodation.**

¹⁴⁶ Q 377

¹⁴⁷ Q 378

¹⁴⁸ Ev 51 Level 3 education is A Levels, Advanced BTEC and equivalent, NVQ3 and Access courses.

¹⁴⁹ Q 380

4 Housing Supply

The Supply of permanent affordable housing

106. The shortage of suitable permanent low-cost housing is a fundamental cause of homelessness. The high price of private housing is putting home ownership beyond the reach of a significant minority of people who consequently have to rely on the provision of subsidised housing. These pressures are particularly strong in the South, and especially in London. Even in the Midlands and the North, in areas where private housing is less expensive and the issue has been the condition and suitability of the stock rather than shortage, the market is changing rapidly. Much of the evidence we have received from the areas which have been called low demand, like Salford, describes recent rises in private house prices and major increases in homelessness demand which the local authorities cannot meet.

107. The extensive periods which homeless people spend in temporary accommodation or hostels is a result of a shortage of homes at the disposal of local authorities to let or make nominations to. The supply of new, affordable social housing is failing massively to keep up with demand, and right to buy is reducing the number of lettings from existing stock.

Availability of social housing

108. Since 1981, the number of homes owned by local authorities and housing associations has dropped by about 1.2 million to 4.1 million in 2003-2004. This decline is mainly a consequence of local authority tenants exercising their right to buy and of councils not being allowed to build new housing following the change of Government in 1979. Housing association development has increased but not sufficiently to replenish the stock or meet increasing demand. The result is that the proportion of the housing stock owned by local authorities and housing associations has fallen by about 10% to 19%.

109. With the decline in the social housing stock, the number of lettings by housing associations and local authorities has fallen. In 1996-97, lettings totalled about 561,000. By 2003/04 it had fallen by about 190,000 to 370,000. The number of lettings to homeless people in the same period fell by about a third from 95,000 to 69,600 despite the rapidly rising demand. The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham said:

“Net demand is outstripping existing supply of affordable housing (our available new lets are estimated to be 787 units per annum) by a factor of 4.6. In comparison with Inner London and London as a whole, Hammersmith and Fulham’s need for affordable housing is significantly higher at 47.9 per 1,000 households per annum than Inner London and London requirements which are 32.3 and 27 respectively. Only 37% of all households needing to move within the year can afford to buy the accommodation they need on the open market in the borough...essentially, existing and future demand for affordable housing cannot be met through available relets and new build alone. This is leading to a number of adverse impacts including

households living in overcrowded conditions and high numbers of households reporting homeless and having to live in temporary accommodation”.¹⁵⁰

110. In London on average about 65% of local authority lettings are to homeless people; in Westminster it is 83%. Ms Genevieve Macklin from the ALG highlighted the dilemma faced by local authorities and housing associations who want to, and are required to, meet the needs of homeless people but also have other serious needs to meet and also want to meet the Government’s agenda of trying to create more sustainable and economically mixed communities.

“The problem here is that the overall lettings available have dropped by about 30 per cent in the last three or four-year period. The supply and demand statistics show that the RSLs [Registered Social Landlords] are accepting a higher proportion of homeless households. Nevertheless, they argue that they would prefer to have more economically active households in order to fulfil sustainable communities and the more mixed and balanced communities agenda, and they are requesting that boroughs work with them to develop local letting plans. That is fine, but again it comes back to the severe problems around the level of overcrowded and homeless households that need to be accommodated”.¹⁵¹

New housing supply

111. Virtually all our witnesses suggested that a major programme providing low-cost homes to rent was a key component in tackling homelessness. Our report on Affordable Housing, published in 2003, underlined the importance of subsidised affordable housing to tackle the increasing needs, particularly with the rising cost of market housing.¹⁵² Since our report, the Government has increased funding to the Housing Corporation. However, its enlarged programme is not adequate to tackle the backlog of housing need, is not sufficiently targeted at the needs of homeless people and is not in the right location.

112. A key principle of the Government’s housing policy is to increase the overall housing supply with a view to stabilising prices. We suggested in our 2003 Report that the number of private homes required to have any impact on house prices would be impractical and could have serious environmental problems.¹⁵³ The review by Kate Barker into the supply of housing, commissioned by the Treasury, suggested that a mixture of market and social housing was required to stabilise the house price increases and tackle housing needs. It recommended an increase of 17,000-23,000 affordable homes each year above current provision, and a doubling of homes developed by the private sector, which would provide an additional 125,000 to 140,000 homes per year.

113. The joint submission by the National Housing Federation, the Local Government Association and Chartered Institute of Housing to the Government’s 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review argued for a mixed housing association programme, to deliver 60,000

¹⁵⁰ HC 61-II, Ev 96

¹⁵¹ Q 90

¹⁵² *Affordable Housing*, Third Report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2002-03 (HC 75), hereafter HC 75

¹⁵³ HC 75, para 25

affordable rented, low-cost home ownership and intermediate rented homes a year by 2007-08. The National Housing Federation said:

“The outcome of the Spending Review resulted in resources that should enable development of 115,000 homes over three years still a shortfall of 25,000 from the Federation's submission to the Spending Review. We will continue to argue for additional investment to bridge this gap”.¹⁵⁴

Shared-ownership housing

114. Much of the evidence questioned the priority given by the Housing Corporation to funding shared ownership housing for key workers. Shelter in its submission pointed to the increasing proportion of Housing Corporation funds being allocated for shared ownership housing. Nationally, the Housing Corporation has allocated over £1 billion in 2004-05 and 2005-06 for shared ownership housing, with a significant proportion for key workers in the wider South East. Shelter estimated that this reflects a 32:68 percentage investment split respectively between intermediate (including key worker) housing and social housing for rent. Witnesses questioned the value of the investment which subsidised the purchase of a private home because it did not increase the overall supply of affordable housing and benefited those people already with a home. Mr Adam Sampson of Shelter argued:

“First of all, some of the way that some of the money has been spent on key workers, it seems to us, is misplaced. If you look at the cost effectiveness of some of the schemes, for example simply to give particular categories of key workers grants to compete on the housing market for purchase, and the long term impact of that is merely to fuel house price inflation. It does nothing to increase the supply and availability of housing in the longer term. It increases house price inflation. In my work with the Home Ownership Task Force last year quite a lot of that discussion was considerable criticism of the current ways of subsidising key workers, which are not very cost effective. The second question is a question about whether we genuinely are right in prioritising housing aspiration over housing need. In the end if we have limited government subsidy it seems to us to be somewhat perverse to use that subsidy to improve the position of people who have housing but are aspiring to better types of housing over people who, by and large, have no access to housing at all”.¹⁵⁵

Southampton City Council pointed out:

“Public investment is weighted too far in favour of investment in housing for key workers. Whilst the council welcomes the provision of resources for key workers this should not be at the expense of those who are in acute housing need i.e. the homeless. Despite increased central investment - and investment by Southampton City Council —we are seeing a decline in the number of new homes to rent”.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ev 117

¹⁵⁵ Q 50

¹⁵⁶ Ev 10

115. Councillor Tony Newman from the London Borough of Croydon, representing the ALG, questioned the Government's definition of key workers highlighting the low take-up of housing funds allocated to help them:

“There is clear evidence that there is not a take-up across London and it is very ill-defined. My own local paper recently carried a half-page advert which said, "Are you a key worker? Ring this number and get a house for £50,000". Well, most people in housing are still trying to work out the definition of a key worker, let alone readers of The Croydon Advertiser, so there is a lot more work that needs to be done on this. Clearly some housing for key public service workers is a reasonable aim, but the ever-expanding list of who is a key worker at the expense of those in immediate housing need, I think we need to keep this at the very least under a very thorough review indeed”.¹⁵⁷

Housing in the Growth Areas

116. Our evidence highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of the homeless people where they are currently inadequately housed so that they can maintain their local support networks. The Chartered Institute of Housing pointed out

“The location of provision of housing, especially temporary accommodation is very important. The experience of homelessness can dislocate households from all of their natural lines of support (friends and families). Children's education can be disrupted by the experience of one or more moves, and permanent offers can frequently be in areas too far removed from current schooling etc. Most councils have two or three hostels for temporary use and frequently this can lead to children having to attend a different school for a short period, with the likelihood of another school move when permanent housing is found”.¹⁵⁸

117. There are concerns that the Government's focus on development in the Growth Areas will not address the needs of homeless people in inner city areas in London and indeed will undermine boroughs' ability to meet their housing needs. Councillor Angela Harvey from Westminster Council pointed out that

“The move to sub-regional procurement of affordable housing and away from direct funding to local authorities and the advent of the Growth Areas make it more difficult to satisfy people's demands to be housed locally”.¹⁵⁹

Westminster also argued that if the whole cost of provision, including the cost of infrastructure, were taken into account it could be argued that it was no more expensive to provide homes in inner London than in the growth areas.

¹⁵⁷ Q88

¹⁵⁸ HC 61-II, Ev 117

¹⁵⁹ Q76

Low demand areas

118. In the parts of the Midlands and the North with an oversupply of housing, there is still a need for suitable affordable housing. Much of the housing is obsolete and located in areas where support services are not available. The North West Regional Housing Forum pointed out

“However there appears to be a perception from outside of the region that the North West does not suffer problems of homelessness with an over supply of void properties which are in low demand. It is important to emphasise at an early stage in this response that low demand properties should not be classified as supply. Many are awaiting decisions around demolition, and if we are to encourage sustainable lettings we should not simply be offering homeless applicants low demand stock. There are issues around the mis-match of supply and demand in the region, and these are issues that organisations are attempting to address through initiatives to deal with the inadequacy and obsolescence of such stock”.¹⁶⁰

119. There are however concerns that that some decent affordable housing will be lost with the demolition programmes developed by the nine Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder initiatives,¹⁶¹ and it will be replaced with unaffordable housing, as Salford City Council pointed out

“Salford and Manchester are a Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder along with neighbouring Authorities, this will have an impact on affordability particularly for homeless people and other vulnerable client groups in particular as areas are cleared and new accommodation is not available due to

- a) construction of replacement taking some time to complete
- b) those properties not being accessible or affordable to homeless people”.¹⁶²

120. Some local authorities are being innovative in accessing private rented sector housing for homeless people in low demand areas. We heard about schemes all over the country, for example to enable homeless people to afford a deposit and rent in advance to take up private accommodation. Salford City Council, for instance, is letting out private sector housing in the low demand areas and has set up an accredited private landlords scheme.

“What we are doing is that where there are housing market renewal areas going on, and where those properties have been empty we will take those properties back in and in the short term we will use those properties for the housing of homeless families, so that is one avenue that we are looking at. As we say, another key for us is that there is a lot of private rented sector accommodation around. We have an

¹⁶⁰ Ev 74

¹⁶¹ The Government has allocated £500m between 2004-2005 and 2007-2008 for nine Market Renewal Pathfinder projects to tackle the most acute areas of low demand and abandonment in parts of the North and Midlands. The aim is to turn whole communities around by improving the quality of private, local authority and registered social landlord housing.

¹⁶² Ev 39

accredited landlord service in the city and we want to make sure that we are using all the possible stock that we have got around”.¹⁶³

121. The stock of affordable housing has declined considerably as a result of right to buy and the cessation of local authority house-building. As a result the number of lettings to homeless families has fallen by a third. A major building programme of low-cost permanent housing to rent is required for homeless people. The serious shortage of permanent housing for homeless people is causing long stays in temporary accommodation. It is unacceptable that homeless people should spend very long periods, sometimes several years, in hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation waiting for a settled home. We believe that the experience of living in temporary accommodation is likely to be damaging to families and vulnerable single people and is likely to lead to significant additional costs in other social programmes. Providing permanent secure homes is a classic case of investing to save.

122. The Government has increased public investment in subsidised permanent housing but this is still not adequate to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of homeless people. The proportion of funds allocated for key worker housing is excessive. We accept that key workers may require a housing subsidy in some high cost areas, but we recommend that the Government reviews the effectiveness of its key worker housing scheme to ensure that it is achieving its objectives. There are major problems with defining a key worker and a danger that subsidising home purchases could add to spiralling house prices by increasing purchasing power without increasing housing supply. Funding for key worker housing should only be used for new-build shared ownership housing and the purchaser should not be able to buy 100% of the home unless covenants guarantee the price of the home remains discounted. Local authorities should identify the groups of key workers eligible for a housing subsidy in consultation with local employers and housing associations. Reflecting the deepening homelessness problem, we recommend that not more than 15% of the Housing Corporation’s funds should be spent on key worker housing.

123. The Government is concentrating new house-building in the Growth Areas. However these areas are not necessarily where housing needs are greatest. The Government’s housing investment programme should seek to meet the needs of more homeless people where they are currently located so that their support networks can be sustained.

124. There is a homelessness problem in areas suffering from low housing demand in some parts of the North and the Midlands. We recommend that the Government encourage and facilitate innovations on the part of local authorities in reusing some of the empty private housing for homeless people. The Government needs to ensure that local authority empty homes strategies effectively consider the potential of leasing private housing. Where homes are being demolished as part of the Government’s Low Demand Pathfinder initiative, the effect on house prices and availability of affordable homes must be carefully monitored and a programme of provision of low-cost housing to rent must be included.

¹⁶³ Q 166

5 Temporary Accommodation

125. Those who are moved off the streets, or present as homeless to their local authorities are almost always placed in temporary accommodation to await placement in permanent homes. Some temporary accommodation also proves living support – whether high level for those who are unlikely ever to be successfully and safely re-housed, or medium level to help people with problems get ready for living independently. Even so, people living in temporary accommodation are still homeless.

Rough Sleepers

126. The Government had two specific priorities when it first addressed the issue of homelessness. The first was to reduce the number of people sleeping rough in England by two-thirds. When the Prime Minister announced this target, the aspiration was that it should be met by 2002. In fact, it was met by December 2001. By 2004, it was calculated that the number of people sleeping rough each night was around 500, compared to 1,850 in 1998.¹⁶⁴ In London, the reduction is only 57% and the highest concentration of rough sleepers is still found there.¹⁶⁵ St Mungo's commented

“the continued success in keeping the numbers of rough sleepers relatively low means that the most visible and socially corrosive form of homelessness is more or less contained”.¹⁶⁶

Sustaining the reduction?

127. There are some reservations, both of the Government's methodology of counting rough sleepers and of the likelihood of this reduction in numbers being sustained. Shelter considered

“it is important to bear in mind the limitations of the methodology which only provides a snapshot covering the areas where street counts are conducted. This means that the actual numbers of rough sleepers at any one time is likely to be higher than the official figure. In some areas, multi-agency monitoring conducted by the statutory and voluntary sector provides a more comprehensive picture and estimates from the ODPM suggest that ten times that number sleep rough over the course of a year”.¹⁶⁷

Broadway told us

“although many rough sleepers are successfully assisted to make a sustained move from the streets, or find their own route away, for some it remains a difficult process.

¹⁶⁴ Ev 169

¹⁶⁵ Ev 175

¹⁶⁶ Ev 127

¹⁶⁷ Ev 188

People are continuing to arrive on the streets of London, and some return to the streets despite being previously linked to services”.¹⁶⁸

The Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Forum stated

“Worrying though the current increase in homeless figures is, there is also concern that the problem is far worse than these figures may indicate. Official homeless statistics present a limited picture of the scale of homelessness and are particularly insensitive to the situation in rural areas. The approved headcount method of estimating rough sleeping is considered to wildly underestimate the scale of the problem and again, in rural areas, often denies the existence of rough sleeping at all”.¹⁶⁹

128. Westminster City Council told us that for 15 rough sleepers moved off the streets in Westminster, 14 new ones arrived, some of which had never slept on the streets before.¹⁷⁰ Mr Terry Moore told us Westminster was exploring new ways of reducing the number.

“We do need to move from where we are at the moment, which is a system where we are actually providing services on the street and to a certain extent that does, we acknowledge, sustain rough sleepers where they are. What we are moving to from next April is a building-based approach by which there will be a safety net on the streets to make sure that the most vulnerable do still receive services, but that all other people will be signposted to various hostels where those services and a more detailed and better assessment can be carried out indoors”.¹⁷¹

129. Several of our respondents are dubious whether the reduction can in fact be sustained beyond this initial period. On Westminster’s figures, and despite all of the effort and resources that have gone in to achieving the rough sleepers’ target, even a small reduction in people moving from the streets or a small increase in new arrivals would tip the balance so that numbers start rising again.

130. The Connection at St Martin’s thought

“the post RSU [Rough Sleeper’s Unit] position is less satisfactory. The Homelessness and Housing Directorate has a wide brief and there are concerns that it is moving away from its roots, and losing interest and/or concern about rough sleeping. This is particularly worrying in London as we have a fragmented, uncoordinated approach, which increasingly emphasises enforcement (anti-social behaviour) rather than care”.¹⁷²

131. Broadway reported comments from its clients which suggested that there is still work to do with rough sleepers. “Clients felt that some of the most vulnerable people on the streets are not receiving appropriate services. They felt that if you are able to help then you

¹⁶⁸ Ev 65

¹⁶⁹ Ev 24

¹⁷⁰ Q 110

¹⁷¹ Q 108

¹⁷² Ev 35

receive it, but some of the most vulnerable people are not able to do this”.¹⁷³ St Mungo’s warned

“lurking in the background is the spectre of rough sleeping numbers rising again. Even in economically benign conditions, the government target for reducing the numbers has not been met in central London. Should the economy take a down turn, numbers will rise, and it is clear that no contingency is in place. There should be one—but to be effective, it would have to be based on an honest appraisal of why the RSU succeeded, and part of the answer lies in its semi-detachment from ODPM”.¹⁷⁴

132. We welcome unreservedly the reduction in rough sleepers. The achievements to date have not been overstated and we congratulate the Government on meeting its targets ahead of time. It is however an area where constant vigilance and rapid responses are required. Indeed, it may be that those with most severe problems are those who are still on the streets. We recommend that the Government make further efforts to identify those long-term rough sleepers who have so far not sought assistance. We also recommend that the ODPM make an assessment of the work of the Rough Sleepers Unit, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and ensure that it is ready to react rapidly should the number of rough sleepers start to rise again.

Bed and breakfast accommodation

133. The Government’s second major target was the Homelessness and Housing Services Directorate’s 2002 mission to reduce to zero, by March 2004, the number of homeless families with children in bed and breakfast accommodation, except in emergency situations where short periods in B&Bs up to six weeks might be allowed. ODPM allocated £35 million in 2002-03, and £15 million in 2003-04, to the Directorate to pursue this aim. In 2004-05, local authorities were allocated £45 million to sustain the lower figures, together with the rough sleepers reduction.

134. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2003 came into force in 2004, and means that local authorities can no longer claim to have discharged their statutory duty to house a homeless family with children if that family has been placed in a B&B for more than six weeks.¹⁷⁵ By March 2004, the number of homeless families with children in B&B accommodation had fallen by 99.3%. Only 17 local authorities did not meet the target, none of which were in London, where B&B use had been most prevalent.

Continuing use of bed and breakfasts

135. Despite such positive results, bed and breakfast accommodation is still used. Indeed, the crisis in temporary accommodation means that some areas have used bed and breakfast for the first time as an emergency measure. For instance, Ms Janice Samuels, of Salford City Council, told us that it had only begun to use B&Bs in the last eighteen months.

¹⁷³ Ev 57

¹⁷⁴ Ev 127-128

¹⁷⁵ Ev 175

“Where we would need to use it we want it to be for single people who we feel could cope quite well in what is unsupported accommodation within Salford. We much prefer to use the temporary supported accommodation provision that we have got”.¹⁷⁶

She felt it was best used in an emergency, for no more than three or four days. We agree that such use of B&B accommodation is acceptable, but it must be closely monitored.

136. Ms Janice Bennett, of South Ribble Borough Council, did not see a problem with using bed and breakfasts to house single young people.

“If it is good quality and is well managed it is a very useful source of temporary accommodation for people... They are well managed, there is 24-hour cover in them. No, they are not wonderful, but they are self-contained rooms with their own doors. A good quality, well managed bed and breakfast can be quite useful”.¹⁷⁷

She admitted that South Ribble was using B&Bs for single young people more than it had in the past.

“Until two years ago our annual bed and breakfast budget was £3,000 a year and probably in any one year we had two, three or four people that we placed in bed and breakfast. This year it is £27,000, not big in money terms, but you can see what the increase has meant to us as a local authority. We have probably between six and eight single people in bed and breakfast now at any one time”.¹⁷⁸

Mr Les Williamson, representing the Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Forum, told us of the significant problems Harrogate was experiencing.

“In Harrogate we were congratulated at our success in meeting the government's target of not keeping in bed and breakfast for longer than six weeks families with dependent children, but we responded by saying that that masks a real difficulty because in actual fact our bed and breakfast costs have gone up by 300 per cent for other categories of homeless presentations, particularly young single people with support needs... Two or three years ago we were spending £1,000 per year on bed and breakfast in Harrogate. Last year we spent £102,000 and that figure is likely to be breached again this year, so there are real concerns”.¹⁷⁹

Harrogate, like some other ‘resort’ towns, faces a particular problem as much of its housing has historically been used as bed and breakfast accommodation. Scarborough has similar difficulties.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Q 170

¹⁷⁷ Q 167

¹⁷⁸ Q 171

¹⁷⁹ Q 175

¹⁸⁰ Q 175

Young people

137. There appears to be a particular problem with the increased use of B&Bs for 16 and 17 year olds, the fastest growing group of homeless acceptances. At least 17 councils have been identified as placing more than 100 vulnerable people in B&Bs, including 16 and 17 year olds, since January 2004.¹⁸¹ Centrepoin told us

“an unintended consequence of [the prohibition on housing families in B&Bs] may be an increase in the use of B&B for 16 and 17s, who can be moved into the spaces left behind by the families who have been prioritised for re-housing...paradoxically 16 and 17 year-olds who are with their families are being fast tracked out of B&B, as the accommodation is deemed unsuitable for them...Housing young people this age in unsuitable B&B accommodation for prolonged periods of time and without adequate support cannot be reconciled with the premise that local authorities are required to help them as they are too young to cope”.¹⁸²

Many single people need supported accommodation which most B&Bs cannot. We were glad to hear that South Ribble Borough Council, for one, recognise this and take measures to address the problem. Ms Bennett told us

“What we are doing is providing them with a floating support service so they are not left on their own. We do have almost daily visits from the floating support team and they are also encouraged and helped to help themselves by looking at possibly other ways of getting better accommodation quicker than they would if they were waiting for the traditional route through the local authority homeless route and being referred to an RSL partner”.¹⁸³

138. Even in areas where there is no alternative, B&B accommodation is only suitable for those who need little or no support. Sixteen to seventeen year olds should, as a matter of course, be housed in supported accommodation and it is unacceptable that they are being housed in conditions which, quite rightly, would be judged unsuitable if they were living with their family. **We commend local authorities like South Ribble that are providing floating support services for those single homeless people housed in B&Bs. This is good practice. We recommend that the ODPM should amend the restriction on the use of B&B except in emergencies to include 16 and 17 year olds.**

Hostels

139. Many homeless people find themselves living in hostels, particularly single homeless people. Hostels vary in size and nature; some are direct access, that is, they take people off the street, although often with a referral from a voluntary organisation. Direct access hostels are for short-term stays and provide a high level of support for tenants. Other hostels are filled by referrals from local authorities and are medium to long term stay. The Snow Hill Centre hostel, which we visited in Birmingham, was large, with 150 beds, and expected most residents to stay no longer than one year. Hostels can be specialist, in which

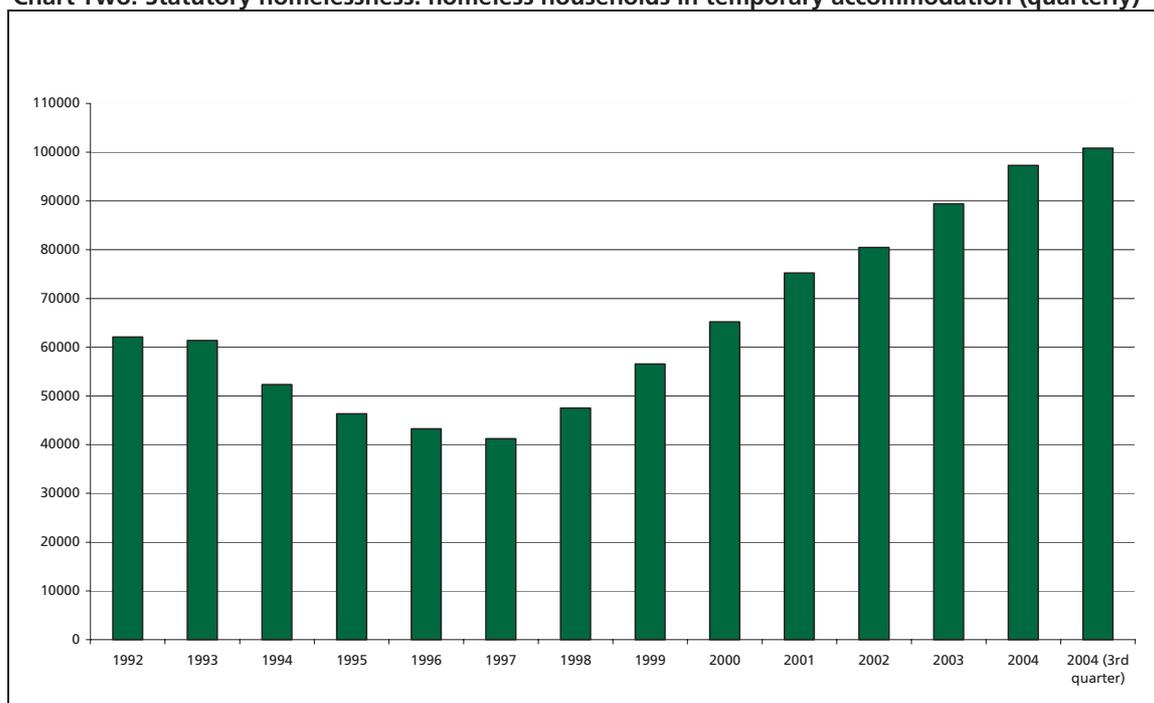
¹⁸¹ Ev 113 (Community Care Magazine, July 2004)

¹⁸² Ev 113

¹⁸³ Q 171

case they often provide high support. Despite recent improvements, there are still a number of hostels which are little more than dormitory accommodation. Mr Nigel Parrington, of the Salvation Army Housing Association, told us that there were a significant number of hostels which had poor standards.¹⁸⁴ Mr Paul Cavadino of NACRO said “there is strong and understandable resistance to going to some types of hostel where people feel, possibly rightly, that they will be among people who are trying to deal in drugs and trying to intimidate them”.¹⁸⁵

Chart Two: Statutory homelessness: homeless households in temporary accommodation (quarterly)



Source: http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/page/odpm_house_604144.xls

The 'silt-up'

140. Chart Two shows the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation in the first quarter of each year since 1992. It is widely recognised that the combination of an increasing number of applicants and non-statutorily homeless people, and a shortage of 'move-on' accommodation represents one of the greatest challenges facing local authorities. This has led to the 'silt-up' of temporary accommodation across the country.

141. Temporary accommodation can mean first stage housing, such as direct access hostels and short stay units, or second stage, which includes most hostels and supported living units. Those whose homelessness applications are accepted will be provided with accommodation by the local authority. This will mean, for most people, privately leased flats for families, and hostel or B&B accommodation for single people. They have the right to be re-housed in local authority or housing association property. Those who have not approached the local authority, or whose application has been rejected, are usually living in

¹⁸⁴ Q 294

¹⁸⁵ Q 301

hostels. They may be waiting for re-housing or simply not have anywhere else to go. Both of these housing streams are suffering from the acute lack of move-on accommodation.

142. We heard from Shelter that a recent survey had identified 30% of hostel residents as ready to move on with nowhere to go.¹⁸⁶ Homeless Link stated “the situation for people in hostels and other temporary accommodation is reaching crisis point and cannot continue”.¹⁸⁷ Ms Jenny Edwards told us “We have recently surveyed the major hostels in London or those providing services to homeless people and we are finding that 43 per cent of the people in those hostels are ready to move on and are just waiting there”.¹⁸⁸ Lord Rooker told us “we have got people flowing into temporary accommodation and not flowing out fast enough because of the shortage of affordable housing and there is a silting-up of the process there”.¹⁸⁹ This in turn increases the pressure on local authorities to impose stricter gate-keeping procedures.

143. Homeless Link stated that another factor contributing to the crisis was the number of former rough sleepers who were now housed in hostels.¹⁹⁰ The Nottingham Hostels Liaison Group (HLG) pointed to the growing number of homeless people with high support needs who require specialist move on accommodation and supported housing which is unavailable.¹⁹¹

144. Long stays in hostels except in exceptional circumstances are to be discouraged. At the most basic level, it can be viewed as bed blocking. New tenants cannot move in and therefore remain in undesirable, even dangerous situations. HLG informed us that

“a recent survey of Nottingham City day centre and advice centre for homeless people found that in the period of a week these services saw 125 individuals who were not able to access an emergency bed that night”.¹⁹²

The tenants already in place are living long-term in hostels and other accommodation built for short stays. This has several disadvantages. The Salvation Army said

“many residents become deeply unhappy at this situation, particularly if they have made great efforts to recover from substance misuse problems but are unable to leave an environment where those problems are all too present”.¹⁹³

145. Centrepont told us that young people find the experience “frustrating when they have worked hard to develop the confidence and skills to live independently. Furthermore young people can also regress: if they are not given the chance to live independently, they may lose the skills they have built up through failure to use them”.¹⁹⁴ This is not just the

¹⁸⁶ Ev 189

¹⁸⁷ Ev 201

¹⁸⁸ Q 238

¹⁸⁹ Q 395

¹⁹⁰ Ev 199

¹⁹¹ Ev 95

¹⁹² Ev 95

¹⁹³ Ev 141

¹⁹⁴ Ev 113

case for the young. People of all ages can be discouraged by long hostel stays. We heard in Birmingham that those over 55 often suffer from spending long periods in hostels with younger people.¹⁹⁵ The ODPM told us “we know that over half of rough sleepers move out of first stage hostels as a result of either eviction or abandonment”.¹⁹⁶ A contributory factor to this situation must be the lack of move-on accommodation. **In order to maintain the reduction in the number of rough sleepers, ODPM needs to ensure that there is suitable first and second stage accommodation for them to move on to.**

Provision of temporary accommodation

146. The Housing Corporation directs the building of permanent accommodation funded through the Approved Development Programme (ADP). The ADP provides homes for rent and temporary social housing. The amount of temporary social housing built under the ADP has fallen from 4,535 units in 1999-2000 to 623 in 2003-04 (a slight improvement on 561 in 2002-03).¹⁹⁷ As a result, the provision of temporary housing is outstripped by the increase in homelessness acceptances.

147. Current hostel provision does not reflect local demand, but is centred mainly in places with high populations. This leads to an unfair draining of resources in these areas, and forces people into city centres and away from their local areas in search of accommodation. Thus large towns and cities end up with disproportionately high percentages of homeless people to support (and potentially house permanently). The Salvation Army told us “service shortages are particularly acute in many rural areas where homelessness may be less visible but still prevalent”.¹⁹⁸ Local authorities should be required to make an assessment of the temporary housing needed in their areas, based not only on the number of acceptances they are making, but also to ensure that the local need for hostel-type accommodation is also met. **It is not acceptable for some areas to bear the financial burden of others because hostels are not being strategically built. We recommend that the Government use the demand identified by local authority homelessness strategies to draw up a national map of hostel need.**

148. In December 2004, the Government announced funding of £92 million, from the 2004 Spending Review allocation, to be spent on improving hostels. It does not seem that this money is to be spent on building new hostels. We welcome this move, but consider the investment to be far too low to tackle the problem of temporary accommodation bursting at the seams. It is with this problem in mind that we view recent comments from Mr Prescott, suggesting that people with a roof over their heads may not be homeless, with concern. **It is imperative that homeless people are not ‘redefined’ as being no longer homeless as soon as they come off the streets.**

¹⁹⁵ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

¹⁹⁶ Ev 175

¹⁹⁷ Ev 178

¹⁹⁸ Ev 141

Licensing regimes

149. Nor is the quality of hostels guaranteed. We heard from the Salvation Army that all hostels run by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), which includes many run by voluntary sector housing associations, must comply to standards set by the Housing Corporation. They are subject to inspection. Hostels outside this sector have no inspection regime, but that of local authority Environmental Health Officers. There is no statutory definition of hostels; they are simply defined as houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). The Housing Act 2004 introduces a licensing scheme for HMOs of three storeys or more, occupied by five or more people. Local authorities also have been given discretion to extend licensing regimes where they see fit. In our 2003 Report, on the then draft Housing Bill, we expressed concern about this policy and recommended that the licensing regime be extended to all HMOs.¹⁹⁹ We are concerned that many hostels and other types of temporary accommodation may be substandard; given that stays in hostels are unacceptably long in many cases, the quality of accommodation should at least be high. **We once more recommend that the Government introduce a registration and inspection system for all HMOs. In the meantime, we hope local authorities will make full use of their discretionary licensing powers.**

Hostels with specialist support

150. There is a shortage of hostels providing the specialist support services which many homeless people need. Facilities such as those run by the Foyer Federation for 16 and 17 year olds bring together many support services, for example a GP and housing advice officer, which may cost more than a simple hostel, but saves money elsewhere. Such high support accommodation can offer various services such as rehabilitation guidance, counselling, social events and education and training advice. There is a need for hostels designed for individual groups too. The Revolving Doors Agency told us

“Generalist housing providers are often unwilling to accommodate people who misuse drugs and/or alcohol or those who have mental health problems, because they will be unable to provide them with enough support to help them to sustain their tenancies. However, the supply of specialist housing is limited and even where it is available providers tend to only offer single issue care. This is inappropriate for many of our clients because of their multiple and complex needs.”²⁰⁰

151. Local authority strategic plans should encompass specialist temporary accommodation. Those responsible for deciding what facilities are provided for homeless people should be long-sighted and think beyond merely putting a roof over heads.

152. Although many homeless people have problems which mean they are in need of support services, there are many who have become homeless and who require no help from their local authority besides a permanent home. It is inappropriate, and a waste of public money, if these people are being housed in temporary housing with funded support.

¹⁹⁹ *The Draft Housing Bill*, 10th Report of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2002-03 (HC 751), paras 51-52

²⁰⁰ Ev 158

At the most, a floating light support package only is needed. Local authorities should examine their housing supply to identify housing that may so far have been dismissed as unsupported, which could be used as move on accommodation for low or no support occupants.

Temporary v permanent?

153. For many years the case has been put that temporary accommodation costs more than the building of new permanent accommodation. Shelter estimated that the cost to the taxpayer of temporary accommodation per year is around £500 million.²⁰¹ The ALG hypothesised

“the present value of saving from replacing temporary with permanent housing for 30,000 families would be £3 billion. If numbers in temporary accommodation were assumed to grow at 3,000 pa and replaced with permanent housing the present value of long term savings would rise to £7.3 billion”.²⁰²

Ms Genevieve Macklin of the ALG told us

“the Better Value Investment Model will produce 40 per cent more housing by just using the same amount of money, but using it on permanent housing instead of temporary accommodation”.²⁰³

Lord Rooker agreed with this point, but raised the problem of capital investment.

“If you do not take a narrow accountant's look at the cost of building and everything else but take the totality for society, it is always going to be cheaper and I fully accept that. But that does require, to do that, programmes such as Spend to Save and capital investment as well”.²⁰⁴

154. We recommend that, as part of its strategy for temporary accommodation, the Government should undertake a full cost benefit comparison of the provision of temporary and permanent housing, taking account not just of direct costs but also the wider implications for public expenditure (eg housing benefit and support services) and the wider costs for social provision as a whole.

155. We are deeply concerned about the ‘silting-up’ of temporary accommodation, which now houses such large numbers of people that it could be regarded as an alternative form of tenure. It threatens to derail the Government’s achievements on homelessness. Of course, the main requirement is to ensure a much stronger supply of permanent homes so that people can move on from temporary accommodation as quickly as possible. The improvement in the quality of temporary accommodation brought about by the success of leasing from the private sector should not become an excuse for failing to re-house people permanently. If, as a society, we are unable to provide permanent homes for people, it is

²⁰¹ Ev 188

²⁰² HC 61-II, Ev 86

²⁰³ Q 79

²⁰⁴ Q 432

reasonable to expect that the temporary accommodation that is provided should at least meet people's needs.

156. The Government should produce a clear strategy for the future management of temporary accommodation. The strategy should set out how the Government intends to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation in all its forms, and their length of stay. We believe it should be a priority of the Government to ensure that the right amount of accommodation is available where it is needed for those, mainly single vulnerable people, waiting in B&Bs and hostels, and that the quality of provision is improved and adequate support services are provided. In particular, use of B&B accommodation should be phased out, starting with 16 and 17 year olds.

6 Supporting Homeless People

Costs

157. We have tried to determine precisely how much the Government is spending on services for homeless people. The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate has a revenue budget of £60 million for both 2004-05 and 2005-06. Allocations from this are made to each local authority based on historic levels of homelessness, and additional allocation can be bid for. This funding is given on condition that local authorities maintain levels of rough sleeping as close to zero as possible, do not house families in B&B accommodation except in emergencies and for no longer than six weeks, and deliver a homeless strategy. Those receiving grants over £50,000, which presumably have high historic levels of homelessness, are also required to reduce levels of: repeat homelessness; homelessness against main causes and inappropriate use of temporary accommodation.²⁰⁵ Southampton City Council told us that their grant had been cut by £175,000 from 2002-03 to 2003-04 (37%).²⁰⁶ Wycombe District Council, on the other hand, received £40,000 in 2003-04, up from £24,000 in 2002-03.²⁰⁷

Strategic working

Services

158. Many homeless people have complex or multiple needs. The local authority homelessness strategies introduced under the Homelessness Act 2002 were designed in part to promote inter-agency working to ensure that those with complex needs did not continue to fall between the lines. Even so, the evidence we have received demonstrates that there is still a great deal to be done in this area. Homeless Link told us

“Almost half of homeless people have multiple needs. These people are highly marginalized and discriminated against. Their needs are complex and their behaviour often bizarre and difficult (and possibly misconstrued as wilful anti-social behaviour). Public service providers in health, education, employment, probation or cultural fields often perceive them as just too difficult to handle”.²⁰⁸

159. People with multiple problems will need a range of services. Specialist drug support/rehabilitation work is carried out with rough sleepers and those in temporary accommodation. Those with alcohol problems also need specialist support. One concern we heard when visiting Prime Focus in Birmingham was the lack of funding available for working with those with alcohol problems.²⁰⁹ Alcohol is not included in many mainstream

²⁰⁵ Letter to local authorities from ODPM, available on <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

²⁰⁶ Ev 11

²⁰⁷ Ev 26

²⁰⁸ Ev 201

²⁰⁹ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

homelessness strategies. The Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy identifies street sleepers as an ‘at-risk’ group, but does not include them in its key aims.²¹⁰

160. Crisis gave us a list of waiting times for organisations to access a selection of external services.

Service undertaken externally	Number of weeks
Alcohol assessment	3.5
Drug assessment	4.5
Drug detoxification	10.5
Alcohol detoxification	9.5
Alcohol rehabilitation	11.0
Drug rehabilitation	12.0 ²¹¹

These waiting times may well deter someone who is at first determined to undergo a detoxification and rehabilitation programme. It is also problematic that people waiting this length of time will often be living alongside those who have undergone these programmes: this situation is far from ideal.

161. Mental health issues often underpin other issues and need to be treated to prevent the reoccurrence of other symptomatic problems. The diagnosis of mental illness can be the hardest part of this process. The Salvation Army told us “the lack of dual diagnosis and multiple needs provision remains a severe issue. Clients still often find themselves passed from one agency to the next, which shows that greater co-ordination needs to take place”.²¹²

162. Homeless people find it very hard to access services that others take for granted. The Revolving Doors Agency told us

“One of the biggest problems facing our client group is the fact that without a home address they find it almost impossible to access basic non-housing services such as primary health care, welfare benefits and banking”.²¹³

Crisis told us

“single homeless people are forty times less likely than the average person to be registered with a GP”.²¹⁴

Clients of Broadway said, of GPs,

²¹⁰ Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, available at http://www.strategy.gov.uk/su/alcohol/alchol_harm03.htm

²¹¹ Ev 163

²¹² Ev 142

²¹³ Ev 159

²¹⁴ Ev 163

“as soon as you mention a drug or alcohol problem, they shut you out”,
and, of hospitals,

“they don’t want to take care of us, just get rid of us as quickly as possible”.²¹⁵

163. Homeless Link told us that 70% of their members found it hard to access dental care for their clients.²¹⁶ St Mungo’s felt there was a need for health services to introduce strategies to address these problems. “It is high time that the Primary Care Trusts, Mental Health Trusts and others were required to specify precisely how they will address the health needs of homeless people”.²¹⁷ **We recommend that the Government require NHS Trusts to draw up strategies for dealing with the health needs of homeless people.**

164. Homeless people present problems for public service providers that differ in complexity and nature from those of most of the general population. It is not surprising that providers struggle to cope with the demands of the homeless sector. There are grounds to suggest large scale investment in a strategic service dedicated to the needs of homeless people, integrating necessary services across the board. We do not propose to recommend this; we recognise that homeless people must be integrated into the mainstream, however difficult. **As part of local authority homelessness strategies, we would welcome consideration of ways to increase the participation of homeless people in mainstream services, as part of their support packages. Staff education on the needs of homeless people, for example in the NHS, would also be a positive step.**

165. Support packages, once acquired, cannot always be relied on. If someone moves across an authority border, their support is lost. Data protection rules mean that sharing of information can be forbidden, although many authorities do not appear to explore this idea in the first place. Homeless people with complex needs are forced in many cases to undergo assessments they have undergone in the recent past in another area. This is neither time nor cost efficient. This probably is especially severe in London, where it is easy to cross authority borders without knowing, and rough sleeping continues to be most prevalent.

166. Homeless Link gave us particularly detailed evidence about this problem.

“Where homeless people have been assessed as requiring a package of support—training, probation, mental health or addiction support—these services are all too often lost as soon as they move across a boundary to a different PCT, mental health trust etc. This is frustrating for staff trying to support them in frontline agencies and can be intensely damaging to the progress the homeless person may have already made. The increasing emphasis that people should prove a “local connection” before they can receive services results in doors being shut in the face of some of society’s most marginalized and excluded people. Even where services try to respond to the needs of people who have arrived without a “local connection”, waiting times for an assessment, never mind a package of support itself, often lead to a real deterioration in the condition of the homeless person. In some areas our members have a strong

²¹⁵ Ev 55-56

²¹⁶ Ev 202

²¹⁷ EV 129

perception that excuses are found to avoid providing services to people without a long-standing local connection. These are real factors in excluding homeless people (who are more likely than average to be mobile or to lead chaotic lives) from the basic standards of public support they need”.²¹⁸

167. Homeless Link proposed a ‘Smartcard’ which would act as a service ‘passport’ from one area to another. We support the idea of some method of tracking support packages but are wary of recommending a system which relies on homeless people holding on to one document. Ms Edwards suggested as an alternative :

“quite a good tracking system in London though called 'CHAIN' which could potentially be extended more widely around the country which does allow a significant proportion of homeless people to be tracked and their histories and risk assessments to happen much quicker than would otherwise be the case”.²¹⁹

168. We see clear advantages for all concerned in the development of a system to facilitate quicker access to support packages. We recommend that ODPM commission research into the development of a network to enable prior assessments and treatment records of homeless people to be accessed across the country.

Local Authority Strategies

169. The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the requirement for each local authority to develop a homelessness strategy, based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their district. ODPM told us “the first strategies had to be published within 12 months of the Act coming into force, ie by July 2003 and must be renewed at least every five years”.²²⁰ ODPM issued good practice guidance and included statutory guidance in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

170. Local authority strategies should, amongst other things, identify resources need to prevent homelessness occurring or recurring and involve other public, voluntary and private agencies in partnership. ODPM told us that the HQNS evaluation:

“concluded that most authorities had gained a good understanding of the causes of homelessness in their areas which were reflected in their prevention strategies”.²²¹

Shelter felt that this exercise had been valuable and praised the efforts of local authorities. “Most importantly, there seems to have been a genuine shift away from crisis management towards a more strategic approach”.²²²

171. In November 2004, the Homelessness and Housing Services Directorate published an independent survey of all 354 strategies, carried out by an independent body, Housing Quality Network Services (HQNS). The survey made a series of criticisms, many of which are reflected in our evidence. It found, for example, that cross boundary working was not

²¹⁸ Ev 202

²¹⁹ Q 255

²²⁰ Ev 171

²²¹ Ev 171

²²² Ev 191

proving effective in London; that prevention work done as part of homelessness strategies has not been evaluated or publicised well and that there has been insufficient research into the causes of homelessness in the BME population.²²³ We cannot list all the findings of the review here, but are in agreement with many of them. ODPM told us that the HQNS evaluation

“concluded that most authorities had gained a good understanding of the causes of homelessness in their areas which were reflected in their prevention strategies”.²²⁴

We hope that the ODPM will act immediately on the findings of the Housing Quality Network Services review of local authority homelessness strategies.

172. Other evidence we have received shows that there is widespread scepticism that these strategies have in fact made any improvement to inter-agency working. Centrepoint stated

“a written strategy is a means, not the end itself. The important thing is to be strategic, not merely to have a documented strategy...effective collaboration requires not the easy parroting of slogans about partnership but sophisticated understanding about inter-personal, inter-team, inter-professional, inter-agency, and inter-sectoral working”.²²⁵

St Mungo’s told us

“already there is evidence of inadequate analysis of the profile and needs of the main homeless sub-groups; and of a failure to engage properly with voluntary sector partners. A full review of the benefit of the strategies needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency”.²²⁶

173. We heard particular criticism about the lack of provision for young people in local authority strategies which, given the fast rising rate of homeless acceptances amongst this group, appears to be a major oversight. Childline told us that a report published by them in 2004 “recommends that local authorities assess and make provision for young runaways”.²²⁷ Centrepoint said “these strategies do not have to include youth homelessness...43% [of 30 key local authorities] do not have a specific strategy for dealing with youth homelessness”.²²⁸

174. Shelter has carried out a series of surveys on the implementation of the Homelessness Act. This revealed real concern on the part of local authorities regarding the lack of social services involvement in joint working on homelessness.²²⁹ These concerns were echoed by the HQNS survey, which also expressed disappointment at the unwillingness of social services to provide information to local authorities about the nature and levels of

²²³ *Local authorities homelessness strategies*, available at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

²²⁴ Ev 171

²²⁵ Ev 111

²²⁶ Ev 129

²²⁷ Ev 5

²²⁸ Ev 112

²²⁹ HC 61-II, Ev 120

homelessness they encountered.²³⁰ The results of this poor co-ordination are serious, and include poor tenancy sustainment, a lack of planning where future homelessness needs, eg children leaving care, cannot adequately be identified and inappropriate use of temporary accommodation.²³¹ **We recommend that the Government issue strong guidance to social services on the role they are expected to play in local authority homelessness strategies. We expect this to be carried out jointly by the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and ODPM.**

175. We welcome the introduction of local authority homelessness strategies. It will take time for their real usefulness to become apparent. Merely writing the first strategy will have forced many local authorities to address issues that had never been looked at before. We are concerned that local authorities are not obliged to consider specific needs in their strategies. Although we understand that a great deal of work is involved in putting these strategies together, renewal every five years will leave an ineffective strategy in place for far too long. The HQNS survey stated

“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”.²³²

176. There is now much better information about good practice which all authorities could learn from and many existing strategies were good first attempts which should be improved. **We recommend that the Government should require the second round of local authority homelessness strategies to be prepared after two or three years rather than five. ODPM should provide stronger advice and clear guidance on the specific issues which strategies must cover, for example in relation to each specific vulnerable group. Round Two strategies should also include an evaluation of the differences made since the first strategy was agreed.**

Supporting People Programme

177. ODPM launched the Supporting People programme in 2003, in grants for financial year 2003-04. The purpose of the programme was to bring together at local level better integrated and more securely funded housing-related services for vulnerable people. Local authorities were asked to draw up Supporting People Plans and make contracts with service providers, who would be given year on year grants to carry out their work. Supporting People funds, unlike previous funding streams, would be subject to a proper review process. We reported on the programme in July 2004, just after it had undergone a major audit by Robson Rhodes. We concluded that the programme had been welcomed by those involved in providing housing services for vulnerable people, but expressed concerns about the apparent lack of forward planning in the operation of the scheme.²³³

²³⁰ *Local authorities homelessness strategies* Chapter 3, para 3.72

²³¹ HC 61-II, Ev 121

²³² *Local authorities homelessness strategies*, Chapter 4, para 4.32

²³³ *Supporting Vulnerable and Older People: The Supporting People Programme*, Session 2003-04 (HC 504-I)

Problems

178. When we began this inquiry, local authority allocations for financial year 2005-06 had not been announced; they were published in December 2004. It was widely assumed beforehand that grants would be cut down from the 2004-05 allocations. Centrepont said “it is difficult to make predictions...this appears to be a cut of roughly 7% in real terms”.²³⁴ Unsurprisingly, this was not welcome. There were suspicions that this cut was in part caused by the administration expense of the programme. Lord Rooker told us this was not the case:

“Any cuts faced by providers next year should only arise through negotiation or following a service review. This is a separate issue to the administration of the programme”.²³⁵

He also assured us that the cost of making a bid was refunded to successful applicants. “Procurement costs normally form part of an organisation’s overheads which would then be recovered if the contract was won”.²³⁶ This is not reassuring to those organisations who must use money that could be used on programmes to put together a bid. Prime Focus, in Birmingham, told us that they spent at least £150,000 on their application this year, with no guarantee of success.²³⁷

179. In oral evidence, the Salvation Army told us

“the Approved Development Programme from the Housing Corporation, which has been approximately £1 billion a year over the last two to three years for supported housing projects, was running at about nine or ten per cent and it is now down to three per cent. You have a situation where the throughput of schemes is not happening because the corporation are not able to provide the capital funding because there is no guarantee of Supporting People funding being available”.²³⁸

180. This is only one of the many complaints we have heard about the Supporting People programme in the course of our inquiry. Other criticisms surrounded the year on year nature of the programme grants. This leads to uncertainty and prevents long-term planning. Projects, even short ones, which need planning over a year in advance may not be feasible. In addition, bids must be made each year, so in effect a body must begin to prepare its bid almost as soon as it has received the previous allocation. We heard in Birmingham that Supporting People funding was targeted towards certain areas, which left others struggling to attract staff. Supporting People funding is, of course, capped each year. This leaves limited room for year on year expansion. The Salvation Army demonstrate above one of the major pitfalls of this: the Housing Corporation will not invest in, and voluntary organisations and local authorities see no point in building facilities for which funds for staff and support cannot be guaranteed.

²³⁴ Ev 112

²³⁵ HC 61-II, Ev 126

²³⁶ HC 61-II, Ev 126

²³⁷ Information gathered on an informal visit to Birmingham

²³⁸ Q 288

181. We also heard strident criticism in Birmingham of the review process. Projects are reviewed each year: those that fail do not receive funding for the following year. St Basil's compared the Supporting People review to the Audit Commission review they had undergone before it. The SP review looked entirely at the process of the projects, and consumed a great deal of staff time, but did not evaluate outcomes. St Basil's suggested that the administrators reconsidered their review procedures to bring them more into line with Audit Commission practice.

182. We explored these problems with ODPM in correspondence, and we remain to be convinced that the department has grasped the difficulties facing people applying for and receiving SP funding. **The Supporting People programme is too large an issue to address in any depth in this Report and so we intend to return to the subject in a separate inquiry. We hope to see criticisms decrease as the findings of the Rhodes review take effect.**

7 Moving on

Support in transition

183. In order to succeed when moving into permanent accommodation, many people may need a tenancy support service to ensure that they access the right services and advice. For many, it may be their first solo tenancy; others may not have adequate English or may suffer from ill health. We are not convinced that the valuable role of tenancy or floating support services in preventing repeat homelessness has been adequately appreciated. Reducing levels of repeat homelessness is now a requirement for all local authorities receiving over £50,000 from the Homelessness and Housing Services Directorate. Shelter's Homeless to Home service was set up to meet the need for tenancy support; it achieves a tenancy sustainment rate of 90% after nine months. Shelter told us

“These services are also cost effective. We have estimated that, based on the average cost of our Homeless to Home service (£3,400); the Audit Commission's estimate of the cost of tenancy failure (£1,650); and the cost of spending a year in temporary accommodation (£5,000), these services can save the public purse an average of £2,800 per household”.²³⁹

Preventing repeat homelessness

184. The prevention of repeat homelessness is part of each local authority's homelessness strategies. One way of measuring the success of this aim is to look at the statistics provided by the Annual Rough Sleepers Summary Report for London 2003, conducted by Broadway. This reported that 64% of the street contacts made were assisted off the streets by outreach teams, compared to 69% in 2002. 62% of those had not been assisted off the streets before 2003, and 3% had been assisted off the streets more than ten times before 2003. At the end of 2003, 53% of those contacted were on the streets, compared to 43% in 2002. This would appear to show that 17% of the contacts were assisted off the streets and had returned by the end of the year. This compares to 12% in 2002. It could be that it becomes less easy to find people to move off the street each year. This snapshot shows however that a sizeable proportion of rough sleepers in London are returning to the streets.

185. The problems we have outlined with temporary accommodation and support services may account for this. We have no statistics for those returning to the streets outside London, although we have seen some anecdotal evidence regarding those who do return to the streets. Although we have discussed prevention work, many of the schemes are not designed to prevent repeat homelessness. Until these problems are sorted out, people will continue to return to the streets who might otherwise find a permanent home.

The real size of the problem?

186. Until the Government has a clearer idea of how many homeless people there truly are in England, it is hard to know how it can assess the success of its strategies. However many people move out of homelessness, there remain those who have never been counted who

²³⁹ Ev 194

are still without a permanent home. These people go unsupported and may be developing complex needs as a result of their situation. **ODPM should commission a census of the hidden homeless in a selection of areas, to assess the scale of the problem.** This will require lateral thinking about ways to discover who is without a permanent home. **A public information campaign informing people of their rights under the Homelessness Act and encouraging people to contact their local authorities could potentially bring a proportion of the hidden homeless into the system. Although this may well increase the existing pressure on temporary and permanent accommodation, it would enable local authorities to make more useful assessments of the scale of the problem and the housing needs of those living in the area.**

Lettings policies

187. There are real problems re-housing homeless people which go beyond the supply of housing. We have heard repeatedly of the barriers that local authorities have come across in re-housing large numbers of homeless people. Local lettings policies are designed, as advocated by ODPM policy, to create mixed and sustainable communities. All social landlords would like to have more balanced lettings, with more new tenants in employment and fewer vulnerable people with complex needs. In high demand areas, the people with highest priority are predominantly people who have been through the mill of homelessness, often have multiple needs and are unlikely to have sustained employment through the ordeal of temporary accommodation. In these circumstances it seems very unlikely that anything significant can be done to create more balanced communities on existing social housing estates, although there is clearly more scope in new development.

Choice-based lettings

188. Homeless people are often stereotyped as ‘problems’ when in fact most homeless people go through the trauma, eventually are re-housed, and then get on with the rest of their lives. Many local authorities are now introducing choice based lettings schemes in line with Government policy.²⁴⁰ There are national concerns about how the schemes will work and whether they will discriminate against vulnerable people, who find it hard to operate the system, and lead to them getting the poorest accommodation. In districts with choice based lettings schemes, all the public agencies providing services for homeless people including social services, health organisations and voluntary sector bodies need to ensure that homeless people have the information and facilities to put together a bid for a home and subsequently to live in it. **With the increasing use of choice based letting schemes, the Government must provide guidance to local agencies to ensure that homeless people benefit from them and are not disadvantaged.**

189. In our Report on Social Cohesion, we raised concerns about choice based letting schemes. Freedom of choice can lead to greater segregation if tenants’ choices are

²⁴⁰ ODPM has set Choice Based Lettings targets for local authorities. By 2005 some 25% of all local authorities are to have adopted some form of choice based letting scheme; and that all authorities will offer choice to applicants by 2010.

constrained by limited information, fear and safety.²⁴¹ These concerns were reflected in evidence to this inquiry. Councillor Tony Newman, representing the ALG, told us

“we have seen how housing can be misused in London in terms of outfits like the BNP in Barking, Dagenham and other areas playing off people's fears around housing and choice-based schemes with wild allegations about who may or may not move into an area, and it is a very sensitive area. I think before getting much more ambitious than one or two well-working borough schemes in London, we need a lot more work on this in terms of how we are going to tackle it. It must be done, as I said, in relation to supply because, without sufficient supply, it simply will not have any credibility”.²⁴²

190. In its Response to our Social Cohesion report, the ODPM said it was conducting a Race Impact Assessment of the allocation legislation.²⁴³ The ODPM needs to review regularly the implementation and practical effect of choice based letting schemes to ensure that they promote integration of different cultural groups rather than increase segregation.

Anti-social behaviour

191. Those homeless people who have previously been associated with anti-social behaviour can put local authorities into quandaries. There is a statutory duty to re-house them, if found unintentionally homeless, but a reluctance on the part of landlords and other tenants to accept them. There is no easy answer to this problem. Mr Les Williamson, of the Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Forum, told us that probationary tenancies could be used in these cases but support packages were part of this and Supporting People funding might not be available.²⁴⁴

Young people

192. The large number of young people in need of homes presents its own problem. We have heard that 16 and 17 year olds have expectations of what housing they can be placed in that does not reflect reality. We asked if sharing would be a solution to the lack of one person units. Mr Jeremy Drew, of the Foyer Federation, said one issue lay in

“recognising the complexity of the need of the homeless person in the first place and recognising that there are mental health issues, a history of drug/alcohol abuse perhaps, abuse and so on, a whole host of issues that are there and very often multiple needs, and to expect that person to be able to live in a shared environment, I think, may be a step too far”.²⁴⁵

Mr Howard Sinclair, from Broadway, added

²⁴¹ *Social Cohesion* House of Commons ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2003–04 (HC 45)

²⁴² Q 81

²⁴³ Government Response to the ODPM Select Committee Report on Social Cohesion Cm 6284 July 2004

²⁴⁴ Q 188-189

²⁴⁵ Q 235

“when people are in unsupported, shared accommodation, they are very vulnerable. They do not know who is moving next door to them, they have no right to say who is living next door to them and actually I think that leads to some of the difficulties and exacerbates the situation for some people”.²⁴⁶

We realise that people who have become homeless so young are likely to be in need of high support and shared accommodation would not be appropriate. We feel however that local authorities with a surplus of family housing might consider converting such accommodation into bedsit accommodation for adults with low support needs.

8 Conclusion

193. There is no question that the Government has taken on the problem of homelessness. The Homelessness Act 2002 represented a breakthrough in strategic thinking, and the extension of the Priority Need categories has brought large numbers under the protection of legislation. New obligations have been imposed on local authorities to help more people than ever before. We are glad that the Government recognised the scale of the homelessness problem.

194. Having reduced the number of rough sleepers, and families forced to live long term in bed and breakfast accommodation, ODPM now faces a new crisis. The growing pressure in temporary accommodation needs urgent attention, and investment. New housing is not being built quickly enough, and too much of it is destined not to be used as much needed social housing. We regard the provision of new social housing as an absolute priority for the Government. This problem will not go away; indeed, it may get much worse.

195. Implementation of the legislation is also patchy. Strategic thinking has, by many accounts, been slow to improve despite the introduction of local authority homeless strategies. Statutory definitions are being inconsistently and carelessly applied; authorities seem to look for reasons to turn people away rather than to help; there are suspicions that 'gatekeeping' is getting tougher to keep the number of acceptances down because authorities cannot cope with the demand. We are deeply concerned that the actions of local authorities are not being monitored closely enough. Disparity between authorities managing the same legislation are often extreme and must warrant intervention on occasion from ODPM. The Government must also take more responsibility for encouraging greater uniformity of approach by publishing more definitive guidance in the very many areas where local authority practice is so inconsistent. A review of the workings of the 2002 Act would identify the weak spots for the Government.

196. It seems to us that the Supporting People programme has structural problems. We will return to this at a later date. We do however wish to express our concern that projects are closing and new projects stifled because of the workings of the programme. Its effectiveness could be greatly improved if the suggestions of its users were taken into consideration.

197. New groups are emerging amongst the homeless population, most notably 16-17 year olds. Funding for prevention work with groups with problems likely to lead to homelessness must be assured and the voluntary sector more closely involved. Prevention work with schools and families is particularly important; early intervention could make a real difference to many who end up as homeless 16 year olds. We think the citizenship curriculum should include housing issues to address the expectations of young teenagers.

198. Although ODPM, in its PSA5, has set long-term targets for reducing the numbers in temporary accommodation, these almost embarrassingly lack in ambition. The Government considers that it cannot realistically bring the numbers in temporary accommodation back down to the figure it inherited until 2016. We believe the Government should publish a radical new strategy to tackle the scandal.

199. Underlying the whole issue of homelessness is the imbalance in the demand for and supply of adequate housing. Many of the Government's initiatives have been aimed at stimulating new building generally and helping groups, like key workers and people who aspire to shared ownership. For most homeless people, given the high rate of poverty, unemployment and vulnerability, their housing need will only be met through an increase in the supply of social rented housing. This is the area where the Government's housing policy seems to have achieved least so far, yet it is the area where need and social justice demand that the priority should lie.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes the right of every person to have “an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing”. It is our view that there should not be homeless people in the UK in 2004. A home is a fundamental right which should not be denied to anyone living in as affluent and ambitious a society as our own. (Paragraph 1)

Who are the homeless?

2. We recommend that the Government continue to acknowledge that homelessness is more than ‘rooflessness’. (Paragraph 17)
3. We believe the Government should now set a target to end the use of bed and breakfast for any homeless household except as a short term emergency response. (Paragraph 25)
4. The Government must commission research to look at why the rates of homelessness are disproportionately high among the black and minority ethnic population. (Paragraph 37)
5. We welcome the extension of the priority need categories and the protection that this has offered to those previously outside the statutory homelessness provisions. (Paragraph 44)
6. We support the concept of prioritisation in the acceptance of homelessness. Nevertheless we recommend that the Government review the priority needs list with a view to ensuring that all vulnerable groups are included. We would in particular like to see the list include all elderly people, whether or not they are vulnerable. (Paragraph 48)
7. We recommend that Government use clear and authoritative guidance on the assessment of statutory vulnerability as a matter of urgency, and certainly within three months of the publication of its response to this Report. (Paragraph 53)
8. Guidance should be stronger and more authoritative on the range of mental health and learning disability issues which might lead to vulnerability. The guidance should stress co-operative working between housing, social services and the mental health agencies to ensure that people are fairly assessed. The guidance should also identify good practice such as the use of trained mental health practitioners as part of local authority assessment teams to ensure that vulnerability due to mental health problems can be properly recognised and dealt with. (Paragraph 55)
9. We recommend that the Government commission and publish a cost-benefit analysis of the removal of any vulnerability criteria in the assessment of homelessness applications to English local authorities. (Paragraph 56)

10. We recommend that the Government should produce improved guidance on the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002 regarding the definition of intentional homelessness as soon as possible, and certainly within three months of the publication of its response to this Report. (Paragraph 60)
11. Guidance on the interpretation of intentional homelessness should include an explicit explanation of its application to ex-offenders. (Paragraph 63)
12. The Government should produce explicit guidance for social services of the action that should be taken following referrals of intentionally homeless families with children, and draw attention to good practice. (Paragraph 68)
13. ODPM guidance should be much clearer about the Government's expectations of local authorities in relation to non-priority homeless people and should aim to achieve much greater consistency of practice, and a significantly better quality of service. It is not acceptable for a section of the homeless population to go unassisted because their needs are not as great as others. (Paragraph 72)
14. The Government should ensure that the needs assessments local authorities undertake for non-priority need homeless people lead to advice, assistance and even support that are designed both to prevent them developing further problems and to help move them out of homelessness altogether. (Paragraph 73)
15. We recommend that ODPM should scrutinise the homelessness acceptance rates of local authorities with a view to intervening where they depart from the average by a considerable margin. Those authorities whose rates are out of line for no clear reason should be referred to the Audit Commission to account for the difference and if necessary, their procedures should be reviewed. Public money should not need to be spent on legal appeal costs. (Paragraph 77)

Prevention

16. We welcome the Government's pump-priming funding to local authorities for prevention work. We recommend that the Government continues to support the efforts of local authorities and voluntary organisations in projects to prevent homelessness, and evaluates the need for future funding beyond the scope of initial pump-priming. (Paragraph 80)
17. We recommend that the operation of prevention schemes should be introduced as a local authority performance indicator. (Paragraph 82)
18. We believe that all prisons should have a specialist housing advice centre, or, at the least, ready access to specialist housing advice, in order to reduce the number of prisoners who leave without settled accommodation and thereby reduce the rate of re-offending. (Paragraph 91)
19. We recognise the efforts that the Ministry of Defence has already made to reduce homeless levels among veterans. We hope that the results of the survey into homelessness among ex-service personnel will be used to design further prevention schemes. (Paragraph 94)

20. Prevention work should not be viewed in isolation. The ODPM should keep in mind that prevention work alone cannot solve many of the problems that lead to homelessness. We hope that the useful work being done on prevention schemes continues, but it should only be viewed as one element in an overall strategy to tackle homelessness. (Paragraph 97)
21. We welcome the Government's decision to pay Housing Benefit to sentenced prisoners for the duration of a tenancy surrender notice period of 4 weeks. We hope consideration can be given to covering tenancy notice periods of up to 6 weeks in future reforms. (Paragraph 102)
22. We await the Government's announcement on potential reform of the 16 hours of study Housing Benefit rules with interest. We believe that this rule should be rescinded in order to help and not hinder those who wish to gain qualifications to move themselves out of homelessness. (Paragraph 104)
23. We welcome the Government's consultation on the Housing Benefit system. We hope that eventual proposals will result in the faster processing of claims, and the removal of barriers into work for those in temporary accommodation. (Paragraph 105)

Housing Supply

24. The stock of affordable housing has declined considerably as a result of right to buy and the cessation of local authority house-building. As a result the number of lettings to homeless families has fallen by a third. A major building programme of low-cost permanent housing to rent is required for homeless people. The serious shortage of permanent housing for homeless people is causing long stays in temporary accommodation. It is unacceptable that homeless people should spend very long periods, sometimes several years, in hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation waiting for a settled home. We believe that the experience of living in temporary accommodation is likely to be damaging to families and vulnerable single people and is likely to lead to significant additional costs in other social programmes. Providing permanent secure homes is a classic case of investing to save. (Paragraph 121)
25. The Government has increased public investment in subsidised permanent housing but this is still not adequate to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of homeless people. The proportion of funds allocated for key worker housing is excessive. We accept that key workers may require a housing subsidy in some high cost areas, but we recommend that the Government reviews the effectiveness of its key worker housing scheme to ensure that it is achieving its objectives. There are major problems with defining a key worker and a danger that subsidising home purchases could add to spiralling house prices by increasing purchasing power without increasing housing supply. Funding for key worker housing should only be used for new-build shared ownership housing and the purchaser should not be able to buy 100% of the home unless covenants guarantee the price of the home remains discounted. Local authorities should identify the groups of key workers eligible for a housing subsidy in consultation with local employers and housing associations.

Reflecting the deepening homelessness problem, we recommend that not more than 15% of the Housing Corporation's funds should be spent on key worker housing. (Paragraph 122)

26. The Government is concentrating new house-building in the Growth Areas. However these areas are not necessarily where housing needs are greatest. The Government's housing investment programme should seek to meet the needs of more homeless people where they are currently located so that their support networks can be sustained. (Paragraph 123)
27. There is a homelessness problem in areas suffering from low housing demand in some parts of the North and the Midlands. We recommend that the Government encourage and facilitate innovations on the part of local authorities in reusing some of the empty private housing for homeless people. The Government needs to ensure that local authority empty homes strategies effectively consider the potential of leasing private housing. Where homes are being demolished as part of the Government's Low Demand Pathfinder initiative, the effect on house prices and availability of affordable homes must be carefully monitored and a programme of provision of low-cost housing to rent must be included. (Paragraph 124)

Temporary Accommodation

28. We welcome unreservedly the reduction in rough sleepers. The achievements to date have not been overstated and we congratulate the Government on meeting its targets ahead of time. It is however an area where constant vigilance and rapid responses are required. Indeed, it may be that those with most severe problems are those who are still on the streets. We recommend that the Government make further efforts to identify those long-term rough sleepers who have so far not sought assistance. We also recommend that the ODPM make an assessment of the work of the Rough Sleepers Unit, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and ensure that it is ready to react rapidly should the number of rough sleepers start to rise again. (Paragraph 132)
29. We commend local authorities like South Ribble that are providing floating support services for those single homeless people housed in B&Bs. This is good practice. We recommend that the ODPM should amend the restriction on the use of B&B except in emergencies to include 16 and 17 year olds. (Paragraph 138)
30. In order to maintain the reduction in the number of rough sleepers, ODPM needs to ensure that there is suitable first and second stage accommodation for them to move on to. (Paragraph 145)
31. It is not acceptable for some areas to bear the financial burden of others because hostels are not being strategically built. We recommend that the Government use the demand identified by local authority homelessness strategies to draw up a national map of hostel need. (Paragraph 147)
32. It is imperative that homeless people are not 'redefined' as being no longer homeless as soon as they come off the streets. (Paragraph 148)

33. We once more recommend that the Government introduce a registration and inspection system for all HMOs. In the meantime, we hope local authorities will make full use of their discretionary licensing powers. (Paragraph 149)
34. Local authority strategic plans should encompass specialist temporary accommodation. Those responsible for deciding what facilities are provided for homeless people should be long-sighted and think beyond merely putting a roof over heads. (Paragraph 151)
35. We recommend that, as part of its strategy for temporary accommodation, the Government should undertake a full cost benefit comparison of the provision of temporary and permanent housing, taking account not just of direct costs but also the wider implications for public expenditure (eg housing benefit and support services) and the wider costs for social provision as a whole. (Paragraph 154)
36. The Government should produce a clear strategy for the future management of temporary accommodation. The strategy should set out how the Government intends to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation in all its forms, and their length of stay. We believe it should be a priority of the Government to ensure that the right amount of accommodation is available where it is needed for those, mainly single vulnerable people, waiting in B&Bs and hostels, and that the quality of provision is improved and adequate support services are provided. In particular, use of B&B accommodation should be phased out, starting with 16 and 17 year olds. (Paragraph 156)

Supporting Homeless People

37. We recommend that the Government require NHS Trusts to draw up strategies for dealing with the health needs of homeless people. (Paragraph 163)
38. As part of local authority homelessness strategies, we would welcome consideration of ways to increase the participation of homeless people in mainstream services, as part of their support packages. Staff education on the needs of homeless people, for example in the NHS, would also be a positive step. (Paragraph 164)
39. We see clear advantages for all concerned in the development of a system to facilitate quicker access to support packages. We recommend that ODPM commission research into the development of a network to enable prior assessments and treatment records of homeless people to be accessed across the country. (Paragraph 168)
40. We hope that the ODPM will act immediately on the findings of the Housing Quality Network Services review of local authority homelessness strategies. (Paragraph 171)
41. We recommend that the Government issue strong guidance to social services on the role they are expected to play in local authority homelessness strategies. We expect this to be carried out jointly by the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and ODPM. (Paragraph 175)

42. We recommend that the Government should require the second round of local authority homelessness strategies to be prepared after two or three years rather than five. ODPM should provide stronger advice and clear guidance on the specific issues which strategies must cover, for example in relation to each specific vulnerable group. Round 2 strategies should also include an evaluation of the differences made since the first strategy was agreed. (Paragraph 176)
43. The Supporting People programme is too large an issue to address in any depth in this Report and so we intend to return to the subject in a separate inquiry. We hope to see criticisms decrease as the findings of the Rhodes review take effect. (Paragraph 182)

Moving on

44. ODPM should commission a census of the hidden homeless in a selection of areas, to assess the scale of the problem. (Paragraph 186)
45. A public information campaign informing people of their rights under the Homelessness Act and encouraging people to contact their local authorities could potentially bring a proportion of the hidden homeless into the system. Although this may well increase the existing pressure on temporary and permanent accommodation, it would enable local authorities to make more useful assessments of the scale of the problem and the housing needs of those living in the area. (Paragraph 186)
46. With the increasing use of choice based letting schemes, the Government must provide guidance to local agencies to ensure that homeless people benefit from them and are not disadvantaged. (Paragraph 188)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 18 January 2005

Members present:

Andrew Bennett, in the Chair

Sir Paul Beresford

Chris Mole

Mr Clive Betts

Mr Bill O'Brien

Mr John Cummings

Christine Russell

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (*Homelessness*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 199 agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 3

Noes, 1

Mr Clive Betts

Sir Paul Beresford

Mr John Cummings

Chris Mole

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (select committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Monday 24th January at 4 o'clock

Witnesses

Tuesday 26 October 2004 [HC 1116-i, Session 2003-04]

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Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Director, and **Mr Nicholas Pleace**, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York Ev 1

Mr Adam Sampson, Director, and **Mr Patrick South**, Deputy Director, Campaigns and Communications, Shelter Ev 9

Tuesday 30 November 2004 [HC 61-i, Session 2004-05]

Councillor Angela Harvey, Cabinet Member, and **Mr Steve Moore**, Chief Housing Officer, Westminster City Council Ev 16

Mr Tony Newman, Chairman, ALG Housing Committee and **Ms Genevieve Macklin**, Director of Housing Policy, Association of London Government (ALG) Ev 16

Ms Janice Samuels, Homelessness Services Manager, Salford City Council Ev 24

Ms Janice Bennett, Housing Services Manager, South Ribble Borough Council Ev 24

Ms Julie Watson, Service Manager, and **Ms Fiona Goodfellow**, Trustee, South Ribble Key Ev 24

Ms Diane Henderson, Head of Care Support and Diversity, **Ms Helen Williams**, Head of Neighbourhoods and Sustainability, and **Mr John Rosser**, Operations Director, Southern Housing Group Ltd, National Housing Federation Authority Ev 31

Mr Josh Sutton, Housing and Advice Manager, Craven Housing, **Mr Les Williamson**, Head of Housing, Harrogate Borough Council, and **Mr Richard Adamson**, Yorkshire Coast Home, Yorkshire and Humberside Forum Ev 31

Tuesday 7 December 2004 [HC 61-ii, Session 2004-05]

Ms Jenny Edwards , Chief Executive, and Mr Howard Sinclair , Board Member, Homeless Link	Ev 39
Mr Jeremy Drew , Foyer Federation	Ev 39
Mr Tarig Hilal , Head of Policy, Crisis	Ev 39
Major Ian Harris , Director of Social Work, The Salvation Army	Ev 47
Mr Nigel Parrington , Chief Executive, Salvation Army Housing Association	Ev 47
Mr Paul Cadavino , Chief Executive, Nacro (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)	Ev 47
Mr Nick O'Shea , Director of Development, Revolving Doors Agency	Ev 47

Tuesday 14 December 2004 [HC 61-iii, Session 2004-05]

Mr Paul Goggins MP , Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Correctional Services and Reducing Re-offending, Home Office	Ev 56
Mr Ivor Caplin MP , Minister for Veterans, Ministry of Defence	Ev 56
Dr Stephen Ladyman MP , Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Department of Health	Ev 62
Mr Chris Pond MP , Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work, Department for Work and Pensions	Ev 62
Rt Hon Lord Rooker , a Member of the House of Lords, Minister of State for Regeneration and Regional Development, and Ms Terrie Alafat , Director of Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, Office Deputy Prime Minister	Ev 67

List of written supplementary evidence

Memoranda HOM 01 to HOM 57 were published as HC 1116-II, Session 2003-04 on 20 October 2004

Countryside Agency (HOM 58)	Ev 79
Friary Drop-in Ltd (HOM 59)	Ev 81
Association of London Government (ALG) (HOM 60)	Ev 82
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (HOM 61)	Ev 96
Local Government Association (LGA) (HOM 62)	Ev 99
Nottingham City Interagency Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group (SIG) (HOM 63)	Ev 101
District of Easington (Housing Strategy) (HOM 64)	Ev 102
Centre for Housing Policy (CHP), University of York (HOM 65)	Ev 108
Focus Housing (HOM 66)	Ev 111
Chartered Institute of Housing (CiH) (HOM 67)	Ev 114
Supplementary Memorandum by the Foyer Federation (HOM 21(a))	Ev 118
Supplementary Memorandum by Westminster City Council (HOM 38(a))	Ev 119
Supplementary Memorandum by Shelter (HOM 55(a))	Ev 120
Nacro (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) (HOM 68)	Ev 121
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (HOM 53(a))	Ev 124

List of unprinted written evidence

Additional papers have been received from the following and have not been reported to the House but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons library where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1. (Tel. 020 7219 3074) hours of inspection are from 9:30am to 5:00pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Background Papers:

- B/P 01 – Community Foundation: ‘Youth Homelessness Strategy’ and YHI Info sheet
- B/P 02 – ‘Social Concern and social enterprise – the origins and history of Focus Housing’ by Kevin Gulliver, 2000.
- B/P 03 – ‘The Real Deal – Annual Report 2004’, Prime Focus Group
- B/P 04 – ‘Focusing on your future’ – Focus Futures.
- B/P 05 – CD Rom: ‘The Regeneration of Willenhall, Coventry’
- B/P 06 – Birmingham City Council Housing Department ‘Homelessness Review And Strategy’ July 2003
- B/P 07 – St Basils Project – Information and Annual Review 2004
- B/P 08 – Snow Hill information
- B/P 09 – Shelter - Homelessness to Home Birmingham. Birmingham Visit – additional facts and information.
- B/P 10 – ‘Local Authorities’ Homelessness Strategies – Evaluation and Good Practice’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, November 2004
- B/P 11 – ‘Effective Co-operation in Tackling Homelessness: Nomination Agreements and Exclusions’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, November 2004
- B/P 12 – ‘Homelessness Strategies: Moving Forward’, Policy Briefing 9, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, November 2004
- B/P 13 – ‘Local Authorities’ Homelessness Strategies – Evaluation and Good Practice’, Homelessness Research Summary No.1, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, November 2004
- B/P 14 – ‘Veterans – Rights for former servicemen and women and their families’, CLS Direct Information leaflet 25, Community Legal Service, Aug 2004
- B/P 15 – ‘Resources for homeless ex-service personnel in London’, MoD Ex-service Action Group on Homelessness (ESAG), Jan 2004
- B/P 16 – ‘The Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness – 5 Years of Action’, MoD ESAG, Jan 2004
- B/P 17 – ‘50:50 The BIG Stat: St Mungo’s Big Survey into the problems and lives of Homeless People’, St Mungo’s, Nov 2004
- B/P 18 – St Mungo’s Newsletter, Christmas 2004
- B/P 19 – ‘Getting a life – St Mungo’s Annual Review 2004’, St Mungo’s 2004

Reports from the ODPM Committee since 2003

The following reports have been produced by the Committee since 2003. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2004-05

First Report	The Draft Regional Assemblies Bill	HC 62-I
Second Report	Annual Report to the Liaison Committee	HC 149

Session 2003-04

First Report	ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2003	HC 102-I (<i>CM 6141</i>)
Second Report	Annual Report to the Liaison Committee	HC 221
Third Report	The Fire Service	HC 43-I (<i>CM 6154</i>)
Fourth Report	Coalfield Communities	HC 44-I (<i>CM 6265</i>)
Fifth Report	Decent Homes	HC 46-I (<i>CM 6266</i>)
Sixth Report	Social Cohesion	HC 45-I (<i>CM 6284</i>)
Seventh Report	Postal Voting	HC 400-I (<i>HC 973</i>)
Eight Report	The Role and Effectiveness of the Housing Corporation	HC 401-I (<i>CM 6351</i>)
Ninth Report	Local Government Revenue	HC 402-I (<i>CM 6328</i>)
Tenth Report	Supporting Vulnerable and Older People: The Supporting People Programme	HC 504-I (<i>CM 6348</i>)
Eleventh Report	The Role of Historic Buildings in Urban Regeneration	HC 47-I (<i>CM 6420</i>)
Twelfth Report	Draft Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres	HC 952
Thirteenth Report	Gypsy and Traveller Sites	HC 633-I