

# Dudley MBC

## Draft Homelessness Strategy 2006-11

### Executive summary

The Review and Strategy provide part of our commitment to meeting the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.

In the five years up to 2003/4, homelessness within the Dudley Borough increased significantly. Since then, presentations have stabilised and acceptances have reduced.

The largest group of households accepted as homeless are households with children.

The main reason for loss of last settled home in Dudley is relationship breakdown.

### Our vision:

To improve homelessness advice and prevention services and to increase the number of homelessness preventions.

The Review clearly indicates that our key priorities in tackling homelessness are:

- continuing to develop homelessness and advice services to prevent homelessness,
- providing more 'move on' accommodation for hostels and supported housing
- providing specific services to Black and Minority Ethnic communities,
- encouraging the provision of more furnished accommodation,
- improving the range of housing options available in the borough
- improving the overall supply of affordable housing in the borough

We are already working towards achieving these priorities. What we have done, or are planning to do is outlined in our Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

There is a statutory requirement to review and update our strategy by 2008. We have chosen to undertake this two years early because many of the projects in our first action plan have been completed, and new projects have emerged.

### Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 imposes a duty on local housing authorities to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of its homelessness review.

The Act specifies that a strategy should be formulated to:

- prevent homelessness in the district
- secure sufficient accommodation for people who are or may become homeless
- secure the provision of support for people who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

The borough's Homelessness Review informs and influences our strategy and provides a valuable insight into the homelessness issues within the Borough.

## **Key Issues from the Homelessness Review**

### **Profile of homelessness in Dudley**

- There was a significant increase in homelessness in Dudley between 1998 and 2003, within which
  - The biggest group in priority need were households with dependent children although the actual numbers and the proportion of the group as a proportion of the homeless total were falling.
  - Single & two person homeless households with priority needs were increasing rapidly.
  - The numbers of young people being accepted as homeless were increasing.
- Between 2004 and 2006
  - The number of acceptances increased and then reduced
  - Families now represent a higher proportion of the total
  - Preventions represent the difference between the numbers of acceptances in 2005/6 compared to 2004/5
- The main reasons for loss of last settled home up to 2003 were :
  - Mortgage arrears possession
  - Termination of assured shorthold tenancies
  - Relationship breakdown (including violent relationship breakdown)
- Between 2004 and 2006
  - Family and friends exclusions became an issue
  - The other main causes have remained the same and acceptances against each have reduced to some extent
- A Homelessness Survey undertaken by local agencies in 2002 revealed higher levels of homelessness across Dudley than the official statistics. A similar exercise took place in 2006, when the figures were considerably lower, but the survey nevertheless provided extremely useful information

### **Profile of Housing Advice and Homelessness prevention services in the borough**

- A range of housing advice & homelessness prevention services across the Borough
- A newly centralised statutory service with videolink and surgery services to the other four townships
- A homelessness & housing advice service which is improving but would benefit from further investment and development
- Some delays in arranging interviews still occurring at peak times, and therefore reduced opportunities for preventions
- Improved partnership working at an operational level, including a number of new projects and services since 2003
- Voluntary sector agencies including Citizens Advice Bureau, and 2 service providers providing advice to 16-25 year olds.
- A range of tenancy sustainment schemes have been developed for 'at risk' households, but are generally over subscribed

## **Profile of accommodation and support in the borough**

- A range of hostel and supported accommodation is provided for homeless families, victims of domestic violence and men over 17 years old, including some move on accommodation.
- The majority of hostel spaces are still for men. Women can access very few hostel spaces.
- The majority of hostels are running at or near full occupancy. A greater range and number of move-on opportunities are still required.
- Good partnering arrangements for youth offenders, care leavers and young people excluded by their families.
- The Council makes limited use of bed and breakfast accommodation and has made major changes to its own temporary accommodation since 2003.

## **Future needs & priorities**

- There is a mismatch of housing demand and supply for most household types. The mismatch is most acute for young people aged under 29 and for new forming and growing families.
- A need to continue addressing main causes of homelessness, particularly the ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies, relationship breakdown and mortgage debt.
- The opportunities to access social housing are continuing to reduce for households with dependent children due to the Right to Buy and to falling void levels.
- Significant numbers of young single homeless. A need to improve move on, achieve a balance between housing availability and demand, and continue to improve joint working with social services and other agencies.
- There were 3339 incidents of domestic abuse reported to the police in 2005/6, compared to 3000 in 2001/2. A need to enhance the range of both mainstream and Black & Minority Ethnic domestic violence facilities, and to update existing facilities.
- An over – representation of Black and Minority Ethnic communities within the borough's homelessness figures. A need for more community based advice work.
- Individuals in prison who gave Dudley as their 'district of origin' at April 2002. A quarter were aged between 16-21 years old. Two schemes exist for young offenders, and provision for adult offenders remains a priority.
- Our customers have identified a need for more information on housing options, including furnished tenancies, and for more choice of area and property type to be offered.

## **Resources**

- The annual funding for the homelessness service was increased by £ 50,000 in 2004/5 to £ 203,200. This is funded from the Council's General Fund. The costs include the Housing Advice Officers, the out of hours service, other staff involved in service delivery or supervision and bed and breakfast accommodation. The increase enabled the number of Housing Advice Officers to be increased from four to six.
- The ODPM/DCLG Homelessness Directorate has also increased our funding from £ 28,000 to £ 53,000 per annum to support various projects and the employment of a Project Office to deliver them.
- The Supporting People Grant for funding the Tenancy Sustainment project is now £ 136,000 per annum, and two additional posts are funded by the Pooled Treatment Budget and Drugs Intervention Programme (£66,000)
- Dudley MBC / Dudley District CAB Debt Prevention project has been funded by the Legal Services Commission but is ending in December 2006.
- A new LSC funded project for outreach money advice has just been commenced by CAB, working in conjunction with Housing Advice, SureStart, Castle and Crystal Credit Union and Neighbourhood Management.

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- In November 2005, our Crash Pad project in partnership with the Youth Offending Service, Mediation Service and Heantun Housing Association won an ODPM Homelessness Innovations Fund grant of £ 60,400.

### **Government Guidance**

The Strategy has also been informed by central Government guidance issued by the Homelessness Directorate as to the key issues to be tackled in relation to homelessness. These key issues are:

- To keep rough sleeping as close to zero as possible
- To end the use of Bed and Breakfast hotels for homeless families with children except in short term emergencies (less than six weeks)
- To achieve a better balance between housing availability and demand
- To strengthen the help available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- To develop a more strategic approach and new responses to tackle homelessness
- To reduce the overall numbers in all forms of temporary accommodation
- To focus on preventing homelessness rather than just responding to it when it occurs.
- To reduce the levels of repeat homelessness.

The Review identified a high degree of similarity between the key issues identified for Dudley and those identified by the Government.

### **Working in partnership**

The directorate recognises that tackling homelessness can only be achieved through working in partnership with a wide range of organisations including other council directorates, the health service, probation, the voluntary sector etc.

Examples of partnership working include:

Involving the local Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations and other voluntary sector agencies in the Homelessness Review. It is felt that the group has strengthened links with other agencies and established better base information within the Borough. Strategic multi-agency partnerships to deliver services are emerging, and operational partnerships have improved significantly since 2003.

Securing £71,000 of funding for a debt prevention project to help prevent repeat homelessness through a partnership between Dudley Citizens Advice Bureau and the Council.

Securing £60,400 of funding for a 'Crash Pad' scheme within the Borough through a partnership between Housing Advice, the Youth Offending Service, the Mediation Service and Heantun Housing Association.

Examples of partnership working in helping to meet housing need include:

- The Housing Services /Childrens Services/Heantun HA scheme for Care Leavers
- The Housing Services/Youth Offending Service/Heantun HA scheme for young offenders.

New partnership projects to prevent homelessness include :

- Debt Outreach with a range of partners led by CAB
- A Pre-Tenancy Savings Scheme for young people
- A planned education project with Lifelong Learning, Schools and Community Safety

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- Increased use of family mediation
- Improved working with landlords and Housing Benefits

### Consultation

There has been widespread consultation in the production of the directorate's homelessness strategy involving a wide range of local partners, including customers, staff, other Directorates and agencies represented on the Review Group, and Registered Social Landlords.

The draft strategy and key issues formed part of a keynote speech and workshop at our Housing Strategy Conference held in June 2003. A range of organisations, agencies, councillors and community representatives attended the conference and workshop. The approach was successful and was repeated with the updated draft in July 2006.

The workshop delegates were provided with a presentation on Dudley homelessness issues paper and the draft homelessness strategy. Delegates were asked to discuss and answer the following questions:

1. Are the strategic priorities correct?
2. Have we missed any issues that you think should be included in the strategy?
3. Of the 'actions planned' which should we tackle first?
4. Can your organisation help with any of the issues?
5. Are there any other local issues that you think we should be looking at?

The workshop delegates broadly agreed with the strategic priorities outlined within the draft strategy and highlighted a number of related issues that they felt should be incorporated. Their comments and feedback have been incorporated into the strategy.

### Our vision:

To improve homelessness advice and prevention services and to increase the number of homelessness preventions.

We aim to achieve this through five strategic objectives:

**Objective 1: To further develop our strategic approach and new responses to tackle homelessness**

**Objective 2: To strengthen the help available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including the availability and quality of housing advice.**

**Objective 3: To maintain low levels of repeat homelessness**  
**/ Key Outcome**

**Objective 4: To continue to reduce levels of homelessness**  
**/ Key Outcome** **against the main causes of homelessness identified in Dudley as:**

- mortgage arrears possession
- termination of assured shorthold tenancies
- relationship breakdown (including violent relationship breakdown)
- parents / relatives unwilling to accommodate

**Objective 5: To achieve a better balance between housing availability and demand**

**HOW WE ARE GOING TO MEET THESE OBJECTIVES:**

Under each objective the actions will be identified as 'service improvements' to identify where existing services exist but require enhancements and 'strategic improvements' where new services and provision need to be developed to meet identified needs

**Objective 1: To further develop our strategic approach and new responses to tackling homelessness**

The review identified a need to develop a more strategic approach and for new responses to tackle homelessness and the strategy outlines new responses to tackle homelessness.

We acknowledge that resources are limited and that there is limited scope for large increases in funding for these services. We recognise the need to work innovatively and in partnership to improve services.

The review identified that some of the strategic improvements included a need to further improve the quality of data collected and the use we make of it, a need to further improve move on arrangements and a need to provide housing advice more widely and on a better range of options.

Further strategic gaps which we seek to address throughout this strategy are: holistic advice services for home-owners at risk of mortgage re-possession, the need for specialist advice for Black and Minority Ethnic communities, a lack of supported accommodation for women, and an increasingly pressing need to update refuge accommodation.

**Strategic Improvements:**

The membership of the Homelessness Review Group has been reviewed and extended. It includes representatives from the remodelled Directorates (Children's & Adults) and Probation. Further efforts will be made to include relevant Health Service colleagues.

We have begun to develop specialist housing accommodation and support for people who need extra support because for example substance misuse, offending or chaotic lifestyles. We aim to help reduce both homelessness and reoffending, and to contribute to the reduction of anti-social behaviour and the promotion of sustainable communities.

We will seek to develop second stage group or cluster accommodation for people with alcohol issues who do not want to live in a hostel but are not ready for independent living.

We will further develop access to housing and support for people with drugs issues, including move on arrangements

We will examine our policies on rent arrears and rehousing (including former tenancy arrears) and link these to engagement with money management and debt services

We will review our service in the light of the Respect agenda in order to develop appropriate access to housing and support as part of an holistic approach to reducing anti social behaviour in communities

We will improve partnership arrangements with local health service providers to promote holistic service delivery, particularly around mental health needs, and discharge from hospital.

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We will establish a project team to provide an accommodation based or dispersed foyers scheme within the borough to provide housing, training and employment opportunities for young people.

We will aim to improve the number and quality of furnished lettings within the Borough.

We will continue to improve the recording and monitoring and reporting of homelessness data and the use to which it is put, for example :

- further enhancing the Annual Report produced each year since 2003.
- providing background reports for service development, member briefings and public information.
- Introducing formal elected member scrutiny of the service

### **Objective 2 : To strengthen the help available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including the availability and quality of housing advice**

The 2003 review found that the Council's Homelessness & Advice Service was under pressure due to an increasing number of requests for help and advice and increasingly complex cases. The average wait for a homelessness interview was three weeks (except if presenting as homeless) and there was difficulty in providing a consistent service across two sites with two separate line management structures.

The Best Value Inspectorate had also identified some specific concerns about the borough's homelessness service in terms of its organisation and capacity for effective case management.

The review identified a range of hostel accommodation across the borough but there were problems with the amount of accommodation that could be accessed by women and the provision of move on accommodation. The Council's own family hostel had shared facilities and an "institutional" feel.

### **Strategic Improvements**

Since 2003, the following changes have been made.

Our family hostel has been converted into six self contained flats, one of which is designed for wheelchair use. Previous residents contributed to the redesign process, and this is an approach we will use again in improving other services.

We have piloted and rolled out 'virtual decentralisation' of the homelessness / housing advice service, increased the number of Housing Advice Officers from 4 to 6, and implemented new training programmes and performance management arrangements.

We have produced a directory of homelessness services in conjunction with our neighbours Walsall and Sandwell, and developed a Tenancy Guarantee Scheme.

We are currently undertaking a formal review of our Housing Advice Service and plan to develop a Housing Options Service and pathways of provision for each main cause of homelessness.

We will review working protocols and provision for refugees, for people without recourse to public funds, for young people including those who have been Looked After, and for families who are excluded from services for whatever reason.

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We will increase the supply of appropriate housing and support for homeless women, including working with the Council's DV Co-ordinator to develop new accommodation and support services, a sanctuary scheme, and to plan for the improvement of existing schemes.

We will develop a community based housing and homelessness advice service for people from BME communities

### **Service Improvements:**

The further service improvements required include the following.

We have developed a client satisfaction monitoring system for homelessness applications, and from the returns we are seeking to establish a user group to help shape future service delivery.

We will work with partners at local and regional levels to provide information and assistance to prisoners and priority offenders and provide pathways of provision to prevent homelessness and help to reduce reoffending

We will work to continue to improve our performance against Best Value Performance Indicators and develop appropriate local performance indicators

### **Objective 3/ Key outcome: To maintain low levels of repeat homelessness**

The original review identified repeat homelessness as a feature in Dudley, and reduction in the levels of repeat homelessness was a **key outcome** of the strategy.

By 2005/6, repeat homelessness has been reduced to less than 1%. Our revised key outcome is to maintain this success through defining risk factors and developing strategies and services to address them.

### **Strategic Improvements**

We will aim to mainstream the successful 'Dudley District Citizens Advice Bureau / Dudley MBC 'Homelessness and Debt Prevention Project', in order to target help to those who need it and develop the skills of our Housing Managers.

### **Service Improvements**

We have identified that domestic abuse is our main cause of repeat homelessness, and will give priority to developing new services for this client group.

We will improve the advice and support provided to those in temporary accommodation and/or identified as being at risk of repeat homelessness, giving priority for Tenancy Sustainment Services to households at risk of repeat homelessness, and monitor the effectiveness of this approach.

### **Objective 4 / Key Outcome: To continue to reduce levels of homelessness both against the main causes of homelessness identified in Dudley and overall**

- mortgage arrears possession,
- relationship breakdown (including violent relationship breakdown)
- termination of assured shorthold tenancies
- parents, relatives and friends not being able or willing to provide accommodation



**Strategic Improvements:**

In the lifetime of this five year strategy, we will continue to examine each of the identified causes of homelessness, using our database of presentations and acceptances, and use the results to develop new strategic and service improvements.

We will improve the effectiveness of existing advice services in preventing homelessness where owner occupied homes are at risk through relationship breakdown and/or financial problems.

We will research the need for, and availability within the borough of schemes which enable owner occupiers to release equity in their homes and/or remain in their homes as tenants.

We will work with landlords and their agents to improve private renting as a secure long-term housing option and one that is more affordable for more people.

We will improve information and education services on housing and homelessness so that young people are encouraged to plan for their future housing needs.

**Service Improvements:**

We will extend our Crash Pad Scheme to provide more capacity for young people excluded by their families.

We will offer mediation in all appropriate cases and aim to improve take-up.

**Objective 5 : To achieve a better balance between housing availability and demand and continue to reduce the numbers in all forms of temporary accommodation**

Our Housing Needs Survey in 2005/6 has revealed

- affordability is a major issue for new forming households
- 43% of concealed households cannot afford to buy and 31% cannot afford private rental
- There is a shortfall of 561 social rented homes becoming available each year for those who need them

**Strategic Improvements:**

We will take action to improve the supply of affordable housing, by ensuring that the target for affordable housing as a proportion of all new development is met, that start up and ongoing costs are within customers' reach, and that there is an appropriate property mix.

We will fundamentally review our lettings and nominations policy whilst introducing Choice Based Lettings to make the best use of vacancies, give fair treatment to all who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and avoid perverse incentives to claim homelessness.

We will review at least annually supply and demand for different households (e.g. young single people) and take action to address any imbalances.

We will review the performance of our borough in the light of the Housing Corporation Paper Tackling Homelessness and incorporate our findings into our Action Plan.

We will build upon the work of this strategy and discuss key themes with neighbouring local

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authorities to assess where cross authority/regional working is possible to achieve common objectives.

### Service Improvements:

We will keep under review our use of temporary accommodation and our progress in achieving reductions of 50% or more by 2010.

### REVIEWING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS STRATEGY

The Homelessness Strategy Review Group will monitor progress against stated objectives. Periodic reports will also be submitted to the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services Management Team, Corporate Board and Cabinet. Progress will be monitored against the action plan on a quarterly basis and its contents will be reviewed annually to drive forward service provision and service improvements.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This strategy and the partnership working indicated in this strategy has developed as a result of the support and co-operation of the Homelessness Review Group and wider partners. Their contributions have been invaluable in driving improvements to the homelessness services within the Borough. The membership of the Review group consists of:

Ron Sims	Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector	Dudley MBC Housing Services
Sian Evans	Area Manager, Brierley Hill	Dudley MBC Housing Services
Peter Hancox	Senior Tenancy Sustainment Officer	Dudley MBC Housing Services
Francis Healy	Homelessness/Housing Advice Manager	Dudley MBC Housing Services
Cheryl Gazey-Bale	Homelessness Project Officer	Dudley MBC Housing Services
Junior Duffus	Bail Supervision and Support Officer	Dudley MBC Youth Offending Service
Cecilia Hanson	Team Manager	Dudley MBC 16 Plus Team, Childrens Services
Mike Marshall	Head of Commissioning	Dudley MBC Adult Services
Wayne Hobday	Accommodation Officer	Dudley MBC Youth Offending Service
Anne Beard	Domestic Violence Co-ordinator	Dudley MBC Community Safety
Dawn Colbourne	Neighbourhood Manager	Dudley MBC Neighbourhood Management
Elaine Hopwood	Commissioning Manager	Dudley MBC Community Safety
Caroline Dimbylow	Chief Executive	Dudley CAB
Jane Clarke	Chief Executive	CHADD
Julian Garside	Area Manager	Shelter, Birmingham
David Hughes	Prison Link	The Cage, Dudley
Debbie Jennings	Scheme Manager	Focus Housing Association Gibbs Road
Michael Anderson	Senior Resettlement Worker	Focus Housing Association Gibbs Road
Neale Pilkington		The Warehouse Project
Christine Ballinger	Area Manager Assessment & Leaving Care	Dudley MBC Adult Services

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Mark Barnett		Black Country Connexions
Carole Neale		Aquarius (Gibbs Road Project)
Jill McLuckie		WHAT Centre
Tony Glew	Area Manager	Aquarius
Claire Hill	Support Manager	Heantun Housing Association
Suki Kaur		Bromford Housing Association
Margaret Oakley	PA to Asst. Director Housing Strategy and Private Sector	Dudley MBC Housing Services

# Dudley MBC Homelessness Review

## Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 imposed a duty on local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review.

The Act specifies that the review should cover:

- the levels, and potential future levels, of homelessness in the borough,
- the services that are available to prevent homelessness,
- the accommodation and support that is available for people who are or may become homeless or who need support to prevent them becoming homeless again,
- the resources available to the authority, and other organisations in the borough.

The Act and Statutory Instruments also set out additional duties including:

- a duty to provide accommodation until a settled home is found for homeless households that are in priority need
- a power to secure housing for households that are not in priority need
- a strengthened entitlement for single homeless people to receive advice and assistance from a local authority
- a duty to secure housing for 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers aged 18 to 20, and those who are vulnerable due to facing racist or domestic violence, leaving institutionalised care, prison or the armed forces
- the requirement for allocation policies to give reasonable preference to all homeless people irrespective of priority need or intentionality.

## Aims & objectives

The aims and objectives of the review are to:

- analyse the levels and types of homelessness within the borough,
- review the advice available for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness,
- review the type of accommodation available within the borough,
- identify future needs and priorities to inform our homelessness strategy.

## Methodology

The review has been completed using the following methods:

- Desk research
- Interviews with staff members
- Visits to area offices to observe working practices
- Survey of homeless people
- Visits to temporary accommodation
- Input from the Homelessness Review group
- Comments from the Homelessness Conference workshop.

## **Links to other strategies**

The Homelessness Strategy needs to complement other work locally and to help to deliver the agenda set by central Government in terms of “Sustainable communities: settled homes; changing lives”.

In updating the review, we have ensured that there are clear links to and from the HRA Business Plan and Housing Service and Improvement Plan. The Council Plan themes are environment matters, safety matters, learning matters, quality service matters and caring matters. Preventing homelessness contributes in some way to all of these, and we have recently added two new homelessness BVPIs to the corporate suite of key Council health performance indicators. The Housing Strategy provides for new housing supply including specialist provision (e.g. foyer), the Business Plan will enable us to secure continued access to Council-owned Decent Homes for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the Service and Improvement Plan contains a host of projects to extend housing advice and homelessness services.

Links to the Supporting People Strategy are of particular importance, and examination of this alongside the Homelessness Strategy will demonstrate that we have a shared understanding of key strategic issues, gaps in existing provision, and how we should direct resources to fill them, for example in the provision of new specialist housing options and floating support. The main elements of the 5 year vision are flexibility (services to follow clients, preference for floating support); prevention (time limited accommodation based or floating support, low to moderate needs not eligible for care services); more move on accommodation (more resources); and the pursuit of other funding and joint funding opportunities. The priority outcomes are maintaining independence, reducing homelessness, re-offending and the use of institutional care, and contribution to the strategic targets of other stakeholders. The strategic relevance matrix for prioritizing SPG places the reduction of homelessness as a high relevance factor.

Equally important are the links to Health and Social Care and Community Safety Strategies, for example through the Drugs Intervention Programme and the multi agency holistic approach to Rehabilitation and Resettlement of offenders. There is a particular focus on targeting support to homeless or potentially homeless young offenders/potential offenders, which can be traced through all of our strategic plans. The updated action plan will incorporate a review of our services against the new Respect agenda, and will ensure that we develop housing and homelessness services within our resources to support individuals and families and protect communities.

In terms of responding to the national agenda, our first Homelessness Strategy contained measures to improve standards in temporary accommodation and reduce homelessness against main causes. The updated Strategy and Action Plan will focus on reducing numbers in temporary accommodation by 50% before 2010 and increasing preventive services. Locally, we are committed to both the West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy (including cross sectoral and cross boundary initiatives) and Regional Supporting People Strategy (including provision for domestic violence, challenging behaviour, and refugees and travellers).

## **Consultation**

The Review has involved a range of partners including social services, Citizens Advice Bureau, housing associations, the youth offending team, other voluntary sector agencies and staff.

The delivery of the first Homelessness Strategy and its review have been overseen and guided by the Homelessness Review Group. A full list of members and a copy of the group’s guiding principles can be found in appendices 3 & 4. Information on services and homelessness has also been shared with members of the group on a regular basis for feedback and comments.

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Input into the original review was also obtained at the borough's Housing Strategy Conference in June 2003 in particular through a homelessness workshop attended by seventeen conference delegates representing local housing associations, voluntary sector organisations, the youth offending team and community representatives, and the same approach has been adopted in order to update it.

The directorate acknowledge the effort and input of all the agencies and individuals who have been involved in the development of this review and subsequent strategy.

### Profile of Dudley

This information has been taken from the 2001 Census except where otherwise acknowledged.

Dudley is a large metropolitan borough with a population of 305,155 people situated in the Black Country. Its neighbouring authorities are Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall.

The ethnicity of the borough comprises of nearly 94% of the population considering themselves to be British / Irish or other white and about 6% defining themselves as from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background. The largest BME communities are the Pakistani community (2.04%), the Indian community (1.55%) and the Caribbean community (0.77%)

There are 124,988 households within the borough – an increase of 6648 households since 1991. 89,196 or 71% of households own their home outright or with a mortgage / loan, 24,221 or 19% of households rent from the local authority and 11,571 or 9% of households are in other rented accommodation. This figure has increased from 6,876 since 1991.



A more detailed analysis of other rented accommodation reveals that the numbers of households renting from private landlords has increased significantly by 1318 households to 4384 households in 2001. The numbers renting from housing associations has increased from 2529 households in 1991 to 3037 households in 2001.

A total of 37,559 households (30%) have dependent children, of which 6,874 households are lone parent households with dependent children. This figure has risen from 3174 households in 1991. A total of 30,888 households (24.7%) comprise of pensioners – 18,153 of these households are single pension households. A further 15,653 households (12.5%) are single persons.

The average price for a property in Dudley in the period January – March 2003 according to Land Registry data was £100,409.<sup>1</sup> This had increased by 44% to £144,953 by the corresponding period January – March 2006. The largest increases have been in terraced and semi-detached (midpriced and lower priced family housing), and over the same period the council's waiting list for family housing has increased by 24% from 2158 to 2668.

The borough's unemployment rate at February 2006 was 4.7% (compared with 4.2% in March 2003). There are pockets of high unemployment in certain parts of the borough – St Thomas's

<sup>1</sup> HM Land Registry Residential Property Price Report, Breakdown of property prices by property type & region.

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ward (11.4%), Brierley Hill (7.8%), St James's (7.7%) and Netherton : Woodside & St Andrew's (7.6%)<sup>2</sup>

The average gross full time earnings are £ 436.90 per week, the highest of the four Black Country boroughs.

There is generally good demand for social housing in the borough and there are not the extreme issues of low demand or abandonment that some other Midland and Northern authorities have experienced. There is, however, a mismatch of supply and demand. Social rented housing is not spread evenly through the borough, but highly concentrated in some wards, and scarce in others. The Black Country Study has identified a pressing need to develop high quality private housing, and there is competition for available land.

### Profile of homelessness in Dudley

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Total households accepted as homeless and in priority need	179	200	288	404	489	813	602	448
Those with dependent children/pregnant	136	153	214	286	278	419	404	323
Households without children	43	47	74	118	211	394	198	125

Source: Dudley Council's Homelessness Data Returns to ODPM (LA P1E) 1998/99 – 2005/06

Between 1998 and 2003, homelessness in Dudley increased significantly. A total of 489 households were accepted as full duty homeless in 2002/03 compared to 179 households in 1998/99 –an increase of 173%.

Between 2003 and 2006, presentations have stabilised at around 2000 per annum and acceptances have reduced due in part to more robust investigations, but mainly to increasing numbers of preventions. In 2005/6, there were 448 acceptances, but a further 138 preventions.

In 2005/6, the presence of children or an expectant mother in the household continued to be the main reason for a priority need acceptance. (72% of all acceptances, representing 323 such households). Data management has improved since 2003, so that very few cases are now recorded as "other special reason". 20 households were in priority need through violence, and 44 through physical or mental disability or illness or old age.

Reasons for the loss of the last settled home are monitored locally and nationally. The main causes nationally (though the order varies) are relationship breakdown, end of Assured Short hold Tenancy and family/relatives/friends no longer willing to accommodate.

Locally, the three main causes are the same. Mortgage arrears/repossessions are generally close behind, and it is often difficult to establish which is the main reason, when relationship breakdown and mortgage difficulties are occurring together.

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics/Mott Macdonald Ltd

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The four main causes of homelessness have remained the same in each of the last four years, with some variations in order, and generally some reductions overall as each cause has been focused upon for action. For example, more effort has been made to intervene at an earlier stage and assist people through our waiting list, whilst our Crash Pad scheme has been developed for young people whose family relationships are already in crisis. Comparative figures for each year are shown below.

Reason	2001/2	2002/3	2004/5	2005/6
Mortgage arrears/repossession	123 (30%)	132 (27%)	69 (11%)	94 (21%)
Relationship breakdown [of which violent]	112 (27%) [77 (19%)]	112 (23%) [75 (15%)]	143 (24%) [100 (17%)]	101 (23%) [77 (17%)]
Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	98 (24%)	112 (23%)	102 (17%)	82 (18%)
Parents/relatives/friends no longer willing to accommodate	21 (5%)	37 (7%)	112 (19%)	64 (14%)

## Comparisons with neighbouring authorities

Homelessness Acceptances 2003/4 and 2004/5

Local Authority	Acceptances 2003/4	Acceptances 2004/5	Acceptances per 1000 households 2004/5
Birmingham	5567	4663	11.7
Coventry	741	455	3.6
Dudley	813	602	4.8
Sandwell	710	681	5.8
Solihull	820	774	9.4
Walsall	429	450	4.5
Wolverhampton	473	464	4.7

It is difficult to make direct comparisons with neighbouring authorities regarding the levels of homelessness for a number of reasons. A lack of complete current data hinders comparisons. It is also difficult to make direct comparisons as local lettings policies and the dynamics of local housing markets all impact on local homelessness levels, however acceptances in Dudley are in line with those in near neighbours Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Since housing authorities issued their first Homelessness Strategies in 2003, the West Midlands has become the first region to produce a Regional Homelessness Strategy, and aspires to use its Regional Housing Strategy and Regeneration Programmes to “design out” homelessness in the region.

### Key findings from Dudley Council's Homelessness Statistics

- The biggest group in priority need continue to be households with dependent children
- The numbers of young people being accepted as homeless have increased, though not dramatically
- Vulnerable households due to old age / physical disability / mental illness remain static.



- The biggest reasons for loss of last settled home have been
  - mortgage arrears possession,
  - termination of assured shorthold tenancies
  - relationship breakdown (including violent relationship breakdown)
  - parents / other relatives / friends no longer willing / able to accommodate

### **Local Homelessness Survey**

At the time of the original Review, the Review Group were concerned whether the official figures provided a real picture of homelessness within Dudley. The official analysis only records applications to the local authority and doesn't record people who don't present themselves or who don't meet the statutory definition of homelessness.

It was agreed that an exercise to determine a more accurate level of homeless presentations would be completed involving all organisations in Dudley providing housing advice. Participating organisations included the directorate's area housing offices, Citizens Advice Bureau's, Churches Housing Association of Dudley & District (CHADD), and the WHAT? Centre.

It is recognised that the survey may still suffer from under-reporting and that the causes of homelessness declared by clients may differ from the substantive reasons for homelessness and its re-occurrence.

The survey included questions on a person's employment status, their current tenure including rough sleeping, reasons for their homelessness, and whether they considered themselves to be vulnerable or having any health or addiction issues.

The survey was completed during November 2002, and proved so useful that it was repeated in April/May 2006 in preparation for updating the Homelessness Strategy.

### **Key Findings (Results of previous survey shown in brackets)**

- A total of 84 (275) surveys were completed
- 10% (15%) of respondents were from a black and minority ethnic community
- 82% (77%) of the respondents were under the age of forty – approximately 58% (56%) were male and 42% (44%) female. 70% (55%) of respondents were single and around 17% (36%) were families.
- 22 respondents were aged 16-17, and one under 16
- The current tenure of respondents included lodgers 14% (28%), owner occupiers 8% (18%) and private tenants 10% (20%). 13% (12%) reported that they had slept 'rough' in the last week. On this occasion they were asked where they had slept, 3 said at a friends, 2 in empty buildings, and 1 each in a shed, a squat, on the street, and on the landing of a block of flats
- The reasons for homelessness were: relationship breakdown and domestic violence 22% (25%), parents / relatives unwilling / asked to leave 26% (20%), and drug misuse 19%. This last figure is of particular interest as it is not reflected in the "official" figures and clearly is more effectively researched through other agencies. In 2002, just 7% considered themselves to be homeless as a result of a drug or alcohol problem

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A comparison between the official and survey figures suggests that there is a higher level of mortgage arrears possessions and termination of assured shorthold tenancies amongst the official figures compared to higher levels of parents / relatives unwilling / asked to leave amongst the survey results.

The updated survey also asked respondents what sort of accommodation they would prefer : an independent tenancy, supported housing, shared housing or an independent tenancy with floating support. Whilst the majority (56%) gave as their preferred option just a home of their own, there was a significant demand for housing with floating support as a first choice (23%), and supported housing (10%). Three respondents would prefer a room in a shared house, four would have been equally happy with several or all of the options, two were not sure what they would need, and one (a private tenant) specifically said that they would prefer to remain in their existing home.

### Key Issues

- The exercise in 2006 showed results more compatible with “official” figures
- There was significant evidence of substance abuse as a factor in causing homelessness, which needs further research
- Levels of rough sleeping suggest that our count was accurate
- There is a considerable demand for supported housing and floating support services

## Profile of Housing Advice and Homelessness prevention services in the borough

A number of service providers provide housing advice within the Borough. This ranges from the authority’s statutory advice and homelessness service, local housing associations and voluntary sector organisations including the Citizens Advice Bureau, the WHAT? Centre in Stourbridge and the Top Church Training Project / Next Generation in Dudley.

Approximately 2000 households per year approach the Council because they are homeless or potentially homeless. Significant numbers approach other agencies as well as or instead of the Council.

### Dudley MBC

There are a number of key issues

- DMBC Housing Advice services have been improved, but the forthcoming service review is likely to identify opportunities and options for continuing improvement.
- The use of non-secure tenancies<sup>1</sup> will have to be effectively controlled if temporary accommodation targets are to be met.
- Limited use has been made of customer feedback, and this is an area for future development.

<sup>1</sup> Tenancies allocated to households with a poor history of rent payment and/or anti-social behaviour, under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended

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- Service provision is subject to external pressures, for example the funding to Top Church is time limited, and hostels have closed or are planned to close in Birmingham and Wolverhampton.
- Floating support services have developed very effectively, and will help to reduce repeat homelessness and social exclusion.
- Through partnership working and pooling of resources, some exciting and innovative projects are being developed.

The service at the time of the original review was provided by two Housing Advice Officers based at Dudley Area Housing Office and two at Brierley Hill. Additionally a specialist Private Sector Tenancy Officer was available at 15/17 St James's Road, and an Out of Hours Service staffed on a rota basis was available through the Housing Contact Centre Dudley Borough Direct.

No provision had at that time been made for increasing demand or for new duties. Since the production of the first Homelessness Review and Strategy, staffing levels have been increased and administrative support provided.

The team is now centralized in Dudley in order to provide adequate cover arrangements, mutual support and more consistent decision-making. Access to the service has however been extended to include weekly surgeries at all five Area Offices and a video link for roofless interviews.

There is still one Housing Advice Officer based in the Strategy and Private Sector Division, concentrating on the specialist private tenancy issues.

Service Standards have been introduced, although a comprehensive monitoring regime has still to be developed. Performance targets in respect of length of stay in hostel/bed and breakfast, and time to make and notify homelessness decisions, have generally been met. A variety of new BVPIs have been introduced, some of which will be particularly challenging for us. For example Dudley has traditionally used non-secure tenancies for homeless households with a history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. These are included in the "all forms of temporary accommodation" indicator, which we are required to reduce by half by 2010.

Staff have attended training courses through the Chartered Institute of Housing, Shelter and ODPM. Numerous additional training requirements are being identified in order to keep abreast of legislative change and best practice/innovation, and it is extremely difficult to release staff for this purpose whilst still maintaining the service.

A Project Officer is in post, working on projects contained within the first Homelessness Action Plan, and a Service Manager has recently been appointed.

Although a protocol exists for Housing/Social Services assessment of vulnerable young people, our joint housing project with both emergency and medium term accommodation did not proceed. Our "crash pad" provision may be able to meet part of that need.

In 2005/6 the number of homelessness preventions per 1000 households has been introduced as a BVPI. The Housing Service and Improvement Plan includes a review of the way in which we provide housing advice.

### **Customer Feedback**

Development of this updated survey has been informed by customer consultation, carried out through telephone surveys with customers who had stayed in our hostel, and a postal survey of other customers. Generally feedback was positive, with many respondents expressing both

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their general satisfaction and particular appreciation to individual members of staff. However, there were also a number of comments as to how the service might be improved, namely

- that there should be more information made available for customers about their housing options and the homelessness process
- that furnished accommodation should be available as an option for permanent housing
- that homeless households should be given more choice of housing, and should not be restricted, for example where there has been domestic abuse but the customer wishes to be rehoused close to the perpetrator
- that any housing offered should be suitable for any pets the household already has

### **Home Stamp**

A guide to renting private property has been co-produced by Dudley MBC in partnership with a number of neighbouring local authorities, the police and fire services. The booklet provides advice on both the landlords' and tenants' rights and responsibilities, housing benefit and dealing with harassment. It also contains a list of useful contacts.

## **Voluntary Sector**

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

The Citizens Advice Bureau have offices throughout the borough where housing advice is available.

### **WHAT? Centre - Stourbridge**

The WHAT? Centre in Stourbridge specialises in advice to young people between the ages of 16-25. In 2001 / 02 over a tenth (14%) of their 8000 clients were looking for accommodation. Housing was the third most common enquiry – 1046 enquiries - higher than health, employment and benefits.

### **Top Church Training Project / Next Generation / Nightstop**

Top Church Training's mission is to empower young people aged 16-25 to have the means to seek, obtain and retain meaningful education, training and employment. They offer practical help and support across a range of areas including housing advice.

They also provide some financial help to young people. This includes help with rent, paying utility bills and furniture / items for their flat. It is aimed at helping young people get out of the poverty trap and move forward.

### **Under 25? Leaving Home? Looking for Somewhere to Live? Booklet**

The Council have produced a guide for under 25 year olds looking for accommodation. The booklet covers the issues of homelessness, different types of accommodation, safety, the costs of renting, your tenancy agreement. It also lists a number of useful contacts.

### **Tenancy Sustainment Initiatives**

A range of tenancy sustainment schemes have been developed under the Supporting People Initiative including a support scheme for local authority tenants. Work is being focused on tenants at risk of losing their tenancy and people who have been allocated a property as a result of homelessness.

Focus Housing Association & Heantun Housing Association provide resettlement and floating support specifically to single people moving on from Gibbs Road, CHADD provide a similar service and the DMBC scheme has a team of four shortly to increase to seven.

There is also a specific service tailored to meeting the needs of refugees who have been given leave to remain in the Borough.

### **Social Fund applications**

There appeared to be problems with social fund applications with applications being dealt with randomly and subject to delays. A briefing session was provided by the DWP for Council staff and partner agencies.

### **Health Issues**

It is vital to ensure that people who are homeless or living in short term accommodation have proper access to general health care and specialist services.

### **Rough Sleeping**

A Rough Sleepers Count was carried out in April 2005. One person was found ; whilst this confirms that rough sleeping is not a major issue in Dudley, we are keen to develop joined up solutions so that there is no need for anyone to sleep rough.

## **Profile of accommodation and support in the borough**

The key issues identified in the first Review were :

- A range of hostel accommodation exists for homeless families, victims of domestic violence, men over 17 years old, including some move on accommodation.
- The majority of hostel spaces were for men. Very few hostel spaces can be accessed by women.
- The majority of hostels were running at near full occupancy. There was a need to identify more 'move on' accommodation for existing hostel residents to avoid 'bed blocking'.
- The Borough had traditionally not used bed & breakfast accommodation but increasing pressures had forced us to use it in emergency situations.
- The Directorate recognized that we would need to make changes in response to the agenda of 'Improving Standards of Accommodation for Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation'.
- We had good partnering arrangements for youth offenders and care leavers.

### **Lye Family Centre**

Dudley MBC had its own family hostel containing ten units with their own kitchens but shared bathroom and toilet facilities. The shared facilities and "institutional feel" of the centre had twice been criticized by Best Value Inspectors. They had also criticised the inconsistency of support and resettlement services provided to residents.

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In the autumn of 2005, the centre closed for complete refurbishment, reducing the number of units from ten to six, all entirely self contained, and adding the security of door entry systems and CCTV. Management and support functions have been split and support is now provided from the DMBC Tenancy Sustainment team. Every resident will have a personally tailored support plan from the same worker for up to two years when rehoused.

Eight dispersed units of furnished temporary accommodation are also available across the borough, and have the same support provision.

### **Bed & Breakfast accommodation**

The Directorate consider the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation to be for emergencies only and it is only used because either all hostel accommodation was full, the client was literally roofless or unsuitable for / excluded from hostel accommodation.

In 2003/4 there was a target of 7 days for the average length of stay in bed & breakfast accommodation of households which include dependant children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need for decreasing to 7 days by 2004/05. In fact, the outturn in 2004/5 and 2005/6 was 0 weeks (3 nights and 4 nights respectively), and the new target is to maintain this level of performance.

### **Churches Housing Association Dudley & District (CHADD)**

CHADD manages a hostel for men over 17 years old. The scheme is predominantly for young offenders and contains 12 units of accommodation.

They also manage two womens' refuges providing a total of 23 units of accommodation and a floating support service to 16 households.

### **Humdard – (Black Country Housing Association)**

Humdard provide four refuge flats for Asian women victims of domestic violence. The four flats are fully occupied. They have also recently introduced a floating support service for Asian women who have been rehoused as a result of domestic violence.

### **Gibbs Rd Hostel**

The Gibbs Rd Hostel is run by Focus Housing Association and provides 74 units of accommodation. It is predominantly for men aged 17+, although nine units of accommodation are available for women. The majority of residents are men aged 25 to 45, although around a quarter are younger. Up to a third have had substance and alcohol issues.

Services available at the hostel include support and resettlement, including an Aquarius project directly assisting clients who abuse alcohol.

Core data information from Focus Housing Association reveals that the most common previous residence for clients was living with family or friends (30.2%) followed by hostel accommodation (11.5%). 5% had previously been in prison.

The hostel is running at full capacity and there are problems with moving clients on with some older residents having been there six / seven years.

Workshop participants commented that there was a need for second stage accommodation - out of the hostel setting - for some residents whilst they dealt with their drug and / or alcohol issues.

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It was also commented that some of the older residents in need of 'move on' accommodation would prefer to live in shared living facilities to prevent loneliness. It was suggested that perhaps joint tenancies with friends may overcome this.

In 2004/5, a project was put in place for Gibbs Road residents to be rehoused by Dudley MBC. Resettlements are jointly monitored and generally successful.

### **Highland Rd**

Highland Road is run by Black Country Housing Association and contains 9 units of accommodation. The client group are predominantly 16+ year olds often with leaving care backgrounds.

It was also identified that all hostels operate an admissions policy with varying degrees of exclusion but which could include convictions relating to arson, violence and sex offences or substance misuse issues. The provision of suitable long term accommodation for these people is particularly challenging.

### **Other hostels**

The directorate also refer to other hostels outside of the borough including the Black Country HA scheme for 16-25 year olds in Smethwick, Beswick House and the First Base scheme in Walsall, Focus HA projects in Smethwick, Lichfield and Walsall, the Riddins Mound Foyer in Old Heath (Trident HA), the YMCA in West Bromwich and various projects within Birmingham. There is specialist mental health provision within the borough in Netherton, and elsewhere in Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell.

### **Crash Pad**

In 2005, this partnership between Housing, YOS and Heantun HA was created to offer short term accommodation and intensive intervention for homeless young people.

### **Move on Accommodation**

#### **Joint Housing Services / YOT Housing Project**

Twelve furnished flats with a tenancy support service, have been provided for the use of young people known to the Youth Offending team who are homeless or have a housing need.

#### **Churches Housing Association Dudley & District (CHADD)**

CHADD also manage a move on accommodation facility (On Route) for 11 people. A referral and assessment process is in operation.

#### **Joint Housing Services / Social Services Housing for Care Leavers**

Six flats with a tenancy support service have been provided in partnership with Social Services for the use of young people who qualify for assistance under 'Leaving Care' legislation. They are furnished and let by social services.

### **Young Parents**

In addition to providing floating support for five families, Bromford HA opened a new nine unit supported housing project in Dudley early in 2006

## Conclusion

Reflecting back upon key issues from our 2003 review (page 12), some progress has been made

- Our own family hostel has been converted to self contained flats and supplemented with dispersed units
- Provision for youth offenders and care leavers has been expanded and our Crash Pad has been launched
- A move-on protocol has been developed with Gibbs Road House
- There are a range of floating support services

Issues which are still of concern, and which are mirrored in the Supporting People Five Year Strategy 2005-2010

- A shortage of supported accommodation for women and for domestic violence
- Insufficient capacity in floating support services for people who are ready to move on

We have also identified, and begun to address, a shortage of accommodation for people with particularly challenging behaviour who are “serially excluded”.

Key issues identified by our customers included

- The quality and quantity of information available on housing options and processes
- The lack of furnished accommodation for permanent housing
- A lack of choice in accommodation, encompassing both areas and property types

## Future needs & priorities

### Forecasting future homelessness

The very rapid increases in homelessness have settled down but we need to be prepared for at least similar numbers of homelessness, in some cases with persons with more challenging needs, and to provide a better service.

There is generally high demand for social housing in the borough. The council manages approximately 24,000 homes with Registered Social Landlords managing another 4000 homes.

The council is also losing up to 1000 homes per annum through tenants exercising their right to buy.

There will be a need to work even more proactively with Registered Social Landlords and particularly with private sector landlords with the aim of improving the standard of private sector accommodation and returning more empty properties to use

We will need to ensure that affordable housing development is suitable to meet the needs of our homeless and potentially homeless people.



## **Households with dependent children**

Numbers of households with dependent children are falling but there is concern about the reasons for homelessness including mortgage repossessions and the termination of assured shorthold tenancies. Our updated Action Plan includes new projects to address these issues.

Pressure on family housing is increasing steadily, and we need to take steps to ensure that the “homelessness route” is not the only way that young families are able to resolve their housing needs.

## **Young single homeless**

A quarter of the homelessness survey respondents were under the age of 18. The official homelessness statistics also identify significant numbers of young single homeless.

An improvement in the move on arrangements from hostels is considered to be the most appropriate way to address this area and is preferred to simply increasing the number of temporary bedspaces. The Supporting People Programme provides for floating support for people moving on from hostels.

Since 2003, there has been a programme of reviewing age designations on council flats to address a mismatch between the numbers of young people on the statutory waiting list compared to the number of Council properties designated for young single people. Although this is an ongoing and gradual process and remains in our updated Action Plan, we are now able to help all of those young singles who are in priority need, and have improved the prospects of those who are not.

## **Young people at risk**

Twenty one 16 & 17 year olds were accepted as homeless in 2002/03 but in a twelve month period Housing Advice Officers had received over 350 enquiries from young people between 16 – 18. A significant number of these enquiries were resolved through mediation with parents and the person returned home. It was felt by staff that there was an underestimation and further work by the Youth Offending Team identified nearly 200 young people who they felt had immediate housing need. Since 2003, an innovative Crash Pad project has been developed in partnership between Housing Advice, YOS, Heantun Housing Association and Mediation.

In 2005/6, 85 16 and 17 year olds presented as homeless including 14 young lone parents, and 9 were accepted. A further 13 were prevented through housing advice intervention.

The council did not used to offer tenancies to persons under the age of 18, but since 2003 has developed an under-18 licence for this purpose.

The hostel provision for under 18's is very limited with only twenty one hostel places being available for 16-18 year olds across the borough. This remains as an issue in our updated Action plan.

## **Leaving Care**

The Leaving Care Act places particular accommodation responsibilities on the Children's Services Directorate. The directorate work closely with social services to provide units of accommodation. These arrangements have generally worked well despite the challenging management circumstances.

## **Domestic violence**

During 2005/6 there were 3339 incidents of domestic violence in Dudley. 77 homeless cases in 2005/6 (17% of the total) were due to a violent relationship breakdown.

The borough has three womens refuges but also makes use of those outside Dudley to ensure places of safety in appropriate circumstances. The figures for 2000/2001 show that over 200 referrals from a wide range of agencies had to be turned away for a range of reasons. One particular reason that will need addressing is where women have older male children and for management reasons the household is unable to access the facilities.

The directorate recognises that there is a need both to enhance the range of mainstream domestic violence facilities and those available for BME communities in particular a long term strategy should be developed to address the cultural needs of African / Caribbean victims of domestic violence.

A Safe at Home (Sanctuary) Scheme is being developed for those who wish to remain in their existing homes.

## **Refugees / Persons given indefinite leave to remain**

The Homelessness Survey and feedback from the Review Group suggested that the housing of refugees / persons given indefinite leave to remain could potentially be an issue for the future. There are 143 NASS contracted LA properties and between 80 – 100 properties contracted through the private sector. The population is estimated at 750 asylum seekers / refugees.

A snap shot over a six month period in 2002 showed that of the 46 asylum seeker households granted some form of refugee status over half moved away from the borough.

In 2005/6 23 households were accepted as priority need at the end of their NASS accommodation. This is not excessive, but masks housing demand from those who are not in priority need and from family reunions at a later date. Our Action plan will include investigating this need and addressing it, and reviewing protocols for dealing with households who have no recourse to public funds.

## **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups**

The Homelessness Survey identified that 15% of respondents were from BME communities. The 2001 census figures identified 6.3% of the population with a BME background and shows that there is an over-representation of BME communities within the borough's homelessness figures.

There has been consultation with BME communities in Dudley where a range of housing issues were raised including homelessness that highlighted the need for more community based advice work. This is an outstanding need carried forward to our updated Action Plan.

In 2004/5, 86 of the households accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need were from BME backgrounds, representing 14.3% of all acceptances. Of these, 37 were required to leave NASS accommodation, so, without these, the acceptances would have been 8.7% BME. This still amounts to a statistically significant over representation, worthy of further examination.

## **Ex offenders / those at risk of offending**

There were 172 individuals in prison who gave Dudley as their 'district of origin' at April 2002. The vast majority were male and nearly a quarter were aged between 16-21 years of age.

In terms of accommodation needs for ex-offenders and those at risk of offending the review group identified Youth Offenders as a particular issue. The YOT/Heantun/DMBC Scheme has worked well for some of these young people.

Workshop participants commented that pro-active homelessness advice and interviews should be undertaken before prisoners leave prison. It was acknowledged, however, that this would be difficult as the prison system is under strain and prisoners get moved frequently. There was a need for better contact with local prisons. At the time of this review, it is known that a programme of early releases with little notice is imminent, and will add to the strain.

### **Summary**

- There is a mismatch of housing demand and supply for most household types. The mismatch is most acute for young people aged under 29 and families.
- There is concern about the reasons for homelessness including mortgage repossessions and termination of assured shorthold tenancies.
- The opportunities to access social housing are reducing for households with dependent children.
- Duties towards 16 & 17 year olds. Limited hostel places and access to social housing. A need for improved joint working with Childrens Services.
- 3339 incidents of domestic violence in Dudley in 2005/6. A need to enhance the range of both mainstream and Black & Minority Ethnic domestic violence facilities.
- An over – representation of BME communities within the borough's homelessness figures. A need for more community based advice work.
- Services for prisoners and prolific and other priority offenders need to be improved

## **Resources**

The current annual funding for the homelessness service in 2002/3 was £156,520 per annum, met from the Council's general fund. The costs included the four Housing Advice Officers, the out of hours service, other staff involved in service delivery or supervision, bed and breakfast accommodation and running the Lye Family Centre.

The General Fund contribution was increased by £50,000 from April 2004.

The ODPM Homelessness Grant has also increased from £28,000 per annum to £53,000 per annum.

The supporting people grant for funding the tenancy sustainment projects was £29,000 per annum, but is now over £100,000 and supplemented by £66,000 Community Safety monies to enable us to support drug users.

Dudley MBC / Dudley District CAB secured £71,000 for a debt prevention project as key tool to prevent repeat homelessness in a three year project which is nearing its end. A new grant has been obtained to provide outreach help with money and debt in partnership with Housing Advice, SureStart, Castle & Crystal Credit Union and Neighbourhood Management.

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Top Church Training Project secured £14,000 worth of funding for a Dudley MBC supported bid to provide a 'Night Stop' scheme within the borough.

As can be seen from all of the above, the council and its partners have been proactive and highly successful in attracting funding into homelessness services, which has been used to employ new staff and develop new projects. Our aspiration now is to secure and maintain sufficient resources to mainstream some debt work, provide a comprehensive housing options service, and increase preventive services including home visits and floating support.

We also need to be mindful of the extent to which activities are supported by funding which could be reduced or withdrawn, and treat this as a business risk.

There is the additional imperative to secure year on year efficiency savings, and the strong working partnerships that have begun to develop ensure that our services are made more efficient and effective by pooling resources and skills.

## Dudley MBC Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2006-09

Objective	What we want to achieve	How we want to achieve it	Outcome required	By (date)	Lead by	Partners Involved	Target achieved
<b>Objective 1 – To further develop our strategic approach and new responses to tackling homelessness</b>							
<b>Strategic Improvements</b>	To develop second stage group or cluster accommodation for people with alcohol issues who do not want to live in a hostel but are not ready for independent living	Identify accommodation & support	Scheme operational	During 2007/8	To be determined when project starts	Aquarius Focus HA DACHS (Strategy Team & Supporting People)	
	Further developing access to housing & support for people with drug issues, including move on arrangements	Agree SLA between DIP & DACHS. Implement move on arrangements	In place and subject to regular review	During 2006/7	DACHS (Tenancy Sustainment)	Warehouse DAT CHADD Focus HA DACHS	
	To examine policies on rent arrears & rehousing and linking these to engagement with money management & debt services	Collect information and review policy	Revised policy in place	During 2006/7	DACHS (Lettings)	CAB Focus HA Probation DACHS	
	Reviewing the service in the light of the Respect agenda in order to develop appropriate access to housing & support as part of an holistic approach to reducing anti social behaviour in communities	Analyse requirements Develop and deliver action plan	Action plan projects commenced	During 2007/8	DACHS (Lettings & ASB)	Shelter Childrens Services Community Safety DACHS	

	Improving partnership arrangements with local health service providers to promote holistic service delivery, particularly around mental health needs & discharge from hospital	Analyse requirements Develop & deliver action plans	Action plan projects commenced	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	Theme group leaders	Criminal Justice Team/PCT DACHS (Adult Services & Housing)	
	Establish a project team to provide an accommodation based or dispersed foyer scheme within the borough to provide housing, training and employment opportunities for young people	Produce & deliver project plan	Foyer provision in place	During 2008/9	Neighbourhood Manager	Managed Neighbourhoods Childrens Services CHADD DACHS (Strategy Team)	
	To improve the number and quality of furnished lettings within the Borough available to homeless/potentially homeless people	Produce & deliver project plan	Set & achieve local performance indicator for number of lettings	During 2007/8	DACHS (Private Sector Housing)	Landlords DACHS	
	To continue to improve the recording and monitoring and reporting of homelessness data and the use to which it is put, for example : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• further enhancing the Annual Report produced each year since 2003</li> <li>• providing background reports for service development, member briefings and public information</li> </ul>	Replace existing information management system Develop and deliver new reporting requirements	New reporting and scrutiny arrangements in place	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	DACHS (Homeless Prevention & Response)	Chief Execs (Marketing & Comms Team) DACHS	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introducing formal elected member scrutiny of the service</li> </ul>						
<b>Objective 2 - To strengthen the help available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including the availability and quality of housing advice</b>							
<b>Strategic Improvements</b>	Implementing recommendations from a formal review of our Housing Advice Service including developing a Housing Options Service and pathways of provision for each main cause of homelessness	Produce and deliver action plan	Services in place and regularly reviewed	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	DACHS	Dudley Council Plus CATS DACHS (Housing Management)	
	Reviewing working protocols and provision for refugees, for people without recourse to public funds, for young people including those who have been Looked After, and for families who are excluded from services	Jointly review working protocols & provision	Protocols & provision agreed and regularly reviewed	During 2007/8	DACHS	DACHS (Asylum Seeker/ Refugee Team & Homelessness Team) Childrens Services YOS Bromford HA	
	To increase the supply of appropriate housing and support for homeless women including working with the Council's DV Co-ordinator to	Analysing requirements and producing and delivering action plan	Refuges physically improved Number of supported	During 2006/7 and 2007/8 And	To be agreed	Community Safety (DV Coordinator) CHADD Childrens	

	develop new accommodation and support services, a sanctuary scheme, and to plan for the improvement of existing schemes		places for women & families increased Sanctuary scheme in use	2008/9		Services DACHS (Strategy & Homelessness Teams)	
	Develop a community based housing and homelessness advice service for people from the Black and Minority Ethnic communities	Analyse requirements and develop and deliver service	Service in place and regularly reviewed	During 2007/8	To be determined when project starts	Possibly an RSL DACHS (Equalities & Housing Options Teams)	
	Establishing from the returns of our satisfaction monitoring system a user group to help shape future service delivery	Develop group	Group operational and influence on service can be evidenced	During 2006/7 And 2007/8	DACHS	Customers DACHS (Participation Team)	
	To work with partners at local and regional levels to provide information and assistance to prisoners and priority offenders and provide pathways of provision to prevent homelessness and help reduce reoffending	Analyse requirements and develop and deliver services	Services in place and regularly reviewed	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	DACHS	Probation YOS Heantun HA DACHS (Housing Options Team)	
	To continue to improve our performance against Best Value Performance Indicators and develop local PIs	Challenging targets set	Targets met	During 2006/7 and ongoing	DACHS (Homelessness Team)	DACHS (Performance Review Team and Housing)	



<b>Objective 3/ Key outcome: To maintain low levels of repeat homelessness</b>							
<b>Strategic Improvements</b>	Mainstream the successful 'Dudley District Citizens Advice Bureau / Dudley MBC ' Homelessness and Debt Prevention Project', in order to target help to those who need it and develop the skills of our Housing Managers	Agree funding, objectives and SLA	SLA in place Targets for service delivery set and met	During 2006/7	DACHS	CAB DACHS (Homelessness and Housing Management)	
	Maintaining low levels of repeat homelessness, including improving the advice and support provided to those who are in temporary accommodation and/or identified as at risk of repeat homelessness	Provide outreach money advice and housing support	Meet targets for take up of service Meet targets BVPI 214	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	CAB	CAB DACHS (Homelessness , Tenancy Sustainment)	
<b>Objective 4 / Key Outcome: To continue to reduce levels of homelessness both against the main causes of homelessness identified in Dudley and overall</b>							
<b>Strategic Improvements</b>	Improve the effectiveness of existing advice services in preventing homelessness where owner occupied homes	Develop and deliver community and court based	Reduce homelessness acceptances	During 2007/8 and 2008/9	To be determined when project starts	Courts CAB DACHS (Housing	

	are at risk through relationship breakdown and/or financial problems	services				Options Team)	
	To research the need for, and availability within the borough or, schemes which enable owner occupiers to release equity in their homes and/or remain in their homes as tenants	Research need and develop project proposals	Project proposal submitted to Review Group	During 2007/8	DACHS (Strategy Team)		
	To work with landlords and their agents to improve private renting as a secure long-term housing option and one that is more affordable for more people	Establish procedures & targets for private tenancies accessed via Housing Options	Meet target	During 2007/8 and 2008/9	DACHS (PSH Team)	Landlords DACHS (PSH & Housing Options Teams)	
	To improve information and education services on housing and homelessness so that young people are encouraged to plan for their future housing needs	Develop lesson plans, pre tenancy savings scheme etc	Services taken up & positive feedback received Long term reduction in homelessness	During 2006/7 and ongoing	DACHS (Homelessness Team)	Childrens Services Schools Community Safety Castle & Crystal Credit Union DACHS	
<b>Service Improvements</b>	We will prevent more youth homelessness by extending our Crash Pad scheme and increasing the use of mediation in all appropriate cases	Add a second crash pad Monitor use of mediation	Achieve targets for mediation Reduce homeless acceptances	During 2006/7	DACHS (Homelessness Team)	YOS Heantun HA DACHS (Time2Talk & Homelessness Teams)	

<b>Objective 5 :To achieve a better balance between housing availability and demand and continue to reduce the numbers in all forms of temporary accommodation</b>							
<b>Strategic Improvements</b>	To take action to improve the supply of affordable housing, by ensuring that the target for affordable housing as a proportion of all new development is met, that start up and ongoing costs are within customers' reach, and that there is an appropriate property mix	Delivery of housing strategy	Affordable homes targets met Customer feedback positive	During 2007/8 and ongoing	DACHS (Strategy Team)	RSLs DUE (Planning) DACHS	
	To fundamentally review our lettings and nominations policy whilst introducing Choice Based Lettings to make the best use of vacancies, give fair treatment to all who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and avoid perverse incentives to claim homelessness	Replace points scheme	Choice Based Lettings in place and evaluated	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	DACHS (Lettings)	DACHS (Lettings, Housing Options, Homelessness Teams)	
	Reviewing at least annually supply and demand for different households (e.g.	Analysis produced annually	Anomalies addressed in lettings plans	During 2007/8 and	DACHS	DACHS (Strategy Team and Lettings)	

	young single people) and taking action to address any imbalances		and results can be evidenced	ongoing			
	Reviewing the performance of our borough in the light of the Housing Corporation Paper Tackling Homelessness and incorporating our findings into our Action Plan	Discussion paper to Dudley Housing Partnership	Outcomes and any actions agreed	During 2006/7 and 2007/8	DACHS (Strategy Team)	RSLs DACHS (Strategy Team & Lettings)	
	Building upon the work of this strategy and discussing key themes with neighbouring local authorities to assess where cross authority/regional working is possible to achieve common objectives	Participation in Regional Strategy Implementation Group	Evidence of homelessness being addressed across boundaries	During 2006/7 And ongoing	DACHS	Other authorities GOWM Other partners DACHS (Strategy & Homelessness Teams)	
<b>Service Improvements</b>	Ensuring that we continue to reduce numbers in all forms of temporary accommodation	Effective monitoring and management	Achieve targets BVPI 203 and the 2010 target	During 2006/7 and ongoing	DACHS (Homelessness Team)	Review Group	