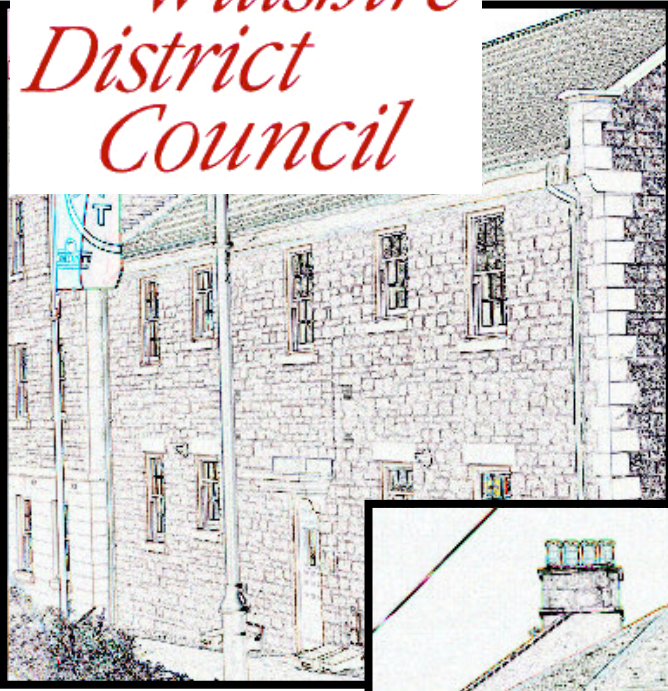


*North
Wiltshire
District
Council*

**DRAFT
HOMELESSNESS
STRATEGY
2006-2011**



Homelessness Strategy 2006/2011

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the District Council's second Homelessness Strategy to you. Since our first strategy was produced in 2003, the Homelessness team has been extremely successful in reducing both the number of people presenting as homeless, and the use and length of stay in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

However, homelessness is still a very real problem in the District, it causes disruption to children and families, and deterioration in people's mental and physical health. The District Council is therefore committed to continually improving the services we offer to people in housing need. In addition to this, the team are under increasing pressure from the Department of Communities and Local Government to meet more and more stringent targets.

The recent Executive decision to bring the Housing Advice Service back in-house has been welcomed by the Housing Team as an opportunity to transform the way we deliver services and support to those in housing need.

The Homelessness Strategy 2006 – 2011 sets out our plans to shape and develop services for people who are homeless or in need of housing advice in North Wiltshire.

The strategy has been developed through a process of extensive research and wide consultation with stakeholders, Members, partner organisations and the wider community. It is also very much a working document; it will be reviewed regularly and updated on an annual basis.

To enable the Council to continue to improve its services to the community I would welcome your comments on this strategy and our future housing priorities.

Olivia Thomas
Lead Member for Housing
North Wiltshire District Council

Introduction

Homelessness is not just a housing issue; to enable us to address homelessness and housing need effectively involves working in partnership with a wide range of key agencies and stakeholders.

This document sets out our plans for improving housing advice and homelessness services in North Wiltshire over the next five years and takes into account all national, regional and local priorities.

The Council's main priorities are:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Eliminate the use of B&B and reduce the use of temporary accommodation
- Improve services to homeless people
- Improve inter-agency working
- Improve monitoring systems

The strategy has documented needs and resources, examined our performance against national targets and identified realistic and achievable actions to deliver on our priorities.

Consultation with the wider community is essential to achieving an effective homelessness and housing advice service and your views on this strategy would be most welcome

Janet O'Brien
Housing Team Leader

Executive Summary

To be added

Corporate Context

The Corporate Management Board (CMB) is made up of the Chief Executive and four Strategic Managers. CMB collectively shares responsibility and accountability for the strategic management and leadership of North Wiltshire District Council, the management of its performance and delivery of the Council's priorities and services as identified in the Corporate Plan.

Four Business areas make up the Council's organisational structure. These are:

Customer Services

Cleansing & Amenities
Investigations
Council Tax
Housing Benefit
Recovery
Customer Contact

Corporate Services

Finance
Human Resources
ICT
Legal
Policy & Democratic Services
Corporate Admin & Member Support

Planning Services

Implementation
Building Control
Spatial Planning
Customer Focus

Community & Environment

Housing
Assets, Design & Regeneration
Community Partnership
Environmental Health
Customer & Business Support

The main democratic structure consists of:

- The Leader of the Council
- An Executive Committee comprising 10 Members appointed by the Leader of the Council
- An Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 5 Area Committees

These are supported by other committees that also report to the Executive Committee.

Our mission statement, "**Improving North Wiltshire**" is the foundation of all the Council's activities and is carried forward into our four Corporate Aims which are:

To create a customer service culture by investing in and empowering those who serve the public

To ensure high quality, cost effective services.

To enable the provision of responsive, accessible and fair services delivered with courtesy and care

To safeguard and enhance the assets and resources of North Wiltshire and the wider community

These Corporate Aims underpin the key priorities for the Council and to ensure that each of these priorities are delivered, a lead Member and Officer is accountable for the progress and delivery of the actions. The Corporate Plan is reviewed monthly as part of the performance management review at Corporate Management Board and is reported quarterly to the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

The timetable for reporting to Executive Committee corresponds with the Budget process to ensure that the Corporate Plan drives budget and resource allocation year on year.

The identification of corporate priorities is influenced by:

- External influences e.g. changes in Government policies
- Priorities set by elected members
- Community ambitions identified through the Local Strategic Partnership

The Corporate Plan forms a key part of the Council's business planning process and is reflected in the four Business Area plans, Team plans and individual work plans. This ensures that accountability and responsibility for delivery is identified and reviewed and monitored monthly.

The Corporate Priorities identified for 2006/07 are:

- Buoyant Economy
- Car Parks and Decriminalisation
- Cleaner, Safer and Better Streets
- Customer Focus
- Equality & Diversity
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Housing
- Minimise Waste – Maximise Recycling
- Partnership Working
- Spatial Planning

Everything to be supported by strong partnership working and community engagement, working towards building true community spirit and a caring society.

These priorities have been chosen as they are areas where major change and/or improvement will be carried out during 2006/2007, in response to local people's views, national targets and new legislative duties.

In order to deliver the Corporate Plan, each of the priorities identified have clear milestone targets in place. For the Housing Team these are:

- Complete the review of the Housing Advice Service
- Produce an Empty Homes Strategy
- Produce a Homelessness Strategy
- Complete research to assess the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the District
- Review the Housing Needs Register contract and Allocations Policy
- Reduce the use of B&B for young people by 50% and reduce the number of young people in unsuitable temporary accommodation by 25%
- Improve energy efficiency of residential accommodation in the District by 2.5%
- Reduce number of households in temporary accommodation by at least 10%
- Complete 150 new affordable homes, including at least 10 rural homes
- Complete 5 local housing needs surveys
- Complete Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document
- Enable 55 vulnerable households in the private sector to live in decent homes, through provision of advice and assistance
- Enable at least 90 adaptations for disabled residents in the District
- Produce a Private Sector Renewal Strategy and Policy

The Homelessness Strategy is one of a number of inter-related Council strategies, which feed into the wider Corporate Plan. These include:

Community Strategy/LSP

North Wiltshire has developed its Community Strategy through the North Wiltshire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a forum consisting of partners from local government, other public services such as Health and the Police, voluntary & community groups, housing associations, young people and the business sector. The LSP identified a vision for North Wiltshire featuring 8 critical areas for the social, economic and environmental well being of the District.

The key areas are:

- Social Care & Health
- Countryside
- Housing & the Built Environment
- Economy
- Transport
- Crime & Community Protection
- Education, Skills & Learning
- Culture

Community Safety Strategy

The key priorities for the North Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership are:

- To reduce offending behaviour
- To reduce victimisation
- To prioritise higher crime neighbourhoods
- To reduce crimes of violence
- To reduce drug & alcohol related harm
- To reduce road casualties
- To make people feel safer

The Housing Team is working closely with partners from other agencies to make North Wiltshire a safer place to live by ensuring that:

- New housing developments are “secure by design”
- Anti-Social behaviour is tackled by our partner Registered Social Landlords
- Community Alarms are provided for vulnerable people
- All serious and sex offenders are managed through the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- The two refuges for women fleeing domestic violence will continue to be funded through the Supporting People Programme
- We will continue to co-operate with the Police and other agencies in the Witness Protection Programme
- The North Wiltshire Handy Person Scheme will provide home safety checks for vulnerable people, especially the elderly
- We work in partnership with Health to provide housing with support for people with mental health problems
- We work with agencies such as the Drugs & Homelessness Initiative to ensure that support is provided for people with drug and alcohol problems

Housing Strategy

The Council's Housing Strategy 2005-2008 is a three-year plan produced in consultation with partners, stakeholders, Members and the local community with the aim of addressing the current and future housing needs of the people of North Wiltshire.

The focus of the Housing Strategy 2005 –2008 is on:

Affordable Housing

- Affordable housing through planning gain – since 2001 129 new units of affordable housing have been provided through the planning system. A further 400 units will be provided during the life of this Housing Strategy

- Social housing built with grant – the District Council has committed £2 million per year until 2007/08 to grant fund housing development, in addition to this the District also attracts Housing Corporation grant funding of approximately £1 million per year.
- Cross subsidising affordable homes with private market housing – profit generated from the sale of private market housing is used to subsidise the provision of social housing.
- Making the best use of land resources – the Housing Team are working with Westlea Housing Association and the Asset Management team to identify sites for affordable housing development.
- Making the best use of existing stock – providing adaptations in existing housing and providing incentives for people to move to smaller properties.

Improving Private Sector Housing

- Making best use of available resources ;
 - ensuring grant assistance is directed to households most in need.
 - working in partnership with neighbouring authorities to explore equity release and national loan schemes.
- Energy Efficiency - Improve on the work currently carried out by the Council in partnership with Wiltshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre in promoting energy efficiency through advice and assistance.
- Making the best use of existing stock by bringing empty homes back into use.
- To ensure that the countywide Home Improvement Agency – in 2004 a partnership was established to provide a consistent service across Wiltshire. Successes have included Home Safety and Benefit checks, assisting vulnerable clients through the grant process and promoting energy efficiency.

Reducing Homelessness

- Prevention of homelessness
- Eliminate the use of B&B
- Improve services to homeless people – such as Housing Advice service.
- Improve inter agency working – to ensure a consistent service is provided to all people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Improve monitoring – to enable the team to monitor trends and target resources more effectively.

For a copy of our Housing Strategy please visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk or contact Jan Parry 01249 706321
jparry@northwilts.gov.uk

Wider Priorities

In establishing its future priorities the Council takes account of the national and regional picture. This section summarises how national, regional and local priorities have informed the production of our homelessness strategy.

National Priorities

In February 2003 the Government launched its Sustainable Communities Plan, a comprehensive programme to improve people's homes, neighbourhoods and quality of life. The plan set out a vision to meet people's housing need in sustainable communities.

The next phase in delivering the Sustainable Communities Plan was introduced with the production of two partner strategies in January 2005, "**Sustainable Communities – Homes for all**", a plan to create communities which provide not only housing but jobs, services and infrastructure and "**Sustainable Communities – People, Places and Prosperity**", which sets out plans to promote good governance, empower communities, tackle disadvantage and make places cleaner, safer and greener.

The Council is committed to building sustainable communities and achieving a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives through community planning and the Community Strategy, the Community Safety Strategy, the Regeneration Strategy, the emerging Local Plan and the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy.

The Housing Team will focus on:

New Affordable Housing

- Continue to encourage our Housing Association partners to develop new affordable housing to good or excellent Eco-homes standards.
- Enable new affordable housing of varied tenure in sustainable locations to ensure that people in housing need have a range of housing options
- Work with partners to include options for education, employment, health and leisure services and support are available to all residents of new affordable housing

Improving Existing Housing

- Focus grant funding on ensuring that those most in need are able to live in decent housing. The Council in partnership with the other Wiltshire Councils is exploring providing assistance through other alternatives such as loans and equity release.

Social Inclusion

- In addition to the District-Wide Housing Needs Survey, carry out further research to identify the housing needs of all residents in the District including minority groups and those subject to exclusion through poverty, discrimination, poor housing, ill health or family breakdown.
- Commission specific research into the housing needs of gypsies and travellers.
- Provide alternative temporary accommodation for homeless people to reduce the use of unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- Review our Allocations Policy and Housing Advice service to ensure there is choice and equality of access to housing services for all the residents of North Wiltshire.

Homelessness Act 2002

The Homelessness Act 2002 sets out the legislative framework for assisting homeless households and the allocation of social housing. One of the main requirements of the Act was that all Local Authorities should produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on:

- The reduction in the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for families
- Increased support for people in temporary accommodation
- Increased emphasis on preventing homelessness.

The Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in July 2003 and has already reduced, and in many cases avoided, the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless families. The average length of stay in B&B has decreased from 9 weeks in 2003/04 to 2.3 weeks in 2005/06. In addition to this we have expanded our use of the Rent Deposit Scheme to enable people in housing need to access the private sector, improved our links with private landlords and, in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Sarsen Housing Association, introduced a private sector leasing scheme which provides decent, self-contained temporary accommodation throughout the District.

Rough Sleeping Target

Monitoring undertaken by the Community Voluntary Services (CVS) and the Salvation Army at the North Wiltshire Homeless Project has revealed that the highest number on a single night was 7 and that, on average, 2 or 3 people are sleeping rough on any single night. Therefore, there is little justification for carrying out a Rough Sleepers Counts given the resources available to us and the rural nature of the District

Temporary Accommodation Target

In January 2005 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced a Local Authority target for the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.

By 2010 all Local Authorities are to have reduced their use of temporary accommodation for homeless households by 50%. This will ensure that all Local Authorities, regardless of their use of temporary accommodation, will need to increase their work in the proactive prevention of homelessness in their districts in order to make this 50% reduction.

In addition to this, the Audit Commission have also introduced several new Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) to measure Councils' performance in reducing homelessness:

BVPI 213

This measures the effectiveness of housing advice intervention in order to prevent homelessness. This indicator is not limited to households who are statutorily homeless or have a priority need but covers anyone who approaches the Council in some housing need.

BVPI 214

This measures the number of households accepted as homeless who had previously been accepted in the past 2 years, this PI will therefore measure the effectiveness of support offered to homeless households in order to prevent them becoming homeless again.

BVPI 203

This measures the percentage change in the average number of families placed in temporary accommodation.

Regional Priorities

The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan introduced a move towards more regionally based government. Regional Housing Boards were set up to allocate investment and develop regional housing policy.

In this region the South West Housing Body (SWHB) is the Regional Housing Board responsible for planning and directing regional policy and strategy relating to housing.

The Regional Housing Strategy 2005 - 2016

The following issues have been highlighted as particular challenges in the South West:

- **High and on-going Housing demand** – Household growth is 29% compared with 21% nationally and this trend is expected to continue.
- **Under delivery of new homes** – There has been an estimated shortfall of 4,600 homes in the last 7 years
- **Difficulties in accessing owner occupation** – particularly for first time buyers
- **Rising homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation** – Homeless acceptances have increased by over 40% between 1999 and 2003
- **Shortage of affordable housing** – current stocks of affordable housing unable to compensate for problems in accessing owner occupation and rising homelessness
- **High levels of second and holiday homes**
- **High levels of Right to Buy sales** – over 130,000 homes have been sold in the region and the proportion of social rented housing is among the lowest in the country at approximately 15%
- **The challenge of major sites** – Development growth is now being concentrated on Principal Urban Areas (PUAs) and it will be essential to ensure that communities are balanced and sustainable

Local Priorities

Supporting People 5 Year Strategy 2005 – 2010

Supporting People is a partnership between Wiltshire County Council, the 4 District Councils, 3 Primary Care Trusts and the Probation Service.

The Supporting People Programme was implemented in April 2003 and currently funds over 370 services for vulnerable people in Wiltshire. This comprises of 4,700 units of supported accommodation and 550 units of floating support.

The Supporting People Partnership Board meets quarterly and has overall responsibility for the Supporting People programme, it comprises of officers and elected representatives from each of the partner organisations.

The Supporting People Officers Group is made up of officers from each organisation and meets monthly.

In addition to this officers from the partner organisations are involved in strategic service reviews. Services currently under review are Homelessness Services, Mental Health, Domestic Violence and services for Older People.

The Audit Commission judged the programme as “good with promising prospects for improvement” in a recent inspection.

The 5 year Strategy was recently submitted to the ODPM following approval by the Partnership Board. It sets out 5 strategic priorities for housing related support services in the county. These are:

- Enabling people to live independently and in their chosen home setting for as long as possible
- Using floating support instead of accommodation based services to break the automatic link between a tenancy and support and provide as much flexibility and choice as possible.
- Linking with our partners and other agencies to provide housing related support packages as part of integrated services
- Provide preventative housing related support services to minimise crises such as hospitalisation, institutional care, homelessness, social exclusion and re-offending
- Work with housing authorities, housing providers and voluntary agencies to ensure vulnerable people are supported to access housing advice and suitable accessible housing of their choice

Partnership working

North Wiltshire District Council recognises that the corporate priorities cannot be delivered in isolation. We work with a variety of organisations to ensure that housing and related issues are addressed in order to deliver the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.

We are therefore fully committed to partnership working and have worked hard to establish effective joint working for the benefit of the community.

Mental Health & Housing Co-ordinator Steering Group.

Representatives from Kennet District Council, North Wiltshire District Council and Health meet to steer the work of the Mental Health & Housing Co-ordinators. These posts have been jointly funded by Avon & Wiltshire Partnership and Kennet & North Wilts PCT and are hosted by the District Councils. There are currently two officers employed to serve the districts of Kennet and North Wiltshire. The steering group is currently considering an extension of the partnership into West Wiltshire. The role of these posts is to improve the strategic direction of the housing service for people with mental health needs and to provide support to individual customers to meet their housing needs.

Local Public Service Agreement 2 (LPSA 2)

LPSA 2 has been set up to provide better support for homeless 16 and 17 year olds in Wiltshire. The agreement, led by Wiltshire County Council, involves officers from all Wiltshire District Councils and Social Services. The target is that no 16 or 17 year old will be placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation by 2008. A project officer has been seconded to drive this project forward and report on progress to the LPSA 2 Group.

Housing Association Liaison Group

This group, consisting of representatives from Registered Social Landlords, Voluntary Organisations and the Supporting People team, meets twice yearly to discuss current housing issues, including nominations and lettings, access to support, housing benefit and community safety issues.

Homelessness Service

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a new requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on the prevention of homelessness in their districts, and the provision of appropriate accommodation and support for households accepted as homeless under the Homelessness legislation.

This has given North Wiltshire District Council the opportunity to work with partners in taking a more strategic approach to address and prevent homelessness in the District. Partnership working has taken place through homelessness consultation days, joint production of the homeless strategy, the homelessness strategy steering group and sub-groups set up to deliver specific initiatives e.g. a new drop-in centre in Chippenham and a working group to look at accommodation needs for single homeless people across Wiltshire.

Housing Advice

The Council currently has a contract with the Citizens Advice Bureau, (CAB) to provide housing advice that is free and independent. This service is available throughout the district through the CAB's offices in Chippenham and Calne. There are also surgeries in Corsham, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett and, if necessary, home visits can be arranged.

Under the terms of this contract the CAB provide housing advice and assistance, debt counselling for rent or mortgage arrears and representation in Court for possession and eviction proceedings. They also assist and support clients who have requested a review of their homeless decision.

The District Council reviewed the services provided under this contract to ensure that advice was provided in the most appropriate way, met customer needs and continued to provide an efficient and effective, value for money service. The review was completed in March 2006 when Members took the decision to bring the service back in-house.

From 1st October 2006 the Housing Team will provide the Housing Advice Service from the District Council offices.

Private Sector Leasing Scheme

Our use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, particularly for families, has reduced radically. In 2003/2004 the average length of time families spent in B&B was 9 weeks, however for 2005/2006 the ODPM target of no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks has been met and exceeded.

This was brought about by both an increase in prevention work and the successful launch of the Housing Association Leasing Scheme, which now enables the Homelessness Team to offer a range of temporary accommodation to homeless families in the District.

North Wiltshire District Council launched this scheme, in partnership with Westlea Housing Association and Sarsen Housing Association, in early 2004 and we now have 28 appropriately sized, self-contained properties for use as temporary accommodation throughout the District. This initiative not only ensures that homeless households have a better quality of life while waiting for permanent housing, but also makes considerable savings on Bed & Breakfast and Housing Benefit expenditure.

Westlea Housing Association

In 1995 the District Council transferred its housing stock to Westlea Housing Association, a key partner of the local authority. It is the largest Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in the district and has 5763 social rented properties (as at April 2006) Westlea Housing Association also manages the Housing Needs Register on behalf of the District Council.

Westlea Housing Association also owns and manages temporary hostel accommodation in Chippenham, 2 refuges for women fleeing domestic violence. Community 4, a local consortium consisting of Westlea Housing Association, Splitz, Alabare and the Drugs and Homelessness initiative, provides floating support for vulnerable households from Westlea's premises in Chippenham.

Supporting People

We contribute to the county-wide Supporting People programme and have been closely involved their strategic review of services for example, the strategic review of Floating Support and the subsequent tendering process for the new County-wide service

Local Strategic Partnership and Community Plans

The District Council has been working in partnership with other organisations and community groups to identify what the people of North Wiltshire want and need and where actions and improvements are needed. The Community Partnerships team have produced five Community Plans and an over-arching Community Strategy. Eight key areas have been identified as vital to the social, economic and environmental well being of the District. All five Community plans identified the need for new affordable housing as a key area.

Wiltshire Homelessness Prevention & Innovation Group (WHIP)

This group consists of representatives from Supporting People and District Council Homelessness Teams. It was established in 2005 and meets quarterly to share good practice and innovation in preventing homelessness in the County. The group are currently involved in the production of a DVD about youth homelessness for use in local schools and colleges.

Connexions

The District Council recognises the importance of the services provided by Connexions Wiltshire and has recently signed a partnership agreement which sets out the services that each organisation offers young people, agreed joint objectives, areas of joint working and agreed procedures.

Homelessness Service Review 2005

North Wiltshire District Council's homelessness advice and prevention service has been contracted out to the North Wilts Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), since 2000. Though amended in 2003, the current contract had not been substantially changed since its commencement six years ago.

Many changes have taken place since the start of the current advice contract, such as the 2002 Homelessness Act, the Government's Temporary Accommodation (TA) targets and Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), BVPI 213 prevention targets. In view of these changes, this review was undertaken to take a fresh look at how North Wiltshire District Council could provide the best homelessness advice and prevention service for local residents.

The review concluded that the current contract did not assist the District Council to meet its legal duties or Government prevention targets.

It is important to realise that there are no negative assessments to be made regarding the activities that CAB carry out or the service they provide. CAB does not fail to carry out the activities specified in the contract nor do they carry them out poorly. On the contrary, CAB deliver their core functions very capably. CAB have an excellent reputation for staff training, provide free access to specialised up to date legal advice and have a well proven track record in the field of representation.

The central issue, for NWDC, is that prevention of homelessness is not about advice provision. Delivery of a quality homelessness service requires considerably more activities on the part of the provider than advice provision alone.

The review examined the feasibility of amending the housing advice contract and re-tendering for the service. This was not considered to be a viable option for the following reasons:

1. **The loss of control.** There would be problems regarding the loss of control. It was repeatedly stated during consultation with other Local Authorities that contracts had been brought back in-house due to the lack of control and flexibility connected with a contracted out service.

2. **Dependency.** The major difficulty with this model is the fact that the Council makes itself dependent for its performance upon the performance of an external organisation. It is the Council that experiences the consequences of failure in this area, not the contractor. Prevention performance is monitored very closely by central Government.

3. Lack of prevention contractors. No organisations currently exist who focus on prevention work in the statutorily defined way, which Local Authorities require. It is possible that such an organisation may present itself upon tendering the contract.

4. Prevention is little known. Local Authorities are still developing their prevention services and finding out what works well in their particular districts and, because prevention is still relatively new to NWDC, there would be risks involved in contracting out a service that is still evolving.

In view of the above, NWDC would have to be completely satisfied that any contract holding organisation would uphold the prevention aims with as much commitment as the Local Authority and was working towards the same agenda.

In-House Provision

Bringing the advice and prevention service in-house would not cause a great deal of disruption to the department. The required infrastructure already exists within the Homelessness Department. The majority of any changes to the department likely to arise would be the need to change the nature of the work the department does, from that of homelessness assessment to one of homelessness prevention.

Staff Training.

The role of a Prevention Officer is essentially a new and quite different job from that of Homelessness Officer and officers will need to be fully supported and trained whilst developing the skills required for this type of post.

If providing a complete service in-house on a 'one-stop-shop' basis, staff will need to be trained in those areas which they currently do not cover – such as benefit and debt advice and new areas unique to prevention, such as negotiation and mediation. Local Authorities, which provide a comprehensive in-house service, note that staff training needs to be given a higher priority for prevention than for homelessness due to the constantly developing nature of prevention.

In-house service with specific external contracts

In Local Authorities where the overall homelessness advice service is provided for in house, it is in the areas of benefits advice, debt advice and court representation where services have been contracted out, typically to the CAB.

A more advantageous way of contracting out is for practical, prevention focussed schemes, jointly funded by a number Local Authorities or organisations on a county or regional basis. Such models meet prevention principles, have been suggested as a recommendation in local consultation and are currently being recommended by the ODPM as an effective means of achieving prevention.

Outcome of the Review

This extensive review of the Housing Advice and Homelessness service was completed in March 2006 and was presented to the Executive Committee in May. Members considered the above options and made the decision to bring the Housing Advice service back in-house, with the option to contract out specific services.

The new in-house service will commence on 1st October 2006.

For a Full Copy of the Homeless Service Review visit our website at www.northwilts.gov.uk

Needs

District Wide Housing Needs Survey 2005

In December 2004, the District Council, in partnership with Swindon Borough Council, commissioned Fordham Research to undertake a District wide housing needs survey. The purpose of this major piece of housing research was to determine levels of housing supply and demand in the District, provide evidence to support funding bids and to enable the Council to negotiate and secure more affordable housing on private development sites

Main Findings

1. There is an estimated shortfall of affordable housing in the district of around 780 units per year.
2. The greatest shortfall is in one and two bedroomed properties in the Chippenham sub-area.
3. It would be difficult to justify an affordable housing target below 40% and a threshold above 10 dwellings
4. At most 40% of the affordable housing should be for shared ownership with the remainder social rented.
5. In the owner occupied sector there is an overall shortfall of provision, which is most acute for two bedroom accommodation with a surplus of four bedroom accommodation.
6. 11.1% of households contain people with support needs with over half of those households having a physical disability.

Homelessness

Levels of homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation are a good indication of housing need. In 2005/06 the Council received applications from 235 homeless applicants. Under housing legislation the Council had a duty to provide permanent accommodation for 155 of these, the majority of which were housed in social housing.

The Council has a duty to re-house homeless applicants who are in a priority group and are not intentionally homeless. The priority group are:

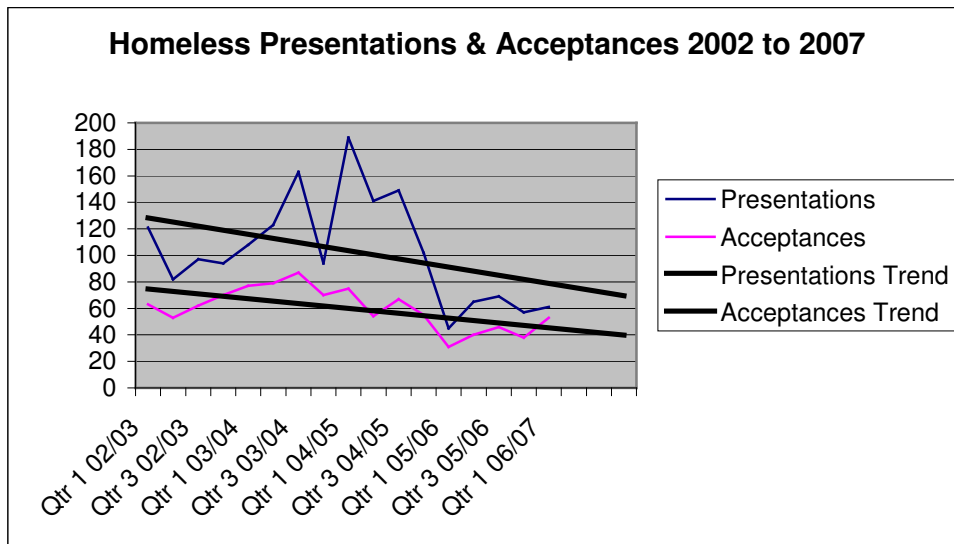
- Households with dependent children or someone who is pregnant
- Anyone who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental health problems, physical disability or illness
- Anyone who has become homeless in an emergency

The Homelessness Act 2002 added the following groups to the priority categories:

- 16 and 17 year olds (unless the responsibility of Social Services)
- Care leavers aged 18 to 21
- Anyone who is vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence, having served in the Armed Forces, having served a prison sentence or having been in Care

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the production of our first Homelessness Strategy, the Council has become more proactive in the prevention of homelessness and in keeping the length of stay in temporary accommodation to a minimum.

The graph below illustrates the decrease in the number of homeless presentations and acceptances as a result of our increased focus on the prevention of homelessness in the District.



House moves are also an important factor to consider when estimating future housing needs. The following information has been gathered from the housing needs survey data on the reasons given for moving house.

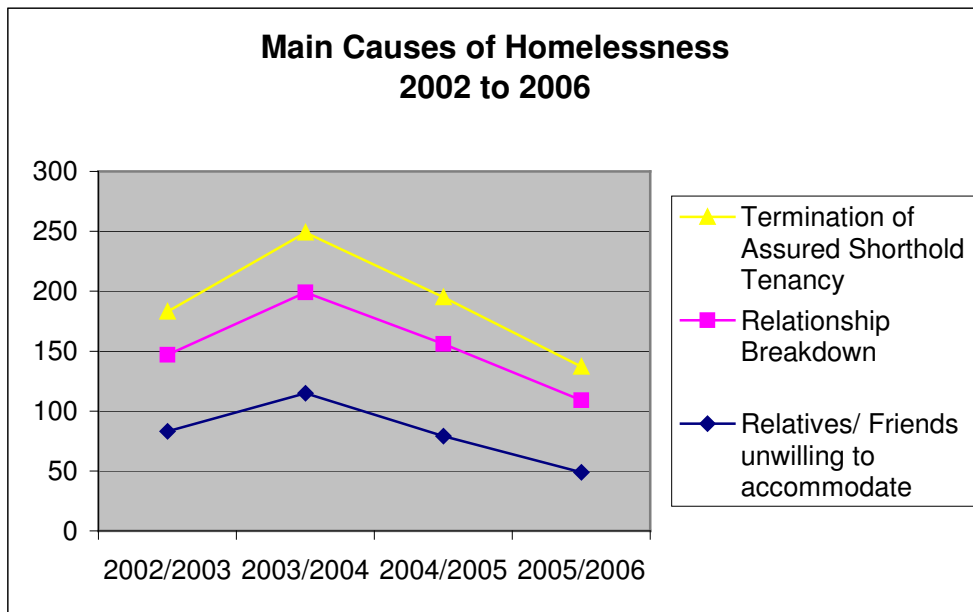
Households expecting to move within next 2 years – Reasons

Of all the households expecting to move within the next two years (18.3% of the total households in the District) the table below shows the number of households who are expecting to leave their current accommodation due to the same reasons as the main causes of homelessness.

Reason	Number/Percentage
Relationship breakdown	151 1.5%
End of tenancy agreement	445 4.5%
Relatives/friends unable to accommodate	154 1.6%
Victim of harassment	210 2.1%
Threat of Eviction/repossession	217 0.6%

This highlights the scope for preventing homelessness in the District as the Homelessness Team undertakes the Housing Advice service and becomes more proactive in the prevention of homelessness in North Wiltshire.

The following graph shows the reduction in homeless acceptances against the main causes of homelessness. As illustrated, the overall reduction in homelessness as reported above, is quite consistent over all three main causes.



Housing Needs Register

The number of social housing properties in North Wilts is roughly 6700. Last year the number of properties let was 556. Of these, 109 were let to people accepted as homeless. However, there are currently 1356 general needs applicants on the Housing Needs Register (as at May 2006). It is therefore clear that the demand for social rented housing is much greater than the supply.

Gypsies & Travellers Update - see Joelle

The District Council recognised that there was currently a lack of specific needs information about gypsies and travellers, therefore a county-wide group, led by North Wiltshire District Council, was set up to formulate a brief and to jointly tender for this research. The research was to be carried out in three phases with a target date for completion of July 2006.

The first phase involved desk top research collating what we already knew from caravan counts, details of unauthorised encampments, enforcement action against unauthorised developments, number of existing authorised sites, both public and private and details of waiting lists for existing sites. The

second phase will involved face to face interviews with the gypsy and traveller community to gather details regarding their needs, while the third phase involved formulating criteria for the selection of suitable sites to meet the needs of gypsies and travellers.

The draft report for comments and suggestions was received in August 2006 and it is anticipated that the final report will be published in the autumn of 2006.

Teenage Parents

In 2005/2006, 30 lone parents or pregnant women under 25 presented as homeless to the District council, of these 2 were 16 or 17 years old.

There are currently 36 teenage mothers on the Housing Needs Register and 12 pregnant teenagers.

In 2004 Bromford Housing Association, in partnership with the District council, opened a Supported Housing scheme for teenage parents in Calne. The scheme consists of 9 two bedroomed flats and provides good quality accommodation with support in budgeting, parenting and life skills.

Teenage parents accommodated in general needs housing are offered floating support.

No further capital projects are planned at the moment.

Rough Sleepers

Monitoring undertaken by the Community Voluntary Services (CVS) and the Salvation Army at the North Wiltshire Homeless Project has revealed that the highest number of people sleeping rough on a single night was 7. However, on average, 2 or 3 people are sleeping rough on any single night. Therefore, there is little justification for carrying out a rough sleepers count given the rural nature of the District and the resources available to us.

A questionnaire on rough sleepers has been planned for 2006/07. This will be sent to agencies and organisations in the District to help identify areas where people are known to be sleeping rough. This will be done in line with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidelines.

Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs

The Census 2001 shows a BME population (ie non-white British) of 4.06%, compared to 4.6% in the South West and 13.01% nationally*. Over the last three years a total of 1297 homelessness applications were made to the District Council of which 42 were from the BME community; these represent 3.2% of the total number of applications. 21 of these 42 clients were found to be not homeless or not in priority need and the full duty was accepted for the

remaining 21. The picture in North Wiltshire, therefore, does not reflect the national situation, where people from BME communities are over represented in homeless acceptances.

During the past two years 72 people from the BME communities approached North Wiltshire CAB for housing advice, 3.7% of the total number of 1948 enquiries.

The number of clients in the BME group on the housing register represents 4.8% of the waiting list population.

The Council subscribes to EITI, a telephone interpreting service line available for clients whose first language is not English.

North Wiltshire District Council will continue working with Wiltshire Racial Equality Council and other organisations to ensure that BME communities are aware of the homelessness and housing advice services available in the District.

**From April 2006 BME was redefined to include every category except White British*

Resources

Homelessness Funding

In 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister provided funding to Local Authorities to assist in delivering their Homelessness Strategy. For 2003/2004 the grant was £25,000, some of which was used to fund research into the feasibility of a homelessness drop-in centre, and to underwrite the Housing Association Leasing Scheme.

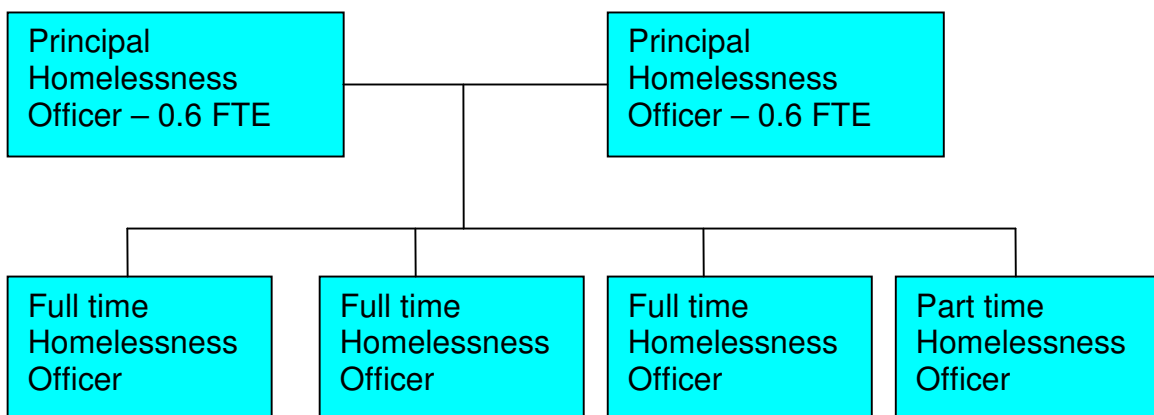
Following a successful bid for 2004/2005, this grant was increased to £40,000 and has enabled the Housing Team to increase the Rent Deposit Scheme and to second a Temporary Homelessness Officer in order to focus on the prevention of homelessness in the District.

A further £40,000 has been confirmed for 2006/07 and it is intended to use this funding to further increase the Rent Deposit Scheme, secure appropriate training for staff to shift the emphasis of the service to prevention work and to ensure that all officers have access to a homeless prevention fund to be spent at the officers' discretion.

Human Resources

In order to provide a good service to the community, the District Council recognises the importance of the quality of its employees. In the Housing Team, good technical and communication skills are essential in providing customers with the support and assistance they require.

The structure of the Housing team recently underwent a review as it was recognised that there were insufficient resources to deliver the outcomes the Council is setting out to achieve. A growth bid was approved for the 2006/07 budget to increase the permanent staffing resource.



NB Following the Executive Committee's decision to bring the Housing Advice contract back in-house, the number of officers in the team will increase by 1.5 FTE officers. However, the final structure is yet to be decided upon.

Revenue Funding 2006/2007

Homelessness Staffing costs	£142,850
CAB Housing Advice Contract	£97,000
Private Sector Leasing Scheme	£12,000
ODPM funding	£40,000

Capital for new Affordable Housing

In April 2003, LASHG was abolished and debt-free councils were no longer able to recycle funding in this way. The Council therefore had to revise its capital funding programme to ensure that a reasonable level of development could be maintained.

In February 2004, the Council took the decision to commit £2m per year from capital resources to fund our development programme in the medium term.

In addition to this funding is also available to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and developers from the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) However, the Council is working with its Registered Social Landlord partners to identify different ways of providing affordable housing without recourse to public subsidy. This will reduce the amount of funding required in order to provide more affordable housing in the future.

Capital Funding - Private Sector Renewal

In addition to the funding for affordable housing, the District Council also has a budget for grants to enable people to remain in their own homes.

The Capital budget for Housing Renewal for 2006/07 is split as follows:

- £650,000 for disabled adaptations.
- £447,000 for other discretionary assistance, the majority of which will be used to ensure that the Council meets its housing renewal standards regarding the Decent Homes Standard.

Supporting People Funding

Following on from the Supporting People review of services for homeless households in Wiltshire, the Supporting People Team identified a shortfall in services in North Wiltshire, and have committed revenue funding for an increased supply of supported housing for single homeless people. This will ensure that people who have previously been homeless will receive the necessary support to live independent lives and assist the Council in meeting the Government target for reducing the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010.

Priorities

The District Council's 2020 vision for housing is "To ensure decent housing for everyone". We are aiming to achieve this by:

- Maximising the opportunities for a decent home for everyone
- Agreeing a way forward to continue to develop new affordable housing in the District.

The reasons for the high priority of housing in the District Council are that house prices are high, local people rate housing services as a high priority and we have mandatory responsibilities for some housing services. We also recognise that we need innovative schemes to provide affordable housing and that we need to focus on preventing homelessness and making best use of existing stock including bringing empty homes back into use.

Three priorities were identified in the District Council's Housing Strategy, they were:

- Maximising the supply of affordable housing
- Reducing homelessness
- Improving private sector housing

Priority	Corporate Priority	Needs Evidence	Consultation Feedback
Priority 2 Reduce Homelessness National, Regional and Sub-Regional Priority	Helps to meet the Council's 2020 vision of decent housing for everyone. Community Strategy highlighted the need for affordable housing, especially for vulnerable people Housing is one of the Corporate Priorities	155 people were accepted as homeless in 2005/2006 There were 55 homeless households in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2006.	Consultation for our Housing Strategy ranked the prevention of homelessness as 2 nd overall. Homelessness Strategy Consultation highlighted the need to "explore innovative ways to prevent and tackle homelessness".

Reducing Homelessness

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a new requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy focused on the prevention of homelessness in their districts, and the provision of appropriate accommodation and support for households accepted as homeless under the Homelessness legislation.

This has given North Wiltshire District Council the opportunity to work with partners in taking a more strategic approach to address and prevent homelessness in the District.

Financial Context

The cost to a Local Authority of processing homelessness applications and accommodating people in temporary accommodation is constantly increasing. Successful prevention means savings to the Local Authority as a whole.

For example, £1000 could pay for the deposit and rent in advance for a family in the private sector on a long-term tenancy of 12-24 months. 50% of this money would be reclaimable back from the first Housing Benefit payment and the remaining 50% at the end of the tenancy. If placing an average family into temporary accommodation, £1000 would cover approximately 2 weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation.

The conclusion is that preventing people from needing to stay in expensive temporary accommodation not only improves people's lives but is also extremely cost effective.

Social Context

'ODPM Policy Briefing No 4: Prevention of Homelessness' identifies the other costs of homelessness. It covers areas such as the physical and mental health deterioration of clients and the disruption to children and families.

Three levels of cost can be seen in relation to homelessness. The direct cost to the Homelessness Department, the cost to the Council as a whole and the indirect cost to the local district due to a fall in the quality of life

It is our intention improve our service to people in housing need in the following ways:

1. Prevention
2. Eliminate use of B&B and reduce use of temporary accommodation
3. Improve services to homeless people
4. Improve interagency working
5. Improve monitoring systems

1. Prevention of Homelessness

Homelessness legislation originated as an emergency measure for those few people who might be homeless – literally ‘roofless’. Over time, due to external market pressures and internal practices it has become, instead, a fast track into social housing.

The emphasis on prevention is the result of the increasing demand upon homelessness departments and the subsequent costs of temporary accommodation. Since 2002 the work of Local Authority homelessness departments across England has been changing radically. This has involved a move away from the delivery of statutory homelessness duties. Instead, the focus is now on preventing people from becoming homeless. This approach was formalised by legislation in 2002 and has continued to be strengthened and emphasised by the current Government in a series of targets, reports, good practice recommendations and Statutory Orders. In view of the success that the prevention approach is having, this trend looks set to continue.

The aim of this is to return the statutory homelessness duty to an emergency-only requirement, the exception rather than the rule. This requires a very different way of dealing with homelessness. Success in preventing homelessness begins with a change in perspective, viewpoint and culture within the Local Authority and the homelessness department. Without this understanding of the difference in culture and approach, prevention is difficult to make succeed because its way of working is so different from the traditional approach.

It is worth briefly mentioning that future legislation looks set to further increase the requirement for effective prevention. The ODPM publication ‘Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives. 2005’, states that the ODPM is consulting on changes in legislation to strengthen the provision of preventative actions and use of the private sector.

Prevention means:

- Preventing a person from losing their current accommodation, or
- Enabling a person to find new accommodation.

Prevention does NOT mean:

- Preventing a person from making a homelessness application.

Prevention is different:

- Prevention owes little to traditional homelessness practice.
- Prevention takes a creative not legislative approach to dealing with situations.
- Prevention means giving people options or support to keep or find accommodation.
- Prevention requires a different departmental culture to homelessness.

Good prevention makes a homeless application **unnecessary**.

The key to preventing homelessness is to explore housing options at an early stage, whether this is looking at solutions for securing someone's present accommodation or looking at alternatives for moving on.

Some of the available options are:

- Mediation with family or friends to stay in current accommodation
- Negotiation with landlords and/or Housing Benefits to prevent the termination of a tenancy
- Provision of a Rent Deposit to obtain accommodation in the Private Rented Sector
- Introduction of a Host Family Scheme to prevent young vulnerable people being placed in inappropriate Bed & Breakfast accommodation
- Joint home visits to tenants in Housing Association properties who are facing eviction for arrears or anti social behaviour

The Homelessness Advice and Prevention Service Review also identified areas of good practice from other authorities, which could be successfully employed in North Wiltshire:

Advice Databases.

One authority has purchased the EIS (Electronic Information System), which CAB uses, and trained its own staff to use it. This was as a more cost effective alternative to contracting out an advice service to the CAB. Even with several licences it was cheaper than contracting out the equivalent advice service and was felt to be more empowering for staff. There was no difference to clients as precisely the same information was being given.

Structuring the banding scheme of Choice Based Lettings to remove the incentives to applying as homeless.

As an example, in such a scheme a person in private rented accommodation is banded the same as a person accepted as homeless. After 5 years in the private sector they are banded higher. A mother and child at a parental home are banded at the same rate as a homeless person. After 1 year, they are banded higher. There is thus little incentive under this mode of operating for a person to apply as homeless unless it is a genuine emergency. In this authority such an approach was the basis of their prevention method.

The Housing Strategy & Policy Officer will be reviewing the Allocations Policy in 2006/07, which will include a review of Choice Based Lettings.

Pre-eviction checklist

Every RSL must complete this before evicting. Details include household members, income, stage of the eviction, referrals made to CAB or other debt advice agency and what efforts have been made to deal with the rent debts or behaviour if relevant. This is good for the housing department and also for the RSL as it makes eviction procedures more consistent.

Verification

Many Local Authorities use credit check agencies and the land registry as a matter of course for checking applicant's financial and address details and to confirm the authority to evict. Officers in the Homelessness Team are currently investigating the use of Experian Credit Reference Agency.

Staff training

This was felt to be of utmost importance to many Councils emphasising prevention. One Local Authority encouraged individual staff members to become specialists in certain areas, to attend all relevant training in that area and to become mentors for other staff on that subject. This was seen as a valuable alternative to the prohibitive cost of all staff attending all training. Other Local Authorities with less staff felt it important for all staff to be regularly updated in case law, court training and prevention issues.

Parental Evictions

Parental evictions are a major cause of homelessness approaches and should not be treated as a simple licensee eviction. They should be taken as serious actions which require multi-agency involvement, close attention from the Homelessness Department to check all facts, including home visits and the attendance of the parents at the homelessness offices for all interviews.

There is a need to present as many options as possible to both parent and young person and to strongly seek involvement from the parents or family in helping the young person deal with their housing future. Linking this with a comprehensive multi-agency approach and joint assessments increases the likelihood of prevention by presenting more options to the parent and young person.

Mental Health

Few Local Authorities have any specific schemes for clients with mental health difficulties or substance abuse issues. One very successful scheme provides training and support for landlords in accommodating this client group. Payments are made to landlords according to the level of care each client requires. Tenancies tend to be lengthy due to the relationship which grows between landlord and tenant. The organisation responsible for this scheme is keen to expand into North Wiltshire.

Helping people to help themselves

Instead of simply paying for a person's rent and deposit, the Prevention Department can work closely with an individual or family to help them to save their own rent and deposit money. Such an approach prevents dependency on the Council and instead successfully empowers people to gain accommodation through their own efforts.

Matching people's savings, where necessary, can be a powerful incentive. Such a way of working also includes involving a person's family and friends, accessing other funding sources where they exist, training people in budgeting

and personal finance skills and education about finding private accommodation. This method is more intensive in terms of staff time spent working with a person but saves money for the Council and has greater long term benefits for the clients themselves.

The use of the waiting list as an early warning system

Many Local Authorities use the waiting list as the basis for their prevention management. This can range from an early warning system of housing difficulties to the active management of the banding system in such a way as to remove the incentives which encourage people to apply as homeless.

Establishing local surgeries for housing advice

Whether for general advice or specifically aimed at young people or relationship breakdown, this is an excellent means of gaining early detection of a person's housing problems.

Housing Benefits

It is very important that departments ensure they are spending all of their Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) as a prevention tool, and some Homelessness Departments have taken control of this budget from Housing Benefits. Training staff in verification procedures, with the use of scanners to enable such work to be done during home visits, is extremely valuable in removing the commonest cause of delays to Housing Benefit payments.

Both Principal Homelessness Officers are currently evaluating the above examples of good practice prior to the Housing Advice Service coming back in-house at the end of September 2006.

2. Eliminate the Use of B&B and reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation

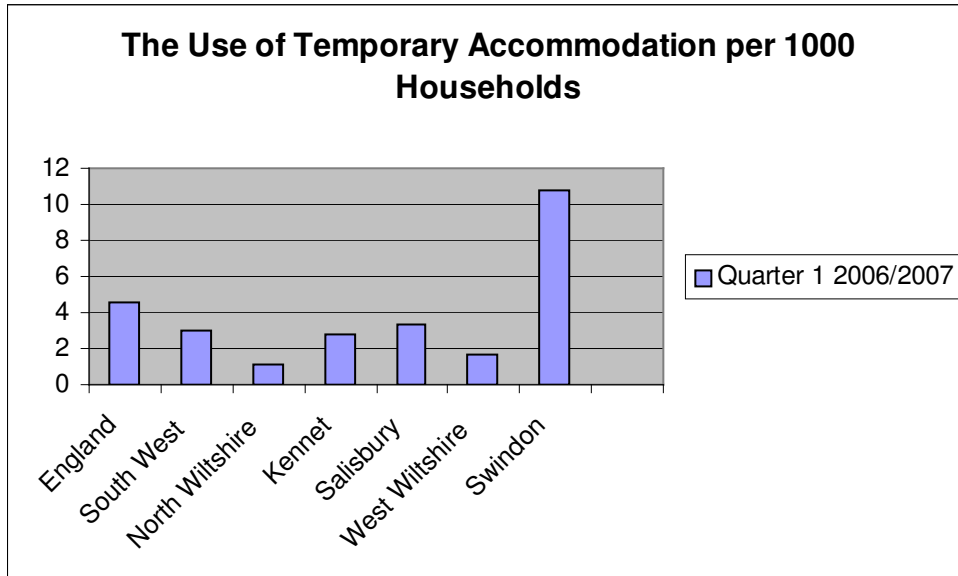
Our use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, particularly for families, has reduced radically. In 2003/2004 the average length of time families spent in B&B was 9 weeks, however for the past two years, the ODPM target of no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks has been met and exceeded. In many cases the use of B&B is avoided altogether, but where this is unavoidable, the average length of time a family spends in B&B is now less than 3 weeks.

This has been brought about by both an increase in prevention work and the successful launch of the Housing Association Leasing Scheme, which now enables the Homelessness Team to offer a range of temporary accommodation to homeless families in the District.

The Government's temporary accommodation target, issued in January 2005, requires all Local Authorities to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation by half over the next 4 years. This has implications for increasing the effectiveness of any prevention measures.

The Council is committed to eliminating the use of Bed & Breakfast and reducing the use of, and length of stay in, temporary accommodation wherever possible.

As can be seen in this graph, North Wiltshire District Council is currently performing well in keeping the use of Temporary accommodation to a minimum. However, as the baseline figure for households in temporary accommodation as at December 2004 was 77, the number of households must be reduced to 38 by 31st March 2010



Units of Temporary Accommodation currently available

	Units	Client Group
Avonside Hostel	21	Families and Singles
PSL/HAL Schemes	28	Families
Wood Lane Hostel	4	Single Men
DV Refuges	10	Women Fleeing Violence
Total	63	

Avonside Hostel

This provision is owned and managed by Westlea Housing Association and is due for refurbishment. Westlea have applied to the Housing Corporation for funding to re-provide this accommodation on smaller sites in the Chippenham area. In total there will be 19 x 2 bedroomed flats for smaller homeless families. It is anticipated that this accommodation will be completed by the end of 2008.

DV Refuges

There are currently 2 Domestic Violence refuges in North Wiltshire, providing 10 units of accommodation. However, at any one time there are only 7 or 8 units occupied by households for whom NWDC has accepted a Section 193 duty. There are no plans to increase or decrease the provision for this client group.

Wood Lane Hostel

This accommodation is currently used for single homeless men under a Section 193 duty. The recent Supporting People review of homelessness services has identified a need for supported housing for single people with complex needs. Provision of this type would be more appropriate for many of the client group currently accommodated in Wood Lane and would therefore remove the need to keep this accommodation.

PSL/HAL Schemes

There are 2 schemes operational in North Wiltshire at the moment, providing 28 units of self contained accommodation throughout the North Wiltshire district.

In the 2 years that these schemes have been operating we have identified that some property sizes and locations have been more difficult to allocate. In particular, smaller properties in the more remote towns have been problematic. In order to ensure that our PSL/HAL properties are the most appropriate in terms of size and location, and as smaller homeless families will be accommodated in the re-provision of the Avonside hostel, the number of properties will be reduced to 10/12 x 3 or 4 bedroom properties in the towns of Chippenham and Calne. This will ensure that appropriate temporary accommodation will be available for larger homeless families.

Quarterly Projected Temporary Accommodation 2006/2007

The number of households in temporary accommodation at 31st December 2005 was 55; this already represents a decrease of 29% on the baseline figure of 77 at 31st December 2004.

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2006/2007	55	54	53	52
2007/2008	51	50	49	48

Annual Projected Use of Temporary Accommodation 2006/2010

Quarter 1 – 31st March	Reduction in TA
2006	55
2007	51
2008	48
2009	43
2010	38

The Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA), involves working with Supporting People to increase supported housing in the District by remodelling current services and accommodation to ensure that the number of young people housed in unsuitable accommodation is significantly reduced by 2008. In addition the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for young people will be eliminated.

Through the Supporting People review of homelessness services in Wiltshire a need has been identified in North Wiltshire for more supported temporary accommodation for single homeless people. The provision of such new temporary accommodation should further reduce the need to use Bed and Breakfast establishments.

3. Improve Services to Homeless People

The Housing Team regularly consults homeless households on the quality of service provided to them and the level of satisfaction recorded is consistently high. It is planned to improve the current satisfaction survey and use the information gathered to make further improvements in our services.

The contract for our Housing Advice service was recently reviewed using the principles of Best Value. Consultation took place with other local authorities, stakeholders and service users and examples of good practice gathered from local authorities identified as high performing in housing services. The information gathered was then used to propose future options for the provision of an effective and customer-focussed homelessness and housing advice service. The new service, due to begin on 1st October 2006, will provide a more comprehensive and proactive service to people in housing need.

Community Four, a consortium of four local organisations (Westlea Housing Association, Splitz Support Service, Drugs & Homelessness Initiative and Alabare Christian Care Centres) provides a housing-related floating support service across the whole of Wiltshire. The floating support service is designed to help vulnerable people settle into a new home or stay in their current one. Support is given for up to two years before it “floats” off to someone else. The aim of the service is to help people work through their own problems and become more confident in living independently in their own homes by offering advice on debt issues, budgeting, benefits entitlement and housing rights and responsibilities

Doorway, previously known as North Wiltshire Homelessness Project, was established as a result of our first homelessness consultation day. The project is a partnership between CVS North Wilts and the Salvation Army, and the District Council is represented on the multi agency advisory group. Originally started as a pilot scheme consisting of a drop-in day centre providing a safe, friendly environment with food, clothing and practical help, Doorway was relaunched in January 2006 as a permanent facility with the ultimate aim of becoming a 7 days a week service. The project offers guests a safe, supportive, empowering and non-judgemental environment in which to promote the growth of self-esteem, confidence and aspirations.

North Wiltshire District Council is currently considering the implementation of a sanctuary scheme. This scheme provides security measures to allow victims of domestic violence to remain in their own homes should they choose to do so, if safety can be guaranteed and the violent partner no longer lives in the home.

Waste Not, Want Not is a registered charity, staffed by volunteers that collects, free of charge, unwanted items of serviceable furniture and household goods to pass on, at affordable prices, to families and individuals on low income benefits.

In September 2003 2 posts of Specialist Housing Co-ordinators (Mental Health) were established in North Wiltshire and Kennet with joint funding from both District Councils and Kennet and North Wilts PCT. The postholders work with people who have mental health problems and are homeless or threatened with homelessness. These posts were initially for a three year period and an evaluation report was commissioned to consider the future of the service.

The evaluation was carried out over a 6 week period and has made the following recommendations:

- The specialist housing and mental health coordination service should be put on a more permanent footing
- Further sources of funding should be investigated eg Supporting People, social services, housing providers and strategic partnerships such as the Crime Reduction Partnerships
- A Wiltshire Strategy for Mental Health and Housing needs to be developed
- Protocols and procedures need to be in place to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clarified

4. Improve inter agency working

In order to provide a consistent service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is important to work with partners to improve our services. We therefore recognise the importance of good interagency working, particularly at local level.

The 4 District Councils and Wiltshire County Council have agreed a joint protocol for young people at risk. This ensures that homeless or potentially homeless young people will have a consistent service regardless of the agency they first approach.

In addition to this, all four District councils and the County Council are working in partnership on the Local Public Service Agreement, the aim of which is to eliminate the use of B&B and have no young people in unsuitable accommodation by 2008.

The Homelessness Team is involved in a Wiltshire wide homelessness forum to share good practice and innovation. The group are currently proposing to pool resources to make a DVD for schools and colleges in order to raise awareness of the realities of homelessness for young people.

The Team also work closely with other agencies such as Connexions, the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel, Probation, Social Services and Health in order to ensure that vulnerable homeless people are housed in the most appropriate accommodation with access to support as necessary.

5. Improve monitoring systems

We are working with the suppliers of our computerised homelessness system to improve monitoring. At the moment, much of the information is collected manually and it has been difficult to monitor trends such as repeat homelessness. An improved monitoring system will enable us to target our resources more effectively. Visits to neighbouring Local Authorities to assess IT software have been planned for the near future.

Performance & Consultation

In summarising the progress made since 2002 and the current practices of the Homelessness Department, it is worth bearing in mind that the original strategy was produced when the entire prevention drive was still very new to everyone. It is not therefore to be expected that ideas stated at the time were necessarily the best ones to carry out, so there is often a good reason why projects have not developed as originally intended. For the same reason, as staff have become more knowledgeable about prevention, new ideas and schemes have been generated which were not thought of when the strategy was written.

Supporting People have stepped in to a lot of roles where the department originally planned to have activity but were unable to do so. This has been very beneficial. Supporting People have now published their 5 year strategy for North Wiltshire with ODPM support. This is fully focussed on the prevention of homelessness across the County.

Generally, good progress has been made on meeting targets and providing an effective homelessness service. However, with prevention now becoming the primary function of Homelessness Departments it is clear that more closely focussed work needs to be done in this area, using the benefit of hindsight and other Local Authority's experiences.

Since the publication of the first Homelessness Strategy, the Housing Team have had some success in reducing the number of people presenting as homeless. This has been the result of areas of good practice as identified in the review of the Homelessness and Advice services. These areas are:

Enquiry Form

From the graph on page 25, it can be seen that from Qtr4/2004 a substantial reduction in applications taken has been experienced. This is due to the introduction of Enquiry Forms for all those whose situation does not warrant a full homelessness application. Prior to this, homelessness forms were issued to most people presenting, even if the decision was likely to be negative.

The enquiry forms have a number of benefits. They have had an impact upon the statutory returns for North Wiltshire District Council. They have also freed up Homelessness Officer time to work more closely on those cases which are taken, rather than processing decisions for people to whom no duty would be owed. Use of the enquiry forms also creates a space where the Homelessness Officer can focus on what advice and assistance can be given to a person unrelated to a homelessness application. This is the beginning of genuine prevention work.

15' Point letter

For clients who enquire but are not offered a full homelessness application, where statutory homelessness is established but there is no priority need, this letter is issued. It gives authorisation to Westlea Housing Association to award extra points for homelessness. Such a letter is an option to preventing the need to apply as homeless.

Relationship with Westlea Housing Association

NWDC enjoys a good working relationship with Westlea Housing Association (WHA), who manage the waiting list on a contract basis. WHA provide details of people who may be evicted and, as set out in this review, are keen to work with NWDC in the area of prevention. They are able to provide an early warning system through the housing register of anyone who may become homeless and so alert the homelessness prevention team.

Good links with Housing Benefit

There are now regular meeting with officers from the Housing Benefit team, who have identified a dedicated officer to liase with the Homelessness team. As a result of this, Housing Benefit claims for households in temporary accommodation have been fast tracked.

Staff Commitment

Existing staff show a high degree of commitment and interest in their work and are keen to learn new skills and ways of working. Staff show a genuine desire to be working with people to actively help and improve their situations. This is a great strength in any drive towards prevention. There is a good understanding amongst staff of the issues around homelessness, of the wider picture and of current services in the area.

Protocols and links with other organisations

The Housing Team has been working closely with local partners and have introduced a range of new services and initiatives. These include a Drop-in centre for homeless people, a teenage-parents supported housing scheme, an additional refuge for women fleeing domestic violence and a Housing Association Leasing Scheme to provide self contained accommodation throughout the district for homeless families.

The Housing Team have also been working closely with the County Council, Kennet DC, West Wiltshire DC and Salisbury DC on a joint protocol for homeless young people. This protocol, which clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies facilitates closer joint working and was launched in North Wiltshire on 23rd November 2005.

Home Improvement Agency.

Works with partners to deliver grants, advice and assistance to enable people to remain in their own homes through repairs, adaptations, community alarms and the funding of a Handyman Service.

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs)

These are Government set Indicators against which the performance of all Councils is measured. The following BVPIs are the benchmark for the homelessness service:

BVPI Number	Description	Target 05/06	Performance	Target 06/07	Target 07/08	Target 08/09
183a	Average length of stay in B&B	3 weeks	2.3 weeks	2.5 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks
183b	Average length of stay in hostel	21 weeks	17 weeks	16 weeks	15 weeks	14 weeks
202	Number of rough sleepers	5	7	5	5	5
203	Percentage change in average number of families in temporary accommodation	-10%	-24.5%	-10%	-10%	-10%
213	Number of households who considered themselves as homeless who approached the LHA's housing advice service and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation	New PI	0.37%	1%	1.5%	2%
214	Proportion of households accepted as statutorily homeless by the same Local Authority within the last two years	New PI	4.52%	4%	4%	4%
225	Actions against Domestic violence	27%	55%	64%	72%	81%

Consultation

The people of North Wiltshire ranked preventing homelessness as the second highest priority during the consultation on our Housing Strategy 2005/2008.

The review of the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service undertook considerable consultation as an integral part the process. The following agencies and organisations were consulted:

Westlea Housing Association, Wiltshire Supporting People, Alabare Christian Care, North Wiltshire Homeless Project, Bromford Housing Association, Will Rolt Solicitors, Social Services, Knightstone Housing Association, Kennet District Council, North Wiltshire Probation Services, Connexions, Reach Out, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community First.

Thirteen Local Authorities were also interviewed (12 of these through personal visits interviewing department managers and staff), regarding their departmental organisation and their advice and prevention schemes. The Local Authorities were: Bath & North East Somerset Council, Canterbury City Council, Colchester Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Kennet District Council, Mendip District Council, London Borough of Newham, North Norfolk District Council, Salisbury District Council, Stratford Upon Avon District Council, Swindon Borough Council, West Wiltshire District Council, Worthing Borough Council.

Service users were contacted via mailed questionnaires derived from the existing records of people who had been through the statutory homelessness route and those who had made enquiries only. Local organisations were also sent questionnaires to give to their clients to complete and return. This was felt to be an effective means of gaining responses as such organisations work directly with a wide range of client groups. Homelessness Officers also gave out questionnaires during every interview throughout a three month period.

Service User Consultation

The response to this consultation was particularly disappointing, of the 135 questionnaires sent to people who had used the service, 5 responses were received.

90 questionnaires were handed out to all participating organisations. Of these, 8 were completed by organisations with their clients. Of these, 6 were from one organisation and 2 from another single organisation. No responses were received via the website suggestion box.

In summary, 225 questionnaires were sent out and 13 were received back. This represents a response rate of <6% and cannot be taken to be a statistically significant figure. Never the less, the responses provided are typical of similar surveys and do provide a guide to people's use of and perception of local services.

28% made CAB their first point of contact for housing advice.
44% made NWDC their first point of contact for housing advice.
28% contacted Westlea first.

People who contact CAB first were referred to NWDC.
Everyone who contacted Westlea was put on the general housing list.
People who contacted NWDC were referred to Westlea if they were not already on the housing register.

50% of people were happy with the advice they received.
50% were not happy with the service they received.

64% made contact with the CAB at some point during their enquiry.
36% did not use CAB at all.

1 person reviewed Kennet Council instead of NWDC.

Suggestions for NWDC:

- Be more helpful - explain things better and make it simpler to understand.
- Give more advice.
- Give a better idea of how long it will take to be housed.
- Set out what they can and can't do.
- Give clarification of the points system.
- Provide a timescale.
- Take vulnerability more seriously.
- Independent representation for people on the street.
- More drop-in facilities.
- More people to help - people who do more than fill in a form or give access to a telephone.
- More sympathetic, understanding attitude.
- Open access hostel.

Suggestions for CAB:

- More staff to help more people.
- Improve quality of information.
- Make it clearer as to what they can and can't help with.
- Train people who have had similar life experiences.
- More relaxed and welcoming environment.
- Provide more information and support.
- Better system so that you don't have to wait so long for help.
- Broaden the criteria for helping people and open up housing to people in difficult situations.
- Cut waiting times.

For the full response to the consultation please see The Homelessness Service Review on our website www.northwilts.gov.uk

Action	Target Date	Lead Officer	Links with other Agencies/ Teams	Resources Required	Linked Strategies
Reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 50%	March 2010	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Westlea HA, Supporting People	To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, Government Target
Produce a DVD for use in schools and colleges to educate young people about the realities of homelessness	September 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	WWDC, Kennet DC, Salisbury DC	Approximately £1,000 for each District (DCLG Grant)	Corporate Plan Housing Strategy
Introduce mediation services and/or secure mediation training for staff	March 2007	Sylvia Spensley		£1000 (DCLG Grant)	Corporate Plan Housing Strategy
Ensure vulnerable households are given the support they require in order to maintain their accommodation	Ongoing	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Community 4 and Supporting People	Officer time	Supporting People Strategy, Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Work with Westlea HA Housing Management team to introduce a pre-eviction checklist	March 2007	Sylvia Spensley	Westlea,	Officer time	Housing Strategy Corporate Plan
Work with Housing Benefits to explore better use of Discretionary Housing	November 2006	Sylvia Spensley	Customer Services	Officer time	Housing Strategy Corporate Plan

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Payments					
Produce customer information leaflets and ensure they are widely available in all possible outlets	October 2006	Sylvia Spensley	Jan Parry Dawn Harding	Officer time	Housing Strategy, Corporate Plan
Review the Homelessness Strategy and update the Action Plan	Annually in October	Jan Parry	Housing Options Team	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Investigate the introduction of a Sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic violence	October 2006	Lindsay Megson	Mark Rippon, Police, Bobby Van	Officer time, resources yet to be identified	Housing Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Community Strategy, Corporate Plan
Ensure key documents are available in main languages	March 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley		To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, Equality & Diversity Strategy
Convene a quarterly North Wiltshire Housing Options Forum for all partner organisations	February 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley		Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Use the Forum to develop a protocol on information sharing	February 2008	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Housing Options Forum	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Improve mechanisms for seeking customers views eg Annual Survey, focus groups, user rep on Forum	April 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Housing Options Forum	To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Ensure all relevant information is	Ongoing	Joelle Moore	Housing	Officer time	Corporate Plan,

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available on the Council website			Options Team		Housing Strategy, E-government
Conduct a review of the Allocations Policy and Housing Needs Register contract	March 2007	Jan Parry	Westlea HA	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Review Choice Based Lettings and identify the most appropriate scheme for the District	March 2007	Jan Parry	Westlea and other Local Authorities	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Expand and develop the Rent Deposit Scheme	December 2006	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Kevin Fellows	Officer time plus £10,000 (DCLG Grant)	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Develop stronger links within the District Council eg Community Partnerships	Ongoing	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Community Partnership Team	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, Community Strategy
Develop Host Family Scheme	March 2007	Jill Neal/ Kevin Fellows	Leaving Care Team	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, LPSA2
Introduce Nightstop Scheme	October 2007	Sylvia Spensley/ Lindsay Megson		To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy,
Introduce Rural Housing Advice Surgeries	October 2008	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley		To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, Community Strategy

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Improve Customer Contact and interview facilities	March 2007	Jill Neal	Customer Services	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Improve links with private landlords eg landlords forum, accreditation scheme	May 2007	Jill Neal/Jackie McLaughlin/Helen Madle	Environmental Health, Housing Benefits	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Investigate the use of IT for remote working eg handhelds on home visits	November 2006	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	IT	To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy, E-government
Evaluate and purchase Advice Database	March 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Customer & Business Support Team	To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Investigate the use of the Housing Needs Register as an early warning for homeless prevention	February 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Westlea HA	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Identify a budget for defending review decisions in Court	November 2006	Janet O'Brien		£10,000	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Officers to have training on Housing Benefit verification	April 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	Housing Benefits	To be determined	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
All caseworkers to work generically but to develop specialisms in specific areas eg Domestic Violence, Mental Health	March 2008	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley		Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy

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etc					
Work with partner organisations to achieve LPSA target (no 16/17 year old in unsuitable temporary accommodation)	March 2008	Janet O'Brien/ Jackie McLaughlin	WWDC, Kennet DC, Salisbury DC, Wiltshire CC	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Investigate the possibility of extending the Mental Health and Housing Co-ordinator Project	March 2007	Jill Neal/Sylvia Spensley	WWDC, Kennet DC. Health Service	£10,000	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy
Reduce the number of evictions due to anti-social behaviour	October 2007	Sylvia Spensley /Lindsay Megson	Mark Rippon, Westlea HA	Officer time	Corporate Plan, Housing Strategy