



Homeless Strategy

2008 - 2013



**WAKEFIELD
HOMELESSNESS
STRATEGY
2008 – 2013**

NOVEMBER 2008

Contents

1. Background
2. Context
 - National Context
 - i. Youth Homelessness
 - ii. Health
 - iii. Employment
 - Regional Context
 - Sub Regional and Local Housing Context
 - Local Strategies
3. Tackling Homelessness in Wakefield: The Last 5 Years
 - Prevention
 - Provision and Access
 - Support
 - Reasons for Homelessness
4. Tackling Homelessness in Wakefield: Moving Forwards
 - Overview and Future Direction
 - Issues Arising from Consultation
 - Aims and Objectives Moving Forwards
 - Delivery Structures

Section 1: Background

- 1.1 In 2003 the first homelessness strategy and action plan for Wakefield was produced. This brought together a wide range of partners in the district, all of whom shared a real commitment to work together on improving the lives of people in Wakefield, especially the most disadvantaged, vulnerable or those in crisis. It set out how homelessness in the district would be tackled and how services and support for vulnerable and homeless people could be improved.
- 1.2 The Wakefield homelessness strategy aimed to:
 - Prevent homelessness wherever possible;
 - Ensure there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless; and
 - Ensure there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- 1.3 Underneath these aims sat ambitious objectives which were designed to see a step change in homelessness prevention and support in the district, they were to:
 - Establish the Open Door Service;
 - Adequately resource the Homelessness Service to improve service delivery and meet increasing demand;
 - Provide more temporary and emergency accommodation and manage existing resources more effectively;
 - Establish an inclusive allocations system compliant with the Homelessness Act 2002 and address barriers that make it difficult for homeless and vulnerable people to access accommodation;
 - Improve the efficiency, co-ordination and provision of supported accommodation in the District to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people; and
 - Work in a co-ordinated way, with partners, to prevent homelessness wherever possible.¹
- 1.4 To ensure the delivery of this strategy an implementation group was set up. Membership of this group included those with a role in homelessness prevention and support, for example local housing associations, the PCT, the YMCA and partners from across many departments in Wakefield MDC. This group has overseen the success in reducing homelessness in Wakefield. Further details of this success can be found in section 3.
- 1.5 The implementation group, along with officers from Open Door and Strategic Housing and other partners and stakeholders have been reviewing the homelessness strategy, which, together with completion

¹ 'Wakefield District Homelessness Strategy' Wakefield MDC, July 2003.

of “Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check”² and statistical analysis provides the basis for this updated strategy.

- 1.6 The purpose of this document is to set the framework for tackling homelessness over the next five years in Wakefield. It will build on the successes of the past five years and will develop a forward programme of activity, which brings about continuous improvement. This is a timely piece of work given the current economic environment, where the number of home repossessions is rising, social housing waiting lists are among the highest in the country³, unemployment is increasing and the country is entering a recession. This strategy also follows the successful transfer of housing stock to Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) and the development of the Councils new housing enabling role; as such it is appropriate and timely to review housing services in this context.
- 1.7 The next section sets the national, regional and local context for the homelessness strategy, it highlights the current policy direction and key issues to address; Section 3 describes some of the significant achievements in tackling homelessness in Wakefield and looks at the statistical improvements that have been made; Section 4 then identifies the key issues that need to be tackled looking forwards and sets out the aims and objectives which will frame the programme of work over the next five years.

Section 2: Context

Local Strategies

- 2.1 Wakefield’s Community Strategy sets out three challenges: safer and stronger communities; healthier communities; and skills, enterprise and work. The priorities under the safer and stronger communities challenge encompass a number of areas related to the prevention of homelessness, including; dealing with antisocial behaviour and neighbourhood issues, domestic abuse, young people involved in crime and supporting families and strengthening communities.
- 2.2 The voluntary and community sector is a cross cutting challenge in the Community Strategy and is highly relevant to the homelessness agenda. The voluntary and community sector play a vital role in the well being of the district and in particular the needs of disadvantaged communities. The community strategy aims to:
- Increase capacity in the sector; and
 - Increase the involvement of the sector in delivery.

² ‘Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check’ Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, Department for Communities and Local Government, September 2006.

³ The Times, Monday 10 November

- 2.3 The community strategy has two targets (Local Area Agreement Indicators) which are directly related to homelessness, these are:
- Number of homeless acceptances at 200 in 2009, against a baseline of 326 in 2004/05; and
 - 90 households in temporary accommodation by 2009, compared to a baseline of 242 in 2004/05.
- 2.4 Responsibility for homelessness in Wakefield sits within the Family Services Directorate. The vision for this directorate is, '*Family Services work with families, individuals and communities to improve lives*'. There are a number of priorities for Family Services, including putting service users in control and giving them choice, improving health, economic well being and quality of life and supporting empowerment and self reliance. These are all key to effectively tackling homelessness.
- 2.5 Sitting within Family Services is Supporting People, which provides housing support to enable a vulnerable person to live independently within their community. This critical support enables individuals and families to stay in their accommodation. Without this homelessness would be a much bigger problem.
- 2.6 The complementary nature of Supporting People and the Homelessness Service is reflected on a number of different levels. Both directorates sit within Family Services and are the responsibility of one Service Director; this ensures a joined up approach strategically and operationally. The three priority client groups identified in the Wakefield Supporting People programme are:
- Families at risk of domestic violence;
 - Offenders with complex needs; and
 - People at risk of homelessness.
- Clearly identifying people at risk of homelessness as a priority client group demonstrates the importance given to tackling homelessness in Wakefield. In addition to this the two other groups, families at risk of domestic violence and offenders with complex needs are two of the groups most at risk of homelessness, therefore providing timely support to these other two priority groups will go a long way to preventing homelessness. It should also be noted that these priority groups have been agreed not just by the Local Authority, but also by partners in the district.
- 2.7 Social landlords have a key role to play in tackling homelessness. The Housing Corporation has made tackling homelessness a priority and they are looking for a step change in how Housing Associations respond to homelessness so communities and neighbourhoods are sustainable in the long term. WDH being the largest landlord in the district plays a key role in tackling homelessness. Their homelessness strategy for 2007-2010 sets ambitious yet deliverable plans for preventing homelessness, making better use of existing stock, developing successful partnerships and promoting sustainable and mixed communities.

- 2.8 Wakefield District PCT has a clear focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, which includes those who are homeless or potentially homeless. Their commissioning strategy sets the following intentions: to find out more about the health needs of homeless people and their experiences when accessing statutory sector health services; to prevent homelessness caused by poor health; reductions in poor health especially mental ill health caused by homelessness; to improve the health care for homeless families in temporary accommodation; and to improve the overall experience of homeless people when using mainstream health services.

The Sub-Regional and Local Housing Context

- 2.9 The West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2008 – 2015⁴ has been endorsed as Wakefield's 'fit for purpose' housing strategy. The action plan alongside this strategy has targets to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010, from 1,172 in 2004 to 586 (by the end of 2006 the figure had reached 1,039). They also have a target of a 30% reduction in the number of homeless (in priority need) acceptances per quarter, starting at a baseline of 1,754 to a target of 1,228. This has been achieved already in West Yorkshire and in the last quarter of 2006 the figure was 902.
- 2.10 A clear priority at a national, regional and local level is to increase the supply of housing. In Wakefield demand for social housing has increased significantly so that in November 2008 over 18,000 households (or 13.6% of households in the city) were on the waiting list for a home⁵. More homes are needed to meet the rising demands of a population that is both increasing and ageing. In Wakefield the Local Development Framework proposes a significant increase in the number of new homes built, and, with the recent growth point status given to Wakefield, house building will be increased even further.
- 2.11 The West Yorkshire Housing Partnership has recently completed a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment this sets out how the needs of gypsies and travellers should be addressed. Addressing these needs will be picked up in the action plan to this strategy.

Regional Context

- 2.12 In the regional housing strategy⁶ homelessness is addressed under the theme of ensuring fair access to quality housing. It aims to ensure that all people, especially those that are vulnerable, have access to a home that meets their requirements and to appropriate advice and support services to provide them with choice an opportunity. There are two targets set; firstly, *'by working in partnership with local authorities, the*

⁴ West Yorkshire Housing Strategy 2008 – 2015, West Yorkshire Housing Partnership.

⁵ Number of Households on local authority 'housing waiting lists' 2007, CLG

⁶ Yorkshire and The Humber Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2021

voluntary sector and specialist agencies as well as positive preventative action to avoid a homelessness crisis, we will reduce the number of acceptances across the region by at least 30% by 2010', secondly, 'continue to ensure that no families with children are placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for longer than six weeks through the region'.

National Context

2.13 Tackling homelessness is a national, regional and local priority. In 2002 Government strengthened its focus on homelessness through the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England). It aimed to:

- Ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district; and
- Strengthen the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness⁷.

2.14 The national strategy for tackling homelessness aims to, expand housing opportunities, including for those who need additional support and for disadvantaged sections of society; and to reduce homelessness by offering a wider range of preventative measures and increasing access to settled homes. Government aims to half the number of households living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010 by:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Providing support for vulnerable people;
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness;
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping; and
- Providing more settled homes.⁸

2.15 This strong national focus on homelessness has resulted in some major achievements:

- Homelessness acceptances peaked in 2003/04 and since then have more than halved, with year on year reductions; between January and March 2008 the number of households that became homeless was 10% lower than the same period in 2007;
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation has been falling since the end of 2005, at the end of March 2008 this figure was down to 77,510, Government is on target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation to 50,500 by 2010;

⁷ 'Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities' Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2006.

⁸ 'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives. A strategy for tackling homelessness.' Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, March 2005.

- Long term use of Bed and Breakfast for families with children has ended and this achievement has been sustained;
- The 1998 target to reduce the number of people sleeping rough by at least two thirds was met a year early in 2001 and is being sustained. There is a current 73% reduction on the 1998 baseline, with approximately 500 rough sleepers on any given night in England.

Youth Homelessness

- 2.16 In November 2006 tackling youth homelessness rose up the Government agenda and a package of measures was announced to tackle this, including:
- A commitment to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds;
 - Improved access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation to young people), so that there is a general expectation of such services; and
 - The creation of a new national supported lodgings development scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.
- 2.17 In addition to this focus on youth homelessness⁹, the Government has issued policy briefings that focus on prevention activities and other more specific themes including improving employment options for homeless people¹⁰, addressing the health needs of homeless people¹¹, improving the quality of hostels and other temporary accommodation¹² and providing more settled homes¹³. This clearly illustrates the vital role that partnership working has to play in tackling homelessness.
- 2.18 It is clear that tackling homelessness is not just a housing issue, to achieve sustainable outcomes the often complex needs of individuals need to be addressed, in particular health needs and employment.

Health

- 2.19 Tackling health inequalities is a top priority across government and the NHS. A Public Service Agreement target is to 'reduce health inequalities by 10% by 2010 as measured by infant mortality and life expectancy at birth'¹⁴. People who are homeless die young. Their average age at death is estimated at about 40, half that for the general

⁹ See also CLG policy briefing 18 (March 2007)

¹⁰ ODPM policy briefing 5 (June 2003)

¹¹ ODPM policy briefing 7 (December 2003)

¹² ODPM policy briefing 8 (March 2004)

¹³ ODPM policy briefing 11 (June 2005)

¹⁴ DH Tackling health inequalities: A programme for action, 2005

population. Prevention of homelessness would contribute to a reduction in overall early mortality rates and help reduce health inequalities.¹⁵

- 2.20 The 2006 White Paper 'Our health, our care, our say'¹⁶ emphasised the importance of local authorities and PCTs working together to provide services for vulnerable groups; including those who are homeless, in temporary accommodation and those potentially homeless. This White Paper also emphasised the need to give people more choice over the services they receive. This focus on choice and personalisation is not just the priority of health, it is echoed in the 2006 CLG White Paper, "Strong and Prosperous Communities"¹⁷ where it advocates individuals control and consultation in how local services are run.
- 2.21 By working together to achieve shared outcomes, local housing authorities and health providers can deliver:
- Marked improvements in the health of homeless people;
 - Reductions in homelessness caused by poor health;
 - Reductions in poor health caused by homelessness; and
 - Improved health support to enable vulnerable clients to maintain their tenancies and reduce health needs.

Employment

- 2.22 Skills, training and employment can be critical in turning lives around and the Government agenda advocates increasing economic competitiveness and getting more people into work. Once individuals secure accommodation then the focus can be moved to getting people into employment. In September 2008 Government announced an initiative to encourage organisations tackling homelessness in England to employ 10% of staff from former rough sleepers, although a relatively small project, this reflects the importance given to getting vulnerable people into employment.

Section 3: Tackling Homelessness in Wakefield: The Last 5 Years

- 3.1 The last five years has seen many achievements in preventing homelessness and promoting independence. In 2006 Wakefield was recognised as a Regional Champion for Tackling Homelessness, one of only 14 local authorities in England to receive this recognition. The Regional Champions were chosen because they had '*developed strengths in tackling and preventing homelessness*' and because

¹⁵ Prevention of homelessness: the role of health and social care, 2007

¹⁶ "Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services", Department of Health, January 2006

¹⁷ "Strong and prosperous communities – The Local Government White Paper" Communities and Local Government, October 2006

central government believed they had '*the skills and expertise to share this good practice with other local authorities*'.¹⁸

- 3.2 Also in 2006 Wakefield was congratulated by central government on meeting the target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010, four years early. At the year-end in 2004/05 there were 242 households in temporary accommodation in Wakefield, in 2005/06 this had reduced to 131 at the year-end, then to 94 in 2006/07. These local trends were in contrast to the regional position where the figure actually rose in 2005/06 to 2,240, before gradually falling. In Wakefield in 2007/08 the numbers in temporary accommodation fell even further, reaching a low of 64 households in temporary accommodation at the end of the first quarter. This figure however has been increasing and at the end of the first quarter of 2008/09 there were 90 people in temporary accommodation. Measures were rapidly put in place to address this increase and again figures have started to fall.
- 3.3 The numbers in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Wakefield fell dramatically between 2004/05 and 2005/06, in the earlier year the figure was the highest in the region at 129, in 2005/06 however just 4 households were in this form of temporary accommodation. Hostel use also declined, from 29 households in 2003/04 to 16 in 2006/07¹⁹. Further details can be found in table 1.
- 3.4 These achievements were the result of significant work by the Open Door project, its partners and stakeholders in Wakefield. It is worth remembering that in 2003, when the first homelessness strategy was prepared, the Open Door project didn't even exist; simply getting this new service up and running demanded completely new ways of joint working to develop a customer focussed one stop shop service.
- 3.5 Nationally in 2003/04 homeless acceptances peaked, this was mirrored in Yorkshire and Humber, but in Wakefield, homeless acceptances were already beginning to decline. There have since been steady year on year reductions. In 2006/07 just 1.2 households in every thousand were accepted as homeless, this is the joint lowest rate in the region (with Craven and Barnsley)²⁰. Further details of this can be found in table 2. They are official Government statistics and figures for 2007/08 have yet to be released. More recent figures for Wakefield however show in 2007/08 acceptances continued to fall to 135, however, in 2008/09 it is projected that acceptances will increase to a level of 175. Potential reasons for this are explored in section 4.

¹⁸ Department of Communities and Local Government Website 2006

¹⁹ Communities and Local Government Statistics

²⁰ Communities and Local Government Statistics

Table 1: Statutory Homelessness: Local Authorities' action under the homeless provisions of the Housing Acts

	Financial Year 02/03		Financial Year 03/04		Financial Year 04/05		Financial Year 05/06		Financial Year 06/07	
	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield
Number of households (000s)	2,101*	133*	2,115**	134**	2,115**	134**	2,115**	134**	2,122***	137***
Households accommodated by the authority	At end March 2003		At end March 2004		At end March 2005		At end March 2006		At end March 2007	
B&B (including shared annex)	440	11	370	26	510	129	450	4	350	5
Hostels (including woman's refuge)	510	28	490	29	450	19	370	15	240	16
LA / HA stock	1,130	178	990	180	750	62	890	17	840	1
Private sector leased	140	0	510	0	320	31	480	95	530	72
Others	50	1	50	0	70	1	50	0	90	0
Total in Temporary Accommodation	2,260	218	2,400	235	2,100	242	2,240	131	2,050	94
'Homeless at home' awaiting accommodation	870	0	3,860	0	2,570	54	1,570	4	1,350	2

Source: CLG

* 2002 mid year revised estimate, ** 2003 mid year revised estimate, *** 2004 mid year estimate

Table 2: Statutory Homelessness: Local Authorities' action under the homeless provisions of the Housing Acts

	Financial Year 02/03		Financial Year 03/04		Financial Year 04/05		Financial Year 05/06		Financial Year 06/07	
	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield	Yorkshire Humber	Wakefield
Number of households (000s)	2,101*	133*	2,115**	134**	2,115**	134**	2,115**	134**	2,122***	137***
Number accepted as homeless and in priority need 1) total, 2) number per 1000 households	1) 15,020 2) 7.1	1) 512 2) 3.8	1) 16,150 2) 7.6	1) 459 2) 3.4	1) 13,430 2) 6.3	1) 326 2) 2.4	1) 9,440 2) 4.5	No data	1) 8,220 2) 3.9	1) 165 2) 1.2
Eligible homeless in priority need, but intentionally	850	37	1,280	53	1,500	61	1,430	No data	1,160	38
Eligible homeless but not in priority need	6,170	144	7,770	203	8,320	274	7,090	No data	5,320	269
Eligible but not homeless	12,020	1,149	13,150	1,228	12,860	557	9,660	No data	8,440	40
Total decisions	34,060	1,842	38,350	1,943	36,090	1,218	27,630	No data	23,140	512

Source: CLG

* 2002 mid year revised estimate, ** 2003 mid year revised estimate, *** 2004 mid year estimate

- 3.6 The interventions used to tackle homelessness in Wakefield can be loosely grouped into three headings, prevention, provision and support. Additionally there are projects that work across these headings, an example of which is the work done by the housing options team. This service works proactively with people who are homeless, those living in temporary accommodation and those who are at risk of homelessness, by exploring a range of housing options and providing realistic advice with the aim of preventing homelessness or speeding up the move on from temporary accommodation.

Prevention

- 3.7 Since 2004/05 there has been significant progress in preventing homelessness. This reflected a change of approach from dealing with homeless applications to the prevention of homelessness. A step change was achieved in October 2005 when the Open Door Project set up a specific team to deal with prevention. Alongside this was the development and implementation of a toolkit of interventions that could be used to prevent households becoming homeless. This toolkit contained initiatives such as the bond guarantee scheme, to help households secure a private rented tenancy.
- 3.8 Playing a key role in preventing homelessness in Wakefield is the Springs Advice Centre. They were set up specifically to tackle homelessness through a wide range of prevention strategies. They recognise the critical value of early intervention and can help individuals and families deal with problems before homelessness even becomes a possibility. They deal with the issues that can put a persons housing at risk, for example, debt issues, benefit problems and tenancy issues.
- 3.9 Statistics for 2007/08 show the scale of the role Springs Advice Centre play in Wakefield. During this period they helped 274 people retain their accommodation, prevented 18 evictions (not including dealing with the early stages of possession proceedings), had 83 eviction warrants and nearly 100 possession orders suspended and overall handled nearly 1800 cases.
- 3.10 Statistics from the Open Door Project show effective homeless prevention services in 2007/08 achieved a 19% reduction in the number of emergency accommodation placements compared to 2006/07 and a 52% reduction compared to 2005/06. This success is also demonstrated through significant reductions in the number of approaches to the homelessness unit as can be seen in table 3.

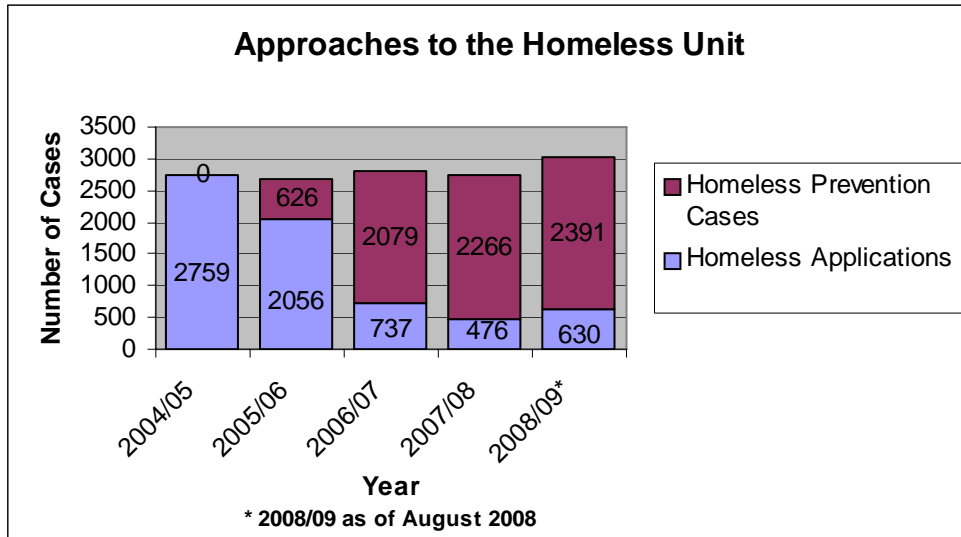


Table 3: Approaches to the Homeless Unit

- 3.11 There have been a number of programmes developed, which, among other objectives, aim to prevent homelessness. Wakefield have used the family intervention project model to develop Families First, this is a scheme designed to deliver intensive support where families with children, or pregnant women are facing eviction and homelessness, this project has demonstrated its importance and has been funded from local sources in 2008 /09, despite a 30% reduction in funding from Government for such projects.
- 3.12 The Step In project is a pilot scheme with Chantry YMCA. It offers age appropriate support to young people and provides housing options to suit an individuals needs. This includes the development of supported lodgings with host families where homeless prevention and reconciliation doesn't succeed.
- 3.13 A Supported Housing team has been established at the Open Door Project. This team provides vulnerable people with support to maintain their tenancies and therefore prevent homelessness. The team also provides support to service users living in temporary homeless accommodation and helps them meet their aspirations to move onto permanent accommodation. This team has made a significant impact on homelessness within the district, and at any given time they are providing support to about 200 local people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Provision and Access

- 3.14 Increasing provision of homes and enabling access to those homes plays a key role in tackling homelessness.
- 3.15 In 2007/2008 over 240 new affordable homes were built in Wakefield, this was a significant increase on previous years. These homes have been for social rent or for low cost home ownership and have included

supported and independent living schemes. The local authority receives 100% of 'new' lets (new build section 106 agreements) and 50% of all subsequent net voids for all the RSLs operating in Wakefield.

- 3.16 The Housing Solutions Team at the Open Door Project work with individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. They look at the housing options available and give advice on what needs to be done to successfully obtain accommodation.
- 3.17 The introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) in partnership with WDH has made significant steps forward in developing a lettings system that is fair, accessible and meets housing need. Homeless people are now more often getting a tenancy than prior to CBL being introduced. The increased transparency that CBL has brought has also made it possible to demonstrate the reasons why some applications are unsuccessful. Towards the end of 2007 a CBL kiosk was opened in the Open Door Project reception area and in early 2008 the assisted bidding system was introduced which has improved move on from temporary accommodation. Significant progress has been made encouraging other active RSLs in the district to join the CBL scheme, most recently in mid 2008 Sadeh Lok and Accent joined.
- 3.18 Homespace is a scheme to provide affordable rented accommodation for potentially homeless people in partnership with Wakefield and District Housing (WDH). WDH buys different types of properties on the open market to meet different client's needs and requirements. By early 2008 11 properties had been acquired, of which 9 had already been let. This accommodation is let on an Assured Short-hold tenancy for a maximum of two years. Towards the end of the tenancy the Open Door Project will work with clients to develop a 'move on plan'. Options are likely to be remaining in the property by buying a stake in it or receiving priority to move onto an assured tenancy under WDHs Choice Based Lettings scheme.
- 3.19 First Rung is a scheme for young people aged 16 to 24 aimed at helping young people obtain tenancies in the private rented sector. The accommodation will be a room in a shared house and support will be provided to the young person as a condition of being offered the tenancy.

Support

- 3.20 Many of the above successes would not have been sustained without good support mechanisms being in place. Cross agency partnership working is essential to tackling homelessness and improving outcomes for individuals. Feedback at the August 2008 consultation event pointed to the fact that many agencies are now actively tackling homelessness and partnership working has improved significantly.

- 3.21 From the examples above it is possible to see the considerable success that has occurred in Wakefield in tackling homelessness; this is just the start however and the strategy now needs to ensure this success continues into the future. To understand more about the direction Wakefield should be taking in future, it is necessary to understand in more detail the current situation and the context in which this strategy is being written.

The Local Context

- 3.22 The population in Wakefield in 2008 is approximately 324,200. This is predicted to increase to 362,000 in 2025. There is a growing elderly population in the district, in 2008, those aged over 65 make up 16.10% of the population, rising to and estimated 21.13% in 2025. In 2008 those aged over 85 numbered approximately 6,600. In 2025 this figure is likely to be in the region of 11,700. Over this period, 2008-2025 the population over 65 in Wakefield with a limiting long-term illness is likely to rise from nearly 25,600 to 43,700. Support for older or sick residents are likely to become increasingly important in future as a result of these trends.
- 3.23 Owner occupation is the predominant housing tenure in the District at 65%. Social renting at 30% makes up a slightly higher proportion than across the region as a whole. The private rented sector is small in Wakefield making up only 4% of stock. The remaining 1% of stock are properties that come with employment or properties that are part owned and part rented.²¹
- 3.24 The Preliminary Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2007 identified a clear need for the provision of affordable housing to be accelerated. Policies to address this shortfall and maximise the development of affordable housing need to be, and are being put in place.

Reasons for Homelessness

- 3.25 The main reasons for homeless applications in Wakefield in 2007/08 were loss of lodgings (176), domestic abuse (68) and leaving UKBA (UK Borders Agency) accommodation (52).
- 3.26 The main reasons for homeless acceptances (as opposed to applications) in 2007/08 were loss of lodgings (57), domestic abuse (17), rent arrears (11) and leaving UKBA accommodation (10).
- 3.27 These reasons for homeless applications and acceptances clearly need to be addressed in the action plan. There needs to be sufficient support for people to remain in their homes and a number of services

²¹ Wakefield MDC Preliminary Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007, David Cumberland Housing Regeneration Ltd.

are already provided to address this. There also needs to be sufficient housing supply to meet the needs of the population. Domestic abuse is increasing in significance as a reason for homelessness. This is likely to be as a result of successful prevention schemes in the district, which are giving people the confidence and support to leave an abusive relationship. Finally there is a high level of approaches from people leaving UKBA accommodation. Work has been focussed on this area, which is notoriously difficult to address, and it will be reviewed to ensure its effectiveness going forward.

4. Tackling Homelessness in Wakefield: Moving Forwards

Overview and Future Direction

- 4.1 Throughout sections 1 to 3 of this strategy there are some clear issues that must form the basis of the action plan going forwards. Wakefield clearly needs to **continue its drive to reduce homelessness and the number of people in temporary accommodation** and overcome the more recent increases that have occurred. Wakefield also needs to **sustain and develop its approach to youth homelessness**; in this area Wakefield are going into this next strategy in a position of strength, having been named Regional Centre of Excellence for what it is currently doing in tackling Youth Homelessness. Actions clearly need to **tackle the current causes of homelessness**, in particular the loss of lodgings and domestic abuse. This isn't to say however that activities addressing other causes of homelessness can be reduced. The **success that has been seen to date must be sustained** and enhanced.
- 4.2 This strategy is being written at a time of extreme economic downturn as the impacts of the credit crunch spread throughout the world. Not only is access to credit and therefore mortgages increasingly difficult, but food and fuel costs are also rising. Unemployment is on the increase and the number of people claiming jobless benefits in July 2008 showed the biggest jump since 1992. Latest figures released at the beginning of August 2008 showed a rise of over 50% in the number of home repossessions in the first half of 2008 in the UK, compared to the same time period in 2007. The number of households failing to meet monthly mortgage repayments has increased by nearly 30% in the first half of 2008 compared to the same time in 2007²². It is possible that the recent increases in homeless acceptances and numbers of households in temporary accommodation are due to these current economic conditions. If this economic trend continues, as it is expected to for some months to come, **Wakefield needs to be proactive in responding to these issues associated with economic downturn to prevent any further increases in homelessness.**

²² BBC News Internet Site, August 2008.

- 4.3 The policy direction is moving towards **ensuring that an individuals complex needs are tackled through partnership working**; for example, it is no longer sufficient to find an individual accommodation; work with other partners should ensure that employment, training and health needs for example are also addressed. This support package is also likely to reduce the likelihood of repeat homelessness.
- 4.4 Finally, **developing an increasingly personalised agenda, where more choice and control is given to customers and service users** is a national policy direction and a clear ambition of Family Services and this will be addressed in the homelessness action plan. Wakefield is keen to focus on improving outcomes for individuals in the District and achieving excellence in service delivery alongside responding to issues coming out of the homelessness review. Taking the ambition of Wakefield alongside the aims and objectives of national, regional and local strategy and policy initiatives there are clear issues on which this second homelessness strategy should focus.

Issues Arising from Consultation

- 4.5 In August 2008 a consultation event was held, attended by individuals from across the council and the different agencies in Wakefield with a role in tackling homelessness. Workshop sessions debated the key issues faced by Wakefield on homelessness. For the purpose of this document these have been grouped into 8 sections as follows:
- Housing supply;
 - Sustaining tenancies;
 - The private rented sector;
 - Young people;
 - Health;
 - Employment;
 - Joint working; and
 - Running to stand still.
- 4.6 There was a clear view that **housing supply** wasn't keeping up with demand in the district, in particular social housing. People cited the loss of supply through Right to Buy as a factor, along with under occupation of properties, with older people remaining in large properties; with the increase in the proportion of elderly people in the district this is likely to be an ongoing issue. A reduction in social lets (reflecting increased stability and less turnover in the sector), long social housing waiting lists and a lack of secure supported accommodation were also said to be key issues facing the district.
- 4.7 Once people were in accommodation there was a view that more support was often required in order for them to **maintain their tenancy**. In addition to this there was a concern expressed about the level of evictions from social housing stock; it was unclear whether this was perceived to be high or it was actually high. What was clear though

was that support arrangements RSLs have in place to prevent eviction should be well publicised.

- 4.8 It was thought more use could be made of the **private rented sector**, although it currently had a poor reputation and concerns were expressed about its lack of regulation. Landlords were understandably reluctant to take on tenants with complex needs. If more use were to be made of this sector, appropriate support measures would need to be in place and reviewed regularly.
- 4.9 The needs of **young people** were frequently raised which fits with the national and local priority given to this group. Concerns were raised around young peoples lack of aspirations and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. It was seen as important to ensure all their complex needs were met. Workshop participants suggested more education was required for young people on the realities of independent living and there needed to be more housing options for young people. Access to appropriate supported accommodation was required along with increased support for those in temporary accommodation. Finally the importance of early intervention was emphasised. Research published in May 2008 for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation²³ has shown the main trigger for youth homelessness to be relationship breakdown, usually with parents and step parents and for many this is a consequence of long term conflict and often violence. It has also been found that conflict in the home can trigger homelessness many years later.
- 4.10 **Health** was an area where people believed more joined up work should be done. It was agreed there were significant health needs that had to be understood and met and that problems such as alcohol abuse and mental health issues could not be tackled unless an individual had secure accommodation. Paragraph 2.22 provides an overview of the work NHS Wakefield District intends to do to tackle this, but this clearly has to be part of a joined up approach by all stakeholders.
- 4.11 It was agreed that once an individual had accommodation it was important for them to be able to move their lives forward. One important element of this was gaining **employment** and participants believed an approach to helping previously homeless people into employment should be developed. Following on from this, sustaining employment was seen as a particular challenge for those with often very chaotic lifestyles.
- 4.12 **Joint working** was seen as essential in tackling homelessness and people commented on how much it had improved in recent years; more could always be done however and this improvement had to continue.

²³ Quilgars et al (2008) "Youth Homelessness in the UK. A decade of progress?" Joseph Rowntree Foundation

4.13 Finally one theme that kept emerging at the consultation event was that we were **running to stand still**. Although much had been achieved over the past 5 years the short term nature of some projects coupled with global economic problems, a rise in repossessions, debt and a lack of mortgage finance was making everyone's jobs increasingly difficult and making it harder to meet targets.

Aims and Objectives Moving Forwards

4.14 The changing socio-economic environment, new national policy directions, the views of stakeholders in the district and the significant progress that has been made in tackling homelessness in Wakefield has meant that the aims and objectives of the strategy in 2002 are no longer appropriate as Wakefield builds on its achievements and moves forward. Therefore the aims and objectives have been refreshed and reviewed. The aims have been developed with partners at the homelessness strategy implementation group; views from participants at the consultation event have been listened to and the following aims and objectives have been designed to reflect the key priorities and new policy direction that has been outlined throughout this strategy. It was thought that there should be an overarching statement on what the strategy aims to achieve; this is: **“To enable people to be independent by helping them tackle their housing needs and by working with partners to address wider needs in particular health, skill development and employment.”**

4.15 The aims that flow from this are:

- **To develop better prevention services with early intervention;**
- **To give people more choice and control over their options; and**
- **To develop and sustain high quality settled solutions.**

- 4.16 These aims will be delivered through the achievement of more specific objectives which will form the basis of the action plan for the next five years. These are set out in the box below.

Aim One: To develop better prevention services with early intervention.

Objectives

- 1a By increasing engagement and support for those who are vulnerable to homelessness; and
- 1b By reducing youth homelessness.

Aim Two: To give people more choice and control over their options.

Objectives

- 2a By providing more information about housing led by the needs of service users;
- 2b By ensuring sufficient supply of appropriate accommodation; and
- 2c By continuously improving the homelessness services in Wakefield.

Aim Three: To develop and sustain high quality settled solutions.

Objectives

- 3a By reducing time spent in temporary accommodation;
- 3b By tackling an individuals needs in partnership with key agencies and stakeholders; and
- 3c By developing in partnership a greater role for the third sector in Wakefield.

Delivery Structures

- 4.18 Unlikely when the first homeless strategy was written, Wakefield now has effective delivery arrangements in place for tackling homelessness. It is always necessary to review these however and this is picked up in the action plan.
- 4.19 The attached Action Plan sets out the actions required to deliver each of the objectives. It sets out timescales, milestones where necessary, financial implications and those responsible for taking the actions forward. This action plan will be monitored regularly against these milestones to ensure progress is being made and to ensure the outcomes of the strategy meet the needs of vulnerable groups within Wakefield.

Wakefield District Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013

Action Plan

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

Introduction

This action plan will delivery Wakefield Districts second homelessness strategy. It aims to build on the success of the first strategy and create a first class homelessness service in Wakefield with high quality sustainable outcomes for all of its customers.

This action plan flows from the aims and objectives set out in the strategy, these are set out overleaf. It is important that this action plan is read alongside the strategy document. This document will require frequent updates to ensure it is meeting the needs of some of the most vulnerable citizens in Wakefield and is able to respond to a continually changing environment.

Overarching aim: To enable people to be independent by helping them tackle their housing needs and by working with partners to address wider needs in particular health, skill development and employment.

Aim One: To develop better prevention services with early intervention.

Objectives

- 1a By increasing support for those who are vulnerable to homelessness; and
- 1b By reducing youth homelessness.

Aim Two: To give people more choice and control over their options.

Objectives

- 2a By providing information about housing led by the needs of service users;
- 2b By ensuring sufficient supply of appropriate accommodation; and
- 2c By continuously improving the homelessness services in Wakefield.

Aim Three: To develop and sustain high quality settled solutions.

Objectives

- 3a By reducing time spent in temporary accommodation;
- 3b By tackling individuals needs in partnership with key agencies and stakeholders; and
- 3c By developing in partnership a greater role for the third sector in Wakefield.

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
1. LAA TARGET: To reduce the number of homeless (in priority need) acceptances to 200 or below in 2008/2009 against a baseline of 326 in 2004/05	2009		Jon Feasey supported by Pete Myers, Open Door	1a, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3c	Within existing resources	
2. LAA TARGET: To meet the LAA target of 90 households or below in temporary accommodation as at 31 March 2009.	31 March 2009		Jon Feasey, supported by Joanne Lambert, Open Door	3a	Within existing resources (LAA & Adult Services)	
3. LAA TARGET: To increase the supply of affordable housing across Wakefield. 330 new affordable homes in 2008/09, 347 in 2009/10 and 460 in 2010/11.	To deliver the National Affordable Housing Programme allocation by March 2011.		Bob Hall, Strategic Housing	2b	Within existing resources	In the 2008/11 National Affordable Housing Programme Wakefield have received the largest grant allocation in the region. This programme will provide 457

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
						new homes.
4. To work with RSLs through the RSL forum to ensure prevention of homelessness is considered in procedures dealing with rent arrears, antisocial behaviour, domestic violence and harassment.	December 2010		Kairen Shearon, Strategic Housing supported by Steven Tew, Springs Advice Service	1a	Within existing resources	
5. To roll out the mortgage assistance package that has been developed in Wakefield to help home owners who are having difficulties with their mortgage repayments remain in their homes.	From Summer 2008	25 loans to be provided in 2008/09	Irene Carey, Strategic Housing	1a, 2a	Within existing resources	
6. To explore the feasibility of delivering the CLG mortgage rescue package in Wakefield	March 2009		Lead Officer TBC in Strategic Housing. To be supported by Pete Myers and Siobhan Morris, Open Door, Steven Tew, Springs	1a, 2a	Resources to be explored as part of the feasibility study	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
			Advice Centre and Irene Carey, Strategic Housing			
7. To evaluate and demonstrate success of all LAA projects.	December 2008		Jon Feasey supported by Pete Myers and Siobhan Morris, Open Door	1a, 1b, 2a, 2c, 3b	Within existing resources	
8. To review the Open Door homeless prevention scheme for people leaving UKBA (UK Borders Agency) accommodation to ensure it is as effective as possible in preventing homelessness.	December 2009		Jon Feasey, supported by Pete Myers, Brian Walsh and Siobhan Morris, Open Door	1a	Within existing resources	
9. To carry out the obligations associated with being announced as the Regional Centre of Excellence for tackling youth homelessness.	Between June 2008 and June 2009.		Jon Feasey supported by Jo Rawnsley, Open Door and Chantry YMCA	1b, 3c	Within grant funded resources	
10. To develop an action plan for how	August 2009		Jon Feasey, supported by Jo Rawnsley, Open	1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a	Within existing resources	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
Wakefield will achieve the Government target of ending use of B&B accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.			Door			
11. To reduce under occupation in WDH stock by introducing an incentive scheme. To then share good practice with other RSLs in the district.	Incentive scheme to be developed by March 2010, good practice disseminated by end of December 2010.		Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Wakefield and District Housing. Supported by Kairen Shearon	2b	Within existing resources	
12. To produce the strongest possible case to ensure the LDF core strategy target for affordable housing is approved	End December 2008, with the Inspectors report due at the end of February 2009		Richard Hollinson, Strategic Planning, supported by Strategic Housing	2b	Within existing resources	
13. Establish a post to progress private rented landlord accreditation to	Post to be established by April 2009		Dave Fowles, Strategic Housing	2b	Within both Strategic Housing and Adult Services	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
ensure a supply of good quality, well managed private sector properties in Wakefield.					existing resources	
14. A review should take place of the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group, ensuring arrangements are in place to regularly review this strategy	Review complete by March 2009		Jon Feasey, Open Door	2c	Within existing resources	
15. A fit for purpose IT system should be procured and implemented throughout Open Door.	End of June 2010	System should be in place by end of April 2010 with training taking place in May and June 2010.	Jon Feasey, Open Door	2c	Capital & Revenue commitment in place within Adult Services	
16. Improve the programme of consultation with service users with a view to improving levels of customer	December 2010		Jon Feasey, supported by Yvonne Counter, Open Door	2a, 2c	Resources will be identified within existing Adult Services Budgets	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
care and developing better quality services						
17. To implement the 2010 temporary accommodation action plan	As set out in the detailed plan, all actions to be complete to meet the target by end of December 2010		Jon Feasey, supported by Joanne Lambert, Open Door	3a	Within existing resources	
18. The PCT to meet the health needs of homeless people in Wakefield in accordance with their commissioning strategy and in partnership with the Open Door Project	End of December 2011		Stephanie Gibson, PCT, working with Open Door	2b, 2c, 3b	PCT resources allocated in line with its commissioning strategy	
19. To improve employment and training opportunities for homeless people	End of December 2011		Catherine Lunn, Skills, Enterprise and Work supported by Tom Edwards, Open Door Project	3b	Within existing resources	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
20. To establish the extent of rough sleeping in Wakefield by carrying out a street count and respond to the results accordingly.	Street Count to be completed by the end of August 2009. A timetable will then be developed to respond to those results.		Jon Feasey, Open Door	1a, 2a, 3b, 3c	Resources will be identified within existing Adult Services Budgets	
21. To develop and embed a greater partnership role for the third sector in Wakefield services for homeless people	Contracts with Third Sector Providers agreed for overnight winter provision for rough sleepers and an enhanced Family Intervention Project by April 2009		Tom Edwards, Open Door Project	1a, 2b, 2c, 3b, 3c	Funding provided by a combination of partners including Central Government, WDH and Wakefield MDC	

Action	Timescale	Milestones	Lead Officer / Agency & Supporting Agencies	Aims the action relates to	Resources	Progress
22. To take forward the recommendations associated with the West Yorkshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment	To be agreed in partnership with the other West Yorkshire authorities		Ann Pittard, Strategic Housing	1a, 2a, 2b, 3b	Within existing resources.	