

AUDIT OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AUGUST 2002

Introduction

The Homelessness Service for the St Albans City and District area is examined in this audit.

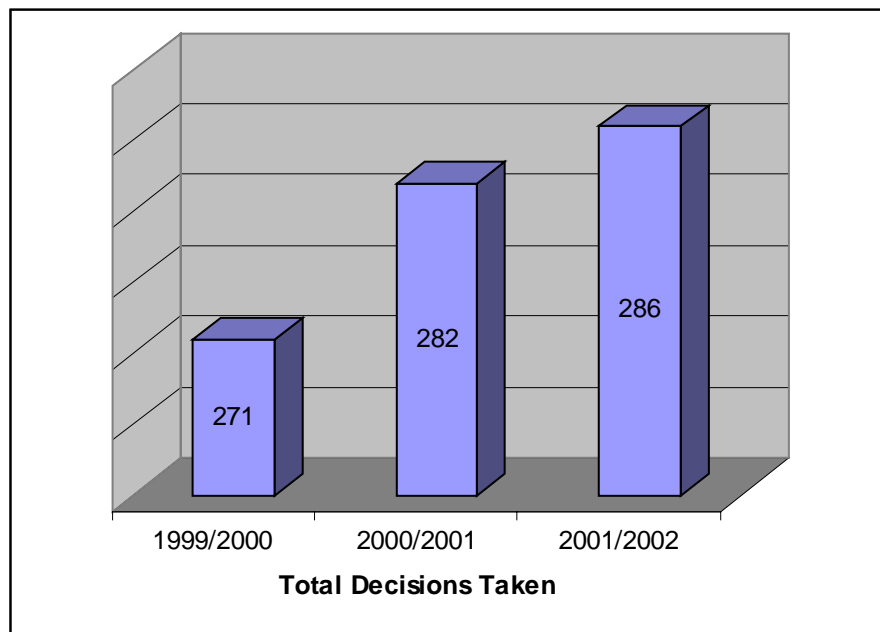
The audit is divided into four areas and covers current trends, temporary accommodation, partnership working and consultation arrangements.

1. Current Trends

An analysis of statistics for the last 3 years shows that there are a number of key trends emerging in the district.

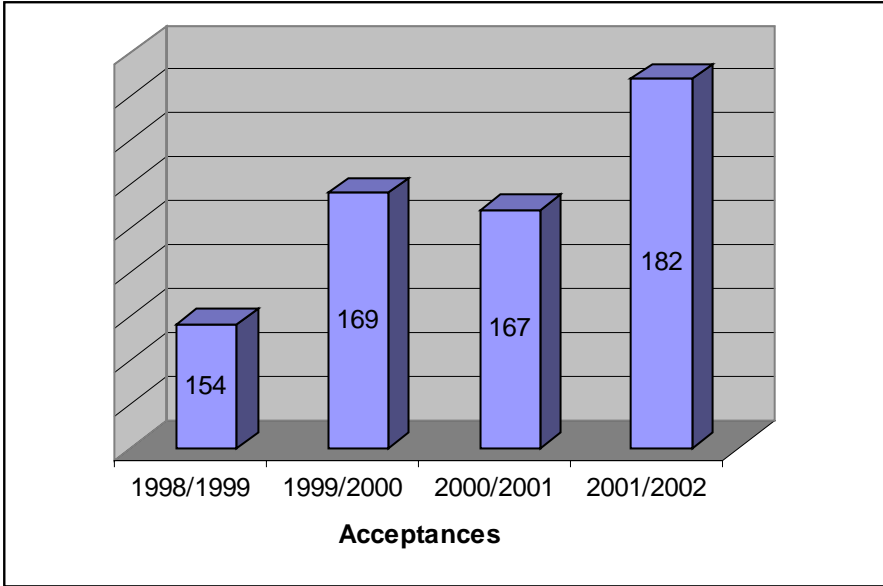
1.1 Increase in Homelessness

Following a nationwide trend particularly prevalent in the South East the total number of homeless applications is increasing.



Total decisions taken in 2001/2002 numbered 286 in comparison with 271 for the year 1999/2000.

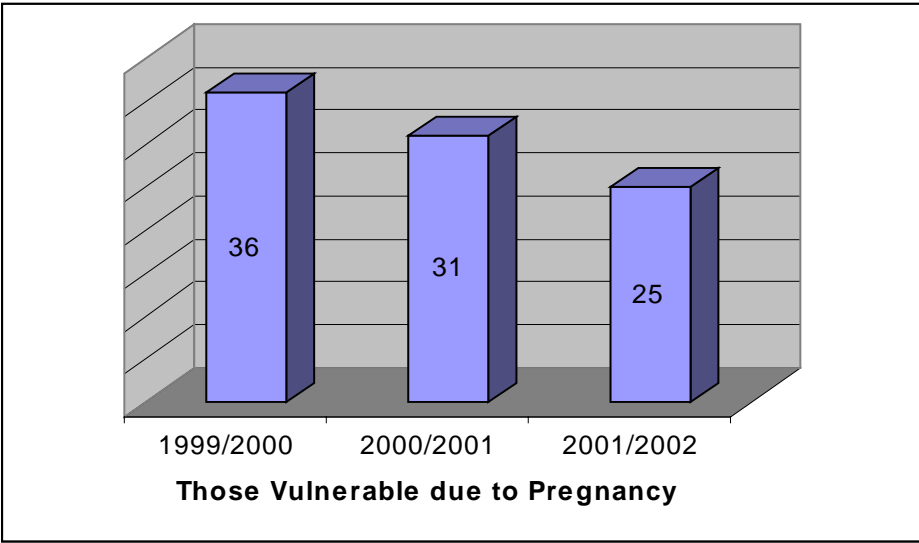
Performance and monitoring statistics (available for the last 2 years only) show that the number of households accepted as homeless increased from 167 in the year 2000/2001 to 182 in 2001/2002. Figures for the first quarter of 2002/2003 show that 54 households have been accepted as homeless. If numbers continue at this level the households accepted as homeless during this year are likely to at least equal those of 2001/2002 or exceed it.



1.2 Type of Households applying as homeless

Those vulnerable due to pregnancy

There has been a decline in the number of applicants who are pregnant with no other dependent children.



Those Vulnerable due to Old Age

There has been an increase in the number of homeless housed as vulnerable due to old age from 0 in 1999/2000 to 5 in 2001/2002.

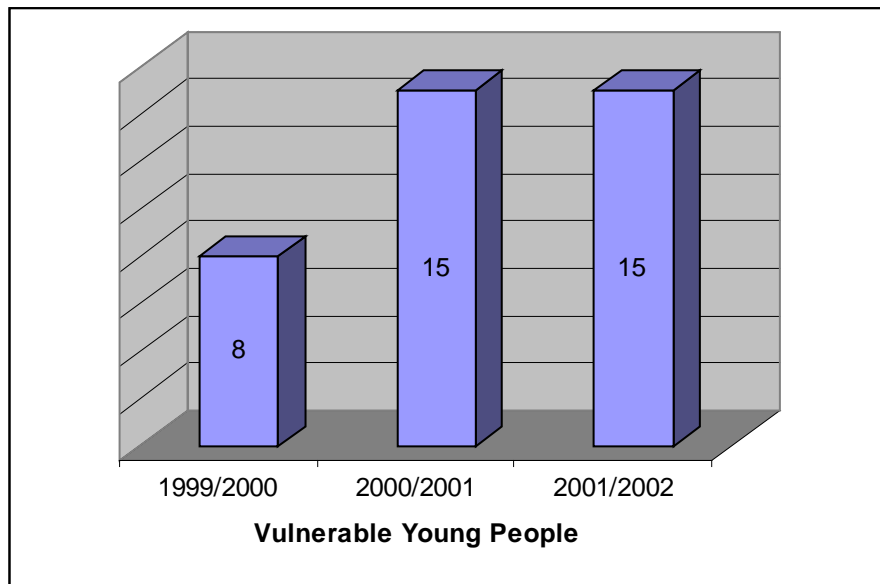
There has for some time been a lack of demand for retirement housing which has resulted in increased publicity and an alteration in the criteria for accepting elderly applicants from outside the area.

Those Vulnerable due to mental illness

The number of homeless households accepted as vulnerable due to mental illness has increased from 8 in 1999/2000 to 15 in 2001/2002.

Vulnerable Young People

The numbers of young people accepted as homeless also increased from 8 in 1999/2000 to 15 in 2001/2002.



Increases in the numbers of vulnerable young people and those vulnerable due to mental illness are thought to be related to a broadening of definitions as a result of the Housing Bill 2001 (Housing Act 2002).

Despite the increase, many young people are returning home as a result of the Joint Protocol, and the mediation work carried out by Base.

1.3 Reasons for Loss of Home

Parents no longer willing to accommodate

The numbers of those households accepted as homeless because parents are no longer willing to accommodate them has fallen slightly from 75 in 1999/2000 to 60 in 2001/2002.

Other relatives/friends are no longer willing to accommodate

There has been an increase in those accepted as homeless because other relatives/friends are no longer willing or able to accommodate them from 11 in 1999/2000 to 30 in 2001/2002. A number of these cases are related to a breakdown in relationships.

Termination of assured shorthold tenancy

The numbers of those accepted as homeless as a result of the termination of assured shorthold tenancies has declined in the last 2 years from 29 in 1999/2000 to 17 in 2001/2002. This may be the result of the increased availability of rented accommodation due mainly to the governments Buy to Let scheme and the shift of the small investor from stocks and shares to bricks and mortar.

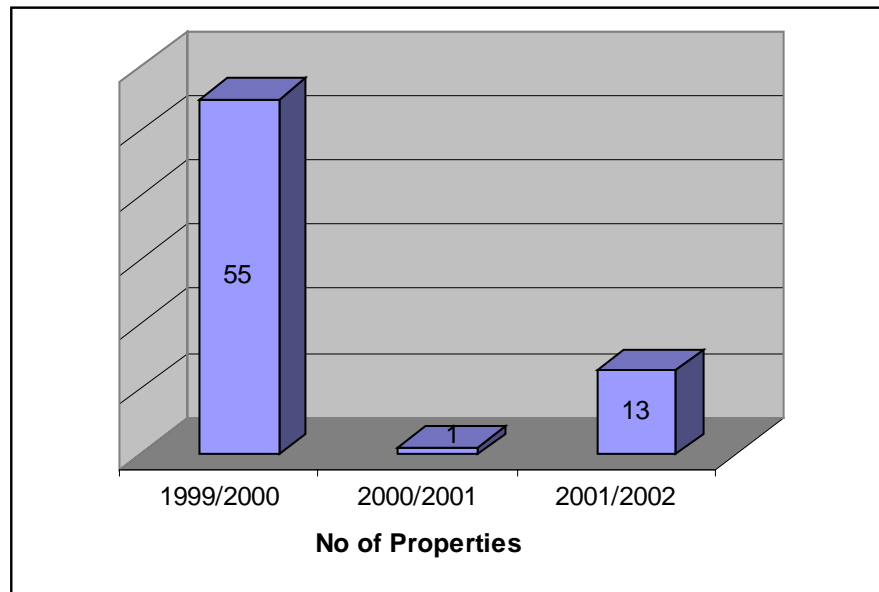
Others housed including those housed in an emergency

This is another area where there has been an increase in applications accepted from 14 in 1999/2000 to 24 in 2001/2002. Some of this increase is attributable to a number of fires in Council accommodation and together with some evacuation caused by local floods.

1.4 The Accommodation of Homeless Households

Decrease in the use of private sector leased accommodation

During the last three years there has been a sharp decrease in the amount of private sector leased accommodation used by the Council. This was almost entirely due to the decision of the Lessors to sell the properties at the end of this lease, taking advantage of the very buoyant housing market.



Increase in the use of Bed and Breakfast

As the number of leased properties fell and the number of homeless households increased, it became necessary to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation during 2000/2002. The number of families housed in bed and breakfast increased from nil in 1999/2000 to 38 in 2001/2002. The number of bed and breakfast nights used rose from 716 during 2000/2001 to 2008 during 2001/2002.

Homeless at Home

In order to reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation there has been an increase in the use of the designation "homeless at home".

This was used for 37 families in 2000/2001 and for 102 families in 2001/2002. At the end of the year 2001/2002 only 2 families remained in bed and breakfast accommodation in comparison with 13 at the end of 2000/2001.

Average time in temporary accommodation

Following a concerted effort to reduce the amount of applicants time spent in temporary accommodation, this has fallen from an average of 8.8 months during 2000/2001 to 5.85 months in 2001/2002.

2. Temporary Accommodation

The District Council provide a number of units of temporary accommodation for homeless applicants. These are a mixture of purpose built units, including mobile homes, converted older properties and a number of houses and flats which are part of the normal housing stock used as temporary accommodation.

There are currently 112 units of temporary accommodation.

These include -

Ridgeview Lodge - 15 units

13 x husband and wife plus 2 children
2 x husband and wife plus 1 child
4 flats have interconnecting doors to provide accommodation for larger families

57 Stanhope Road - 4 units

2 x husband and wife plus 2 children
2 x husband and wife plus 1 child

30 Stanhope Road - 5 units

2 x husband and wife and 2 children
3 x husband and wife and 1 child

The Hedges, Woollam Crescent - 10 units (mobile homes)

2 x husband and wife and 3 children
8 x husband and wife and 1 child

Brandon - 20 units (mobile homes)

20 x husband and wife and 1 child

Norman Close - 8 units (mobile homes)

8 x husband and wife and 1 child

3 Sandpit Lane, St Albans - 2 Units

1 x husband and wife and 2 children
1 x husband and wife and 3 children

26 Grosvenor Road - 5 units

3 x husband and wife and 1 child
1 x husband and wife and 2 children

34 Grosvenor Road - 8 units

1 x husband and wife and 2 children
7 x husband and wife and 1 child

5 Russell Avenue - 4 units

4 x husband and wife and 1 child

124 Holywell Hill - 2 units

2 x husband and wife and 1 child
or 1 unit x husband and wife and 3 children

140 Marford Road - 1 units

husband and wife and 3 children

Abbots Avenue West (Mobile Homes) - 3 units

3 x husband and wife and 1 child

Redhall - 17 units

6 x single person units
1 x husband and wife and 2 children
5 x husband and wife and 1 child
house 2 x husband and wife and 2 children
or 1 x husband and wife and 4 children
no. 3 - 2 x husband and wife and 2 children
or 1 x husband and wife and 4 children
no. 4 - 2 x husband and wife and 2 children
or 1 x husband and wife and 4 children

Private Sector Leased Properties

A local Housing Association, Hightown Praetorian has leased private sector homes for use by homeless households, these include:

162 Cell Barnes Lane - 3BF

Husband and wife and 4 children

12 Guildford Road - 3BH

Husband and wife and 4 children

18 Clarendon Court - 2BF

Husband and wife and 2 children

50 Radlett Road - 3BH

Husband and wife and 3 children

9 Springfield Road - 3BH

Husband and wife and 4 children

256 Camp Road - 3BH

Husband and wife and 3 children

45 St Leonards Court - 1 bedroom House

Husband and wife and 1 child

Collingham, Harpenden

husband and wife and 3 children

Council owned properties used under licence include -

2 1 bedroomed flats at 51 Newgate Close and 43 Pickford Hill housing husband and wife and 1 child.

In total therefore there are currently 118 units of temporary accommodation available (not including normally tenanted properties).

of these -

9 units are for single people

58 units are for husband and wife and 1 child

30 units for husband and wife and 2 children

21 units for husband and wife and 3 children + with a possibility of a further 9 if 2 units are joined to provide accommodation for larger families.

Staff perception is that it is more difficult to provide temporary accommodation for larger families and single people.

Womens Aid Refuge

The local Womens Aid Refuge provide 7 units for women fleeing from domestic violence.

A local housing association is now providing move on accommodation for a maximum of 4 households, having secured funding in 2001/2002 from the Housing Corporation.

Arrears in temporary accommodation

Performance and monitoring statistics show that at the end of the financial year 2001/2002 arrears for temporary accommodation represented 4% of the annual debit of £14,656.

Ridgeview, which in addition to the 15 family units provides 68 places for the single homeless, succeeded in reducing arrears from 20.05% of the annual debit at the end of 2000/2001 to 16.85% at the end of the year 2001/2002. Arrears in this type of accommodation are often high. A recent survey of local authorities providing similar accommodation showed an average arrears level of around 12% of the annual debit.

Hostel Accommodation

There are also a number of hostels/nighshelters within the St Albans District run by a variety of organisations.

These include:-

Pat Larner House (Hightown Praetorian Housing Association)

This provides 26 single rooms in two bedroomed shared self catering flats. Residents must show consideration for others. The accommodation is targeted at single people aged 18 and over male and female and is permanent. The housing association will give consideration to move on accommodation after one year.

Kent House Hostel (St Albans District Churches Housing Association)

Kent House is a supported housing project providing shared accommodation for 20 single homeless people and is well located in the centre of St Albans. Kent House provides temporary accommodation with a maximum length of stay of 24 months. The project delivers effective support to all residents with staff present 24 hours a day in order to empower and enhance their social skills and confidence to address their support needs.

Life Hostel (Life Pregnancy Care Centre)

This provides 4 bedsitters with a communal sitting room, kitchen and toilet facilities for single parent women and girls aged 16-40 years. Residents may stay until they are rehoused either by the Council or a housing association. House managers and voluntary helpers provide support and care before and after birth as needed, although no staff are resident on site.

Marlodge

This provides 17 single bedsitting rooms for male homeless people aged 25+. There is no limit on the length of stay, and no support provided.

Martin House

There are 21 beds available in 16 rooms for homeless men aged 18+. In practice most men are older. There is no limit on the length of stay, and a very low level of support is provided by a warden, deputy warden and cleaner.

Ridgeview

This is St Albans District Council accommodation and provides 64 single bedrooms for male/female occupation and 19 self contained flats for families. The family accommodation is temporary and used for homeless families, but the Council will accept 8 nominations per year for move on accommodation for occupants of the single rooms.

The accommodation is open and staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No care staff are present but support and counselling are available and there is access for disabled people.

Stoneham (St Albans) Project

8 self catering bedsits are provided 4 male, 4 female targeted at male single ex-offenders aged 18+ accessed through probation and female single non-offenders aged 18+ through all agencies. Residents are normally allowed to stay up to 18 months, and a non resident project worker provides assistance with benefits and living in the community.

Emmaus

The Council has also worked closely with Emmaus and in December 2001 the St Albans Emmaus Community Scheme was opened at Hill End Lane providing accommodation for up to 25 residents. This is a self help project for previously homeless people.

Nightshelters

Open Door (Hightown Praetorian Churches Housing Association)

This is a short term night shelter open all the year round, and accepts service users aged 18 plus between 7 - 10 p.m. The shelter closes at 9 a.m. It is operated on a first come first served nightly basis and has 12 male and 4 female spaces. A cooked evening meal is provided and there is a 3 week maximum stay.

The shelter is funded from a District Council grant, charitable donations, the Primary Care Trust and the Hertfordshire Health Partnership.

Open Door claim Housing Benefit on behalf of clients and also provide a number of services during the day.

A day centre is open Monday to Friday for two hours a day and a cooked meal can be purchased for 50 pence.

An art therapist is available on one day and during one evening. A specialist nurse for the homeless runs 2 drop in sessions during the week and one evening of appointments.

A counsellor attends on one day, Shelter on another and two sessions are run by housing support.

Specialist volunteers also provide a legal advice session and a healing service covering complimentary therapy.

There is a specialist nurse provided by The Primary Care Trust who helps with health needs.

Recent statistics show that between April 2000 and March 2001 3,760 bedspaces were filled and that this dropped to 3,636 for the period April 2001 to March 2002. However, recent figures since March 2002 have been much higher and service users have had to be turned away, because the shelter is full on a regular basis. It is not clear why numbers are fluctuating so much, although there is some indication that there is an increase in the numbers of service users from North London.

3. Partnership Working

There are several partnership schemes in place with a variety of organisations to provide support to a number of client groups.

These include -

Floating Support Scheme for teenage mothers

This Scheme is run in partnership with Aldwyck Housing Association. It commenced in the autumn of 2001 and provides for a total of eight placements for teenage mothers under 18 years. The District Council lease their accommodation to the Housing Association who provide a support package in conjunction with the West Herts Health Authority Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator Service.

Floating Support Scheme for those suffering from mental illness

This scheme is also managed in conjunction with Aldwyck Housing Association and has been running for approximately five years. Twenty properties are leased at any one time and the property and tenant returned to the Council when appropriate. The Housing Forum (comprising of the Homeless Persons Officer, representatives from local Housing Associations who provide supported housing and health organisations), agree on which clients are the most suitable to be supported under this scheme and where they should be housed.

66 Artisan Crescent

This is a scheme run by Aldwyck Housing Association jointly funded by the District Council and Social Services. This provides accommodation for young people who are accepted aged 18 and under. It is possible for clients to stay until the age of 21. The children and families team, Aldwyck Housing Association and the District Council jointly decide on who is housed.

Joint Protocol for 16 and 17 year olds

The Homelessness Act 2002 will extend the statutory responsibility of local authorities to encompass a wider group of homeless people which includes 16 and 17 year olds.

A Joint Protocol has been established between Hertfordshire's Childrens Schools and Families team (Social Services), Base (funded through Social Services and Connexions who obtain monies from the Department of Education and the Hertfordshire Careers Service (Department of Education). This is to assess the needs of young people to ensure that they receive an appropriate and effective response to their needs including life skills training.

This protocol is now being used as a template for the whole of Hertfordshire. During 2001/2002 there were 14 young people assessed under this protocol. Six were able to return home with the help of the Connexions support worker. A further three were offered secure tenancies with support and the remainder are still being processed through temporary accommodation.

Drug and Alcohol Services

Drugcare is a local voluntary organisation, who provide a drop in centre in a building supplied by the Council at a peppercorn rent where they can give advice, counselling, some medical care and refer clients on to other services.

The Council have bid successfully in partnership with drugcare for funding under the Communities Against Drugs Initiative. With these funds they set up the Alcohol Services Consortium which is operated by drugcare in partnership with both statutory and non statutory organisations. This service is for the benefit of all tenants who are in danger of losing their tenancy due to living the chaotic lifestyle associated with alcohol and drugs dependency. The aim is to prevent arrears accrual, court procedures and possible eviction through crisis intervention and the provision of emotional support.

A support worker has been appointed for the next three years to provide support for single vulnerable people with alcohol/drug problems.

Carr-Gomm is a local specialist organisation who have obtained funding through Transitional Housing Benefit. They are providing a floating support scheme similar to that managed by the Aldwyck Housing Association for those suffering from mental illness but will be specifically for drug and alcohol dependants. This involves the Council leasing 10 properties with funding through transitional housing benefit.

The Resettlement Service

The resettlement work involves helping people to find somewhere to live and assisting with the practicalities and emotional aspects of moving home. This includes providing furniture, claiming benefits, establishing friendly relations with neighbours and making arrangements to pay bills and rent. Clients for the service come mainly from Open Door, Kent House and the District Council. The service is provided by St Albans District Churches Housing Association with funding partly provided by the District Council and the Government. There are a maximum of 20 clients at any one time.

The Tenancy Support Service

The Tenancy Support Service is intended to compliment the resettlement service and is again managed by St Albans District Churches Housing Association. The scheme is being funded through transitional housing benefit as part of the supporting people programme. It supports those people leaving the resettlement team who still need help or any tenants referred to them by the Housing Management team. There may be drug and alcohol users among them.

There are 25 service users, who sign up for the service for between 3 and twelve months. The support is provided by a team of three staff who have regular meetings with service users and work with all relevant support agencies to ensure that users receive a holistic service provided by all partners.

Shelter

Shelter hold a housing advice surgery on a weekly basis using one of the Housing Departments interview rooms. This is open to anyone wanting housing advice. The service is supported by a grant from the Council which amounted to £46,200 during 2001/2002.

Proposed schemes

Hightown Praetorian Housing Association has also obtained revenue funding for a floating support scheme which would entail the use of 10 District Council properties. The funding is not for a specific support area but could be used for drug and alcohol users.

In corporation with Herts Young Homeless Group and the other District Councils in Hertfordshire, proposals are underway to develop a Countywide Crash Pad and assessment scheme for 16/17 year olds.

A potential gap in current provision is for supported housing for those at risk of re-offending, drug alcohol and those with multiple problems.

4. **Consultation Arrangements**

Current consultation arrangements include the following networks.

A **Housing Consultative Forum** meets twice a year and includes representatives from the voluntary sector and local providers, for example, Registered Social Landlords and agencies such as Drugcare, Shelter, Emmaus.

A **Supporting People Consultative Forum** is held with Dacorum Borough Council and meets every 2 months. This is attended by local providers in both Districts, the NHS Trust and the Children Schools and Family teams from Social Services. This forum has its own terms of reference and is the main consultation network for the Supporting People Programme.

Local Strategic Partnership

A Local Strategic Partnership has been set up to co-ordinate the work of a number of different agencies and groups in the area.

Five separate themes have been identified, following consultation with all voluntary groups and agencies during 2001.

These are Health, Housing and Social Care, Environment and Heritage, Leisure, Learning and Culture, Community Safety and Business Transport and Infrastructure.

An inaugural meeting of the partnership took place in April involving a wide range of community groups and professional bodies from the local area. Priorities are being determined under each these for inputting into the Community Strategy.

Summary

This document outlines the services currently provided in this area for homeless people.

Any assessment of whether these services meet the need of homeless applicants across the district will need to involve extensive consultation with a wide range of partners especially given the diverse needs of homeless applicants.

It is difficult to accurately predict changes in trends, as unforeseen events can have a major effect on levels of homelessness. However, there are a number of possible sources of funding for any additional services that may be required, these include Supporting People grant, private voluntary sector, the Housing Corporation, Community Safety grant, Central Government funding, Rough Sleepers funding.

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