

**Westminster's
Homelessness Strategy
2003 –2008**

July 2003

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Executive Summary

Westminster faces possibly the most challenging homelessness situation in the country. It is one of the most expensive places in which to purchase or rent a property and finding a secure and affordable home is virtually impossible for many people. Demand for affordable housing is overwhelming. At the same time central London acts as a magnet for the homeless and those with complex social needs.

The Government has recognised the extent of the challenges we face, in particular by working with us to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and to tackle rough sleeping.

Our research suggests that at any one time there could be over 11,000 people in Westminster who are homeless or who could be vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Given the scale of need in Westminster, it is virtually impossible for us to fully satisfy demand. Here we are realistic. We do not expect that by 2008 – the end of our first five-year strategy – we will have eliminated the problem of homelessness. We can, however, begin to address some of the identified causes of homelessness to prevent, as best we can, cases of future homelessness. We can also build on our good record of improving the quality of life for those who are homeless and awaiting a permanent home, by providing high quality transitional accommodation, support and advice and providing people with choices about their futures.

Our strategic objectives

Together, members of our strategy steering group have agreed the following objectives for Westminster's strategy:

Homelessness prevention

- To prevent homelessness wherever possible through maximising the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk of homelessness, and intervening at as early a stage as possible

Provision of accommodation

- To provide a range of quality accommodation for homeless households, where possible located within the City, but also by promoting rehousing opportunities in areas of lower housing demand
- To maximise the supply of affordable housing within Westminster and the North London sub-region
- To improve and make best use of the available supported accommodation for homeless households

Provision of support

- To ensure that there is sufficient appropriate support to meet the needs of those in temporary accommodation
- To ensure vulnerable children are protected
- To provide appropriate resettlement and tenancy sustainment services for tenants vulnerable to homelessness

Homelessness and health

- To improve the availability and accessibility of health advice and

personal healthcare for those who are homeless

Youth homelessness

- To reduce youth homelessness through early intervention and education, improve accommodation options for young homeless people, and improve support for them in temporary accommodation

Rough sleeping

- To reduce the flow of people onto Westminster's streets and to protect the vulnerable by careful management of the social care and enforcement agendas

Homelessness, crime and offending

- To reduce the incidence of re-offending among ex-prisoners, through provision of timely and appropriate housing advice and support

Our values

In addition, there are a number of values which underpin our work around tackling homelessness in Westminster:

- We will treat homeless households with respect and have regard to their broader life circumstances
- We value diversity, and are committed to fair and equal access to and provision of services
- We believe that people who are homeless should be actively involved in resolving their homelessness, and should be provided with the assistance and tools required for them to move towards independence. The experience of being homeless should be made as positive as possible
- We value user engagement and will continue and further develop arrangements for ongoing

consultation and involvement of service users in policy and service development

- We are committed to partnership working, as this is key to addressing homelessness holistically

Developing the strategy

This strategy has been developed in response to the Homelessness Act 2002, which requires that all local authorities publish homelessness strategies by July 2003. The strategy has been developed over many months and has involved input from a wide range of individuals and organisations.

We have based our strategy on a range of information sources including some new research carried out by consultants Vision 21, analysis of homelessness data held by the City Council and partner organisations, and the personal experience and views of service users and providers gathered through a range of consultation exercises. Our major consultation event was a conference in January 2003 attended by 150 delegates who came together to discuss the many issues around homelessness in Westminster and to identify potential solutions to addressing gaps in service provision.

The Strategy

Our strategy is structured around the three priority areas of: homelessness prevention, the provision of accommodation, and the provision of support. In addition, we have looked at some aspects of homelessness that we feel are particularly important in Westminster such as youth homelessness, health, crime and rough sleeping.

In this summary, we have highlighted some of the major initiatives that will be taken forward through our homelessness strategy. They are, however, just highlights. Further actions and more detail can be found in the relevant chapters of the strategy.

Homelessness prevention

Given the acute mismatch between the supply of and demand for affordable housing in Westminster, preventing homelessness wherever possible is key to the success of our homelessness strategy. Here are just some of our plans for improving homelessness prevention in Westminster:

- We will enhance the City Council's housing advice service for "non-priority" applicants and provide more outreach advice surgeries. We will also review the support given to housing advice services provided by other organisations, with the aim of introducing longer term funding arrangements where appropriate.
- We will re-launch the City Council's homelessness assessment and advice service, re-focusing it to become a "housing options" service. In addition to its traditional gate keeping role, the service will become much more about helping people to explore the various housing options open to them, including options available beyond Westminster. The service will be well linked to the other advice and advocacy services available throughout the City, and with many local authorities throughout the country.
- The largest single cause for people losing their accommodation in Westminster is that family and friends are either unable or unwilling to accommodate them. We will undertake a home visit in these

cases for priority need applicants, and offer mediation where appropriate to try and prevent or at least delay homelessness until a more permanent solution is found.

- Termination of private sector tenancies is also a significant cause of potential homelessness. In many of these cases, Housing Benefit (HB) is the issue. We have well developed partnerships with private landlords in Westminster, and are well placed to intervene when HB related issues arise. We have a system for fast-tracking HB claims where there is risk to a tenancy, and we will use our discretionary HB fund where appropriate to top up rent shortfalls.

Provision of accommodation

There will not, in the foreseeable future, be sufficient affordable housing in Westminster to satisfy demand. Permanent social housing opportunities will increasingly be accessed in boroughs other than Westminster, and those to whom Westminster accepts a homelessness duty can expect to be placed in temporary accommodation for lengthy periods. The quality of that temporary accommodation is therefore of paramount importance. Our accommodation strategy therefore has a number of strands:

- We will continue our work to meet the Government's target that no families with children should be in B&B hotels for longer than six weeks. Our primary means of achieving this is through accessing additional self-contained units of temporary accommodation in the private sector and through our housing association partners.
- We have procured B&B accommodation through block-booking arrangements, which has

enabled us to improve on the quality, management and cost of B&B, and reduced the number of moves for homeless households.

- We are undertaking a review of hostel provision in the City, addressing the particular issues of access and referral practices, move-on needs, staff skills in relation to client needs, and gaps in services. Through this review, other Supporting People reviews and a Best Value Review of mental health services, we will also be looking at the supported accommodation needs of single vulnerable clients in temporary accommodation.
- The increasingly semi-permanent nature of temporary accommodation means that we should no longer call it “temporary accommodation”. We will be working to better inform people’s understanding of this form of housing and their likely length of stay.
- We will be working with private sector landlords to access additional sources of supply, through stock improvement initiatives, HB improvements and management fees/supply incentives.
- We will of course take advantage of every opportunity to increase the supply of permanent social housing, whether in Westminster or in partner boroughs, and encourage clients to consider housing options outside London. The way in which the City Council decides to rollout our choice-based letting pilot (Home Connections) will greatly assist the promotion of alternative housing options.

Support for the homeless

Providing appropriate support to vulnerable homeless people when rehoused, either temporarily or permanently, is key to preventing

repeat homelessness. As our review found, issues around education, training and worklessness are of great importance. The following are some of the initiatives aimed at improving the support available for homeless people in Westminster:

- We will be investigating the potential to establish a “trainee flat” scheme, to help vulnerable people in hostels or B&B with the transition to more settled housing and prevent future tenancy breakdowns.
- We will investigate the possibility of adopting and expanding Centrepoin’s Safe Stop model as an accommodation and support model for other homeless groups.
- Valuable support for families in temporary accommodation is provided in the north of the City by the Bayswater Families Centre (BFC), where comprehensive advice, counselling and children’s services are available. The Centre also hosts weekly multi-agency health and housing surgeries which we aim to expand in the future to include a Housing Benefit surgery. We will also be looking at expanding this type of service in the south of the City.
- We have a housing and education liaison service that ensures that school aged children living in temporary accommodation, often out of borough, are able to access school places and educational welfare services.
- With the increasing concentration of single vulnerable people in our B&B hotels, we are mindful of the need to provide additional support to this group. Savings being made on temporary accommodation costs will be reinvested in providing support services for these clients, and we are actively exploring through a Best Value Review of

mental health services, a review of day programme provision and our hostels review, how we can better support this client group.

- The City Council participated in the pilot NOTIFY project, which aims to develop a comprehensive web-based notification system for placement of families in temporary accommodation. This will be rolled out London wide by September 2003. We will be working to ensure other information and notification systems, such as the emerging Social Services IRT system and a system of client held medical records being developed by the PCT Health Support Team and the BFC are well integrated.
- We will be working more closely with the resettlement services of institutions such as hospitals and the prison service, to help vulnerable clients manage the transition to independent living. We will also be working with providers through Supporting People, and other partners such as Women's Aid, to ensure that long-term support is available to vulnerable groups such as those with mental health problems, learning disabilities, substance misuse problems and women fleeing domestic violence.
- Building on our pilot ESOL and ICT training programmes for residents of B&B hotels, during 2003/04 we aim to undertake outreach work on an individual basis to properly determine learning needs and match clients with appropriate courses. We will link closely with Paddington First, an organisation that aims to engage local labour in the major redevelopment of the Paddington Basin area.
- The City Council has recently forged links with Jobcentre Plus and we will be working together on

initiatives that aim to assist lone parents and people recovering from substance misuse into suitable employment.

Homelessness and health

There are well established links between homelessness and health, with homeless people being known to suffer disproportionately from physical and mental health problems compared with the population as a whole. Substance misuse (either of alcohol or drugs) is also disproportionately found among this population. Our health improvement strategy focuses on improving access to and availability of direct medical services for homeless people; improving knowledge of homelessness issues among health practitioners and vice versa; and improving standards in currently poor quality accommodation. Specific initiatives include:

- The piloting of Personal Medical Services (PMS). Two pilots are currently underway, the principal aims of which are to increase access to primary health care and improve service standards through greater continuity and improved care pathways. The pilots will run for three years, after which they will be evaluated. Early feedback on the pilots has been extremely positive.
- The Health Support Team currently provides health support to homeless households living in temporary accommodation in the north and west of the City. Possibilities for expansion of this service are currently being investigated.
- The Health Support Team also work very closely with staff at the Bayswater Families Centre in the north of the City, and participate in the multi-agency advice surgeries

that are held on a weekly basis. With funding from the Homelessness Directorate, the BFC have recently developed a “health passport” for mobile homeless families.

- We will be implementing a number of initiatives aimed at improving the knowledge of and communication between workers in the different sectors involved in homelessness. For example, we aim to improve hospital discharge planning through better information and awareness about available accommodation and support services, improve health awareness among front line homelessness workers, and nominate lead homelessness practitioners among the various medical/health disciplines.
- Westminster PCT has a recently appointed lead officer for homelessness, and a Partnership Manager has been appointed at the Housing Assessment and Advice Centre. These two posts will be key to improving on joint working and awareness raising of homelessness and health issues.
- We have a good record of improving housing conditions in private sector stock – our Residential Environmental Health service was recently awarded 3 stars from the Best Value inspectors in recognition of its work. We will ensure that improvements continue to be made, as poor quality accommodation is well known to have detrimental effects on people’s health.

Youth homelessness

Homelessness can have a particularly devastating effect on the lives of young people. Our review identified a number of services in the City that cater for the support needs of

homeless and other vulnerable young people, but we recognise that there is little provision aimed at preventing homelessness among this group. We therefore aim to develop the following initiatives:

- With the support of funding from the Homelessness Directorate, we will establish a Safe in the City scheme in Westminster. Linked to this, we will also explore the establishment of a foyer scheme to provide accommodation and employment training opportunities for young people in the City.
- We will consider the expansion of our existing supported lodging scheme for care leavers, with possible expansion to other groups of young people, such as clients of our Youth Offending Team.
- This particular client group will also benefit from the expansion of our housing advice service for ex-offenders to cover young offenders.
- Prevention work with schools and individual casework is being undertaken by a dedicated homelessness Connexions worker based at our Assessment & Advice Centre. The integration of these services has been effective and well received; it has greatly improved our ability to work proactively with young people. We will be considering expansion of this service in the first year of our strategy, given high levels of demand experienced to date.

Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping remains a significant challenge in Westminster. We have had some success in recent years in reducing the number of people sleeping rough, however there are a number of highly vulnerable people who remain on the streets.

We are introducing a new approach to tackling rough sleeping, by initially targeting hot spots through the provision of a Rapid Intervention Street Services Team. This will be followed by a radical shift away from street provided services to building-based services, where rough sleepers will be sign posted to multi-agency assessment units co-ordinated within existing day centre and hostel provision.

We are also committed to providing a rolling shelter and a wet day centre within the City, and are in the early stages of developing a specialist mental health project to accommodate rough sleepers with a dual diagnosis or complex needs who are currently excluded from existing services.

Crime and homelessness

There are clear links between homelessness and crime. Research has found that prisoners who are homeless after their release are much more likely to re-offend than those with a secure home, and contact with the criminal justice system is an identified

risk factor for homelessness. Working with partners in the Probation service, we will take forward the following initiatives:

- Our pilot scheme providing Housing Advice to ex-offenders has only just begun, but has shown some early success. We will review the pilot in the first year of our strategy, with a view to continuing the scheme, and look at extending it to young offenders.
- We will also explore opportunities to provide housing advice to short term prisoners who are not required to report to Probation, and those who are at risk of losing their homes upon entering prison.
- Through Supporting People and our hostels review, we will be reviewing the availability of hostel bedspaces for ex-offenders.

Measuring our success

On the following page is a list of the targets by which we will be measuring our strategy's success in achieving its objectives.

Measuring the success of our strategy

We have set ourselves the following targets to measure the success of our strategy:

- 100 cases of homelessness to be prevented or delayed through home visits and mediation in 2003/04
- The number of homelessness acceptances resulting from relatives/friends no longer able to accommodate, loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancies and accommodation being unreasonable to occupy to reduce by 10% in 2003/04. In 2002/03, 692 acceptances were due to these three reasons alone.
- By 31/3/04 no homeless family with children will be accommodated in B&B except for a maximum of 6 weeks from accepting a duty, in emergency cases
- To reduce the proportion of B&B from 39% to 17% of TA by 2005/06 and maintain at maximum of 17% thereafter
- To procure a minimum of 200 new units of permanent affordable housing per annum
- To return 90 vacant private sector dwellings to occupation in 2003/04
- To complete a review of hostel provision in 2003/04 and identify ways of making the sector, the City Council and the Homelessness Directorate work more effectively together in addressing single homelessness
- To reduce the level of repeat homelessness by 10% in 2004/05
- By 2004/05 to establish, with CityWest Homes and RSLs, a baseline for measuring the success of tenancy sustainment activity in social housing
- 40 homeless households in TA to access ICT and ESOL training in 2003/04
- Establish a work experience placements scheme with local employers for homeless clients in 2004/05, and set targets for later years
- To establish standardised referral routes from primary and community healthcare services
- To introduce screening and immunisation protocols for those infectious diseases of particular relevance for the target group
- To increase the number of homeless substance misusers who are referred into treatment by 10%
- To work with 200 young people through the Safe in the City scheme over the 5 years 2003-2008
- By 2005/06, to see 85% of care leavers turning 21 in suitable accommodation
- To increase supported accommodation options for young people
- To increase the proportion of young people aged 16-18 in employment, education or training to 88.4% by the end of 2003/04 (local Connexions target)
- To reduce to under 100 the number of people sleeping rough on Westminster's streets by 31/3/04
- In partnership with the Safer Streets Police Homelessness Team, to reduce related street activity including begging, street drinking and drug misuse
- Increase Supporting People bedspaces for ex-offenders from 20 to 80 (2% of total) by 2006
- Ensure all offenders released on licence are assisted to access appropriate accommodation

Part 1 – Policy Context and Strategic Framework

1 Introduction

Defining Homelessness
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References and Acknowledgements

2 The Policy Context: National, Regional, Sub-regional and Local

National Policy
London
Sub-regional and Central London Working
Local Policy and Strategic Links

3 Homelessness in Westminster

Our Homelessness Review
Black & Minority Ethnic Communities, Refugees and
Asylum Seekers
Providing Quality Services

1 Introduction

This document sets out Westminster City Council's plans for tackling homelessness over the next five years. It has been produced in response to the Homelessness Act 2002.

The challenge of tackling homelessness in Westminster is not new. A variety of services and policies have been developed over a number of years. This strategy gives us and our partners the opportunity to build a more co-ordinated approach, to better integrate existing services and initiatives, and to develop new ones.

What is Homelessness?

Homelessness is not as straightforward as it may seem. At one extreme there are those who sleep rough on the streets, but there are other groups for whom the term is equally applicable:

- people living in emergency/temporary accommodation
- people living in insecure or impermanent accommodation, such as tenants facing eviction
- people living in unsuitable or unsafe conditions
- people involuntarily sharing accommodation long term

This strategy addresses homelessness in its broadest sense, covering those who are currently homeless and those who are vulnerable to becoming so.

Developing the Strategy

In February 2002 we set up a multi-disciplinary steering group to oversee a homelessness review and production of this strategy. The group consisted of senior Council officers across

Housing, Social Services, Education and Corporate Policy, the Council's Housing Assessment and Advice contractor, representatives from Westminster Primary Care Trust and key voluntary sector partners including Shelter and the Bayswater Families Centre.

At the same time the inter-agency Health Partnership Group (HPG) for homelessness, refugees and asylum seekers acted as the main body for wider consultation. The HPG consists of a wide range of representatives from the health and voluntary sectors.

A separate steering group was set up to develop the youth homelessness aspects of the strategy. This group comprised the Youth service, the Accommodation and Leaving Care team, the Youth Offending Team, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team and Connexions.

Consultation

In January 2003 we held a conference attended by over 150 delegates, including City Council Members and officers and representatives from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. We focussed on developing solutions to address service gaps.

A summary of the Homelessness Review, including conference outcomes, was published in April 2003.

A draft of this strategy was widely circulated during May and June 2003. It was discussed by the steering group, the HPG, the Westminster Homelessness Network, our A&A Service Users Forum and the RSL Needs and Nominations Group. The Strategy was also considered by

Council Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Westminster Faith Forum and the Westminster City Partnership. It was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Social Services and Housing in July.

Our approach, values and objectives

The Homelessness Act requires that homelessness strategies address:

- prevention of homelessness
- securing accommodation for people who are homeless or are likely to become homeless
- securing satisfactory support for people who are homeless or those who need it to prevent them from becoming homeless again

In Westminster we have identified that youth homelessness and health also require particular attention

The following strategic objectives and values underpin our strategy and ongoing homelessness work:

Objectives

Homelessness prevention

- To prevent homelessness wherever possible through maximising the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk of homelessness, and intervening at as early a stage as possible

Provision of accommodation

- To provide a range of quality accommodation for homeless households, where possible located within the City, but also by promoting rehousing opportunities in areas of lower housing demand
- To maximise the supply of affordable housing within

Westminster and the North London sub-region

- To improve and make best use of the available supported accommodation for homeless households

Provision of support

- To ensure that there is sufficient appropriate support to meet the needs of those in temporary accommodation
- To ensure vulnerable children are protected
- To provide appropriate resettlement and tenancy sustainment services for tenants vulnerable to homelessness

Homelessness and health

- To improve the availability and accessibility of health advice and personal healthcare for those who are homeless

Youth homelessness

- To reduce youth homelessness through early intervention and education, improve accommodation options for young homeless people, and improve support for them in temporary accommodation

Rough sleeping

- To reduce the flow of people onto Westminster's streets and to protect the vulnerable by careful management of the social care and enforcement agendas

Homelessness, crime and offending

- To reduce the incidence of re-offending among ex-prisoners, through provision of timely and appropriate housing advice and support

Our values

In addition, there are a number of values which underpin our work around tackling homelessness in Westminster:

- We will treat homeless households with respect and have regard to their broader life circumstances
- We value diversity, and are committed to fair and equal access to and provision of services
- We believe that people who are homeless should be actively involved in resolving their homelessness, and should be provided with the assistance and tools required for them to move towards independence. The experience of being homeless should be made as positive as possible
- We value user engagement and will continue and further develop arrangements for ongoing consultation and involvement of service users in policy and service development
- We are committed to partnership working, as this is key to addressing homelessness holistically

About this document

Part 1 outlines the strategic and policy context within which our homelessness strategy has been developed. It sets out current policy and priorities at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels. It also sets out the current homelessness “state of play” in

Westminster, drawing on information from our homelessness review.

Part 2 sets out our strategy. In seven chapters, we outline our strategic objectives for tackling homelessness in Westminster.

Part 3 sets out how the actions will be monitored and how the strategy will be reviewed and developed over time.

Westminster’s homelessness strategy will be a living and evolving plan of action that will adapt and respond to ever-changing social and economic conditions and legal or statutory requirements.

References and Acknowledgements

In producing our strategy we have drawn upon numerous sources of guidance and good practice including the former DTLR Guide *Homelessness Strategies A Good Practice Handbook*, the recently revised Homelessness Code of Guidance, the Audit Commission’s 2003 report on homelessness and publications from various organisations including the ODPM, Shelter, Crisis, the Chartered Institute of Housing and other local authorities.

We wish to record our sincere thanks to all our partners for their feedback and contributions to the development of the strategy. We look forward to continuing to work with our partners in implementing and further developing the strategy.

2 The Policy Context

National Policy

The Government set out its approach to homelessness in the publication *More than a Roof* (DETR, March 2002). It acknowledged homelessness to be as much about employment, education, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and mental illness as it is about putting a roof over people's heads.

Since then the Homelessness Act and a homelessness Priority Needs Order have come into force. In addition to requiring the production of homelessness strategies, the Act strengthened homelessness provisions in the Housing Act 1996, particularly around housing advice and reviews of homelessness decisions. The Priority Needs Order broadened the definition of vulnerable groups for whom accommodation should be provided.

The Government has set a target for reducing the use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation for families with children. By March 2004 families with children should no longer be accommodated in B&B hotels except in emergencies and then for no longer than six weeks.

In February 2002 the Government announced the Sustainable Communities Plan. It outlines its plans for achieving a 'step change' in housing policy and identifies how resources announced in the July 2002 Spending Review will be allocated in the period up until 2005/06.

The Plan signalled a new regional emphasis in allocating resources for affordable housing and a shift to direct resources to 'growth' areas in London and the South East.

London

Following the Communities Plan the London Housing Board was set up to direct housing investment in London. It will produce a London Housing Strategy in the same time frame as this strategy, setting out priorities for investment in 2004/05 and 2005/06.

Westminster's Chief Housing Officer chaired a sub-group of the London Housing Forum, which drafted the homelessness elements of the London Housing Strategy. This has enabled us to ensure that the needs of homeless households and those vulnerable to homelessness in Westminster and other parts of Central London are considered as the London Housing Board sets its priorities for investment.

Sub-regional and central London working

For the purposes of delivering investment in new affordable housing, Westminster has been grouped with the boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington to form the North London sub-region.

We will produce a strategy with our partners setting out how we will work together to maximise investment and meet housing need. We agreed a Framework Strategy in June to ensure the London Housing Board developed its strategy with consideration of our housing needs and ability to deliver.

In developing and reviewing our homelessness strategy we will ensure it dovetails with wider London strategies and those of our sub-regional partners and other neighbouring boroughs.

As a central London authority, the issues of homelessness in Westminster are also shared by neighbouring authorities. We will continue to work with these authorities to better plan and co-ordinate delivery of services. We will work closely with both the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the London Borough of Camden to reduce the number of inter-borough placements of homeless families, and further develop our protocols for keeping each other informed of placements, especially the movement of children. We will also continue to work closely to reduce rough sleeping and to monitor and commission the provision of hostel services.

Westminster, Camden and Kensington and Chelsea will meet at a senior officer level on a regular basis to provide information, peer reviews and support on the development of our respective strategies and the consequent action plans.

Local policy and strategic links

In 2001 Westminster launched an ambitious programme of **Civic Renewal** based on extensive consultation about what matters most to our residents. It is designed to help regenerate the social and physical infrastructure of the City and many of the initiatives will have a positive impact on addressing the needs of homeless people. The five priorities for the City Council under the Civic Renewal programme are:

1. Customer First – a programme to consult more effectively, listen and act on people’s views, and develop methods of service delivery that suit service users.
2. City Investment – a programme to renew and improve the City’s physical infrastructure, including

housing, to ensure it sustains vibrant communities and businesses.

3. Education Guarantee – a programme to modernise education facilities and raise standards in the classroom.
4. Clean Streets – a programme to keep Westminster clean and tidy, free from anti-social activities such as graffiti and fly-posting.
5. City Guardian – a programme to work with the police on community safety and crime reduction.

The **City Plan** is Westminster’s community strategy. It sets out how we will improve economic, social and environmental well-being in the City. It is the over-arching plan of our Local Strategic Partnership – The Westminster City Partnership.

Key aims relating to homelessness are to provide affordable housing and maximise choice in lettings; to provide housing opportunities for vulnerable residents; and to increase access to primary care services for refugees, asylum seekers and the homeless.

Nested within the City Plan is Westminster’s **Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy** which sets out the Westminster City Partnership’s approach to tackling deprivation in Westminster. The strategy prioritises areas of greatest need as well as City-wide communities with greatest needs:

Areas:

- Queen’s Park
- Church Street
- Harrow Road & Westbourne
- South Westminster

Communities:

- Vulnerable young people
- Vulnerable families
- Older people in need
- Recent arrivals in need
- The City street community

Clearly the communities prioritised include those who are homeless or are vulnerable to homelessness.

Westminster's **Housing Strategy** for the years 2003-2008 sets the strategic direction for housing related services in the City, including the Council's homelessness service. "Increasing affordable housing and balancing needs" is the second of five strategic priorities - a reflection of the acute affordable housing supply/demand mismatch currently seen within Westminster. For this priority area, the strategy focuses on the following objectives:

- Homelessness prevention and advice
- Maximising the supply of new permanent affordable housing
- Making best use of City Council stock
- Maximising lettings to the homeless and balancing needs
- Accessing affordable housing outside Westminster
- Maximising low cost homeownership opportunities
- Maximising the proportion of self-contained temporary accommodation
- Lobbying on areas of government policy that restrict the Council's ability to meet needs

Two other key strategies have clear links with our homelessness strategy - the Supporting People Strategy and the Rough Sleepers and Street Culture Strategy.

Supporting People (SP) is the new Government regime for the funding of housing related support services. The SP partnership in Westminster currently focuses on 204 services that, since April 2003, have been funded through the SP grant. These services are provided within specialist housing schemes or on a floating basis within people's own homes. Support is provided in a variety of ways to over 6,000 permanent and temporary residents with a diverse range of needs. The annual cost of these services exceeds £19m, and approximately half of our SP Grant is for single homeless services.

Westminster's **Supporting People Shadow Strategy** for 2003-2004 sets out an assessment of supported housing needs, an audit of current provision and initial proposals for innovation and service development. Our first full strategy is to be published by December 2003.

Our **Rough Sleepers and Street Culture Strategy** was published in June 2002. It sets a new direction for our approach to tackling rough sleeping and associated street culture and for bringing some of the identified problems and conflicts under control. This approach is outlined in Chapter 9 – Rough Sleeping.

With our partners we have developed a range of local strategies and programmes that link to and support the delivery of this homelessness strategy. Key strategies are shown in the following diagram.

**Civic Renewal
City Plan
Best Value Performance Plan**

- Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- A Vision for Westminster
- Welfare to Work

- Housing Strategy
- BME Housing Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Strategy

- Programme for a Healthier Westminster
- Affordable Warmth (under development)
- Westminster DAAT Action Plan
- PCT Health Strategy for Homeless People

- London Housing Strategy
- North London Housing Strategy
- Unitary Development Plan

- Supporting People Strategy

**HOMELESSNESS
STRATEGY**

- Other boroughs' homelessness strategies

- Crime and Disorder Reduction Action Plan
- Youth Justice Plan
- Domestic Violence Strategy (under development)

- Rough Sleepers & Street Culture Strategy

- Children & Young People's Strategic Plan
- Local Preventative Strategy
- Behaviour Improvement Plan
- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

- Community Legal Services Partnership
- Voluntary Sector Grants programme

**Social & Community Services Service Plan
CityWest Homes Delivery Plan
PCT Business Plan**

3 Homelessness in Westminster

Our Homelessness Review

Westminster's homelessness review was carried out between August 2002 and February 2003. It involved analysis of existing data and new research undertaken by social researchers Vision 21. Our Homelessness conference, in January 2003 formed an integral part of the review.

⇒ Further information

A summary of the findings of our review was published in April, along with Vision 21's research report. For copies, contact Jenny Campbell (see Appendix 1 for contact details).

Here we set out the key issues that came through the review.

Levels and profile of homelessness

- There are currently over 2,700 homeless households living in temporary accommodation, of which almost 800 are in B&B hotels. A recent street count undertaken by the Council with assistance from the voluntary sector and the Police found 120 people sleeping rough in the City, under half the numbers counted in 1998. In addition, around 1,100 people sleep in Westminster's homeless hostels every night and many more stay with friends or in over-crowded conditions. Our research suggests that at any one time there could be over 11,000 people in Westminster who are homeless or are vulnerable to becoming so.
- In 2002/03 the City Council accepted 1,069 households as statutorily homeless (19% of those who applied). 54% of acceptances were of families with dependent children (aged under 16, or single persons aged 16 to 18 and in full-time education) or pregnant women.
- The main causes of homelessness for those who applied last year were disputes with family or friends (41%), accommodation being unreasonable to occupy (12%), or the termination of a private sector tenancy (11%).
- Of the households accepted last year, 20% were accepted due to a mental health problem, 10% due to a physical health problem and 11% due to age – more than double the national rate in each case.
- The City Council allocates nearly 90% of net lettings of family-sized dwellings to statutory homeless families. Despite this, average length of stay in temporary accommodation is 78 weeks.
- The number of rough sleepers verified on the last count in May 2003 was 122. The number counted in March 2002 was 169. Whilst numbers have been reduced, a high percentage of those who remain on the streets are particularly difficult to engage and accommodate.
- Key characteristics identified as contributing to homelessness are unemployment, partnership breakdown, being in trouble with the law, debt, bereavement, drug or alcohol problems, mental health problems and domestic violence.
- Though Westminster's black and minority ethnic (BME communities) make up about one-third of the population, more than two-thirds of

homelessness applications come from BME households. The proportions of Black African and Bangladeshi applicants have increased markedly over the last five years.

Profile of services

- There is a comprehensive range of services for homeless people in Westminster. We identified over 150 organisations as part of our review and over half responded to our survey. We identified very little overlap and few service gaps.
- Advice is the primary service offered – over half of the responding organisations included homelessness, welfare benefits, housing and general advice among their services.
- Smaller proportions of service providers offer some of the specific services that might be considered as key to the prevention of homelessness. Financial advice and formal counselling are available from less than one-third of organisations, while education, training and employment services are offered by just 10% of organisations.
- Nearly two-thirds of organisations are in the voluntary sector while 28% of responding organisations were either part of Westminster City Council or another statutory agency. It should be stressed that while these organisations are located within Westminster, few restrict their services to people residing within the City boundaries.
- The organisations surveyed receive most of their funding from three main sources: central government (30% of funding), rental income (18%) and Westminster Council (15%). There is great diversity in the size of organisations – over

one-quarter have annual income of over £1 million, while there are a number of very small organisations operating on less than £20,000 per year.

Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

As mentioned above more than two-thirds of homeless applications now come from BME households, although Westminster's black and minority ethnic (BME) communities make up only one-third of the City's population. This has significant implications for the development of this strategy. Our commitment to meeting the needs of BME households cuts across our approach to tackling homelessness.

Our Homelessness Review's survey of service providers revealed that around 5% of organisations target their services specifically for BME clients. Few gaps in current provision specifically geared for BME clients were identified. However, some providers commented that more targeted services were needed such as interpretive services for refugees and asylum seekers. It is also clear that we need to involve BME groups more in service planning and delivery.

The City Council is currently undertaking a cross cutting Audit of Ethnic Minority Needs. This will further inform the development of this strategy as we increasingly look to tailor our services to ensure that the needs of our BME communities are fully and appropriately met. Initial findings show that many BME residents do not understand our housing allocations process, and experience considerable difficulty in communicating with Council services. There are also concerns about the number of moves households make

during their time in TA, and the geographical separation of temporary and permanent housing opportunities which can result in disruption to children's education and cutting of community ties. This issue is addressed in Chapter 5 – Provision of Accommodation.

As a result of the National Asylum and Immigration Act (1999) the City Council no longer has a housing duty to asylum seeking households who arrived in the UK after April 2000. Only 15 households that applied for asylum before 2000 now remain in temporary accommodation, awaiting decisions from the Home Office.

The City Council continues to have a social services duty to asylum seeking households, and currently supports approximately 1,500 asylum seekers.

There are currently over 54,000 asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Service – (largely outside London) and 28,000 receiving subsistence only support in London (including 515 in Westminster). Anecdotal evidence suggests that, upon receiving positive Home Office decisions, many refugees who have been dispersed through NASS to other parts of the country, will gravitate to central London where opportunities for employment or community support are to be found. We will continue to monitor demand on our housing services arising from the housing needs of asylum seekers granted refugee status.

Providing Quality Services

As noted in our homelessness review, there is a comprehensive range of services available in Westminster. We have high quality services that operate in arguably the most challenging of environments. They have a history of

responding to change and of achieving results.

The Council's Housing Assessment and Advice Service

The Council's Assessment and Advice Centre, based at Harrow Road in the north of the borough, is the single largest service for homeless people in Westminster. It received a total of 37,037 personal callers and 149,045 telephone calls during 2002/03 and dealt with 38,637 items of written correspondence in that time.

The service was the subject of a Best Value (BV) review in 2001 and was subsequently contracted out to WMS Haywards (now Haywards Property Services). Following our BV review, the service was subjected to a BV inspection from the Housing Inspectorate in March 2002, which resulted in an award of 2 stars with excellent prospects for improvement.

The BV review and the letting of the contract resulted in a number of service improvements including the establishment of a call handling centre and associated technology, the implementation of document image processing and a much improved reception area. The Housing Inspectorate commended many aspects of the service including:

- Clear and comprehensive information provided to homeless applicants
- Responsive call centre and emergency out of hours service
- Inspections and high standards of temporary accommodation
- Extensive range of support services available for vulnerable/special needs clients

- Thorough casework and speedy turnaround of homelessness decisions
- Good partnership working arrangements

Certain shortcomings were also highlighted, such as a lack of comprehensive quality advice for non priority applicants and a high turnover of frontline staff, and these are now being addressed within a comprehensive BV improvement plan.

The contract for the service sets out a range of clear service standards and offers a number of financial incentives to the contractor for good performance. The Council closely monitors it through a variety of mechanisms.

Regular customer satisfaction surveys are carried out and mystery shopping exercises conducted. A Service User Forum (SUF) meets on a quarterly basis and feeds in ideas for service improvements. The SUF has now begun to meet with the Housing Panel, our statutory means of consulting permanent residents on housing management issues including allocations policy and practice and in particular Choice in Lettings.

Monthly training sessions are held for Assessment and Advice staff and have included joint interactive sessions with staff from other service areas (e.g. care managers, estate officers etc).

Haywards Property Services were awarded a finalists trophy in the National Training awards in November 2002 for the staff training programme developed in A&A. The National Training awards are the most

prestigious awards for excellence in training and people development in the UK. The A&A programme was judged to be ranked amongst the best examples of effective training across the UK, delivering the objectives set and achieving the required performance standards.

We have positively embraced joint working with key partners in Social & Community Services, Health, Education and the voluntary sector. In particular we have focused on the needs of people with mental health problems and more recently the education and welfare needs of vulnerable children.

The service has also been enhanced through additional staff, partly funded by the Homelessness Directorate, to provide better management of the temporary accommodation portfolio, improve the advice offered to non priority homeless, and promote alternative housing options. In addition, a Housing and Education Liaison Officer post, part funded through Westminster's Education Action Zone, and a Connexions Personal Advisor dedicated to helping homeless young people have been secured. We have also introduced a new home visit and mediation service aimed at preventing homelessness as a result of parental or other family exclusion.

More recently a new Partnership Manager post has been established with the aim of forging links with other service providers and better co-ordinating preventative and support work in the borough.

Part 2 – Delivering our Strategy

4 Homelessness Prevention

- Housing Information and Advice about Options
- Homelessness Assessment and Mediation
- Working with the Private Sector
- Homelessness and Council Tenancies
- Debt Counselling and Maximising Incomes
- Managing Expectations
- Measuring Outcomes

5 Provision of Accommodation

- Temporary Accommodation Supply and Management
- Making Best Use of the Private Rented Sector
- Permanent General Needs Social Housing
- Homeless Hostels and other Supported Accommodation

6 Support for the Homeless

- Support for Household in Temporary Accommodation
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- Outreach work through the Health Support Team
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- Homelessness and Substance Misuse
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- PCT Health Strategy for Homeless People

8 Youth Homelessness

- Specialist Advice and Support
- Early Identification and Intervention
- Leaving Care Services
- Accommodation Solutions
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9 Rough Sleeping

- Hot Spot Targeting
- Building-based Services
- Enforcement
- Rough Sleeping and Mental Health
- Substance Misuse

10 Homelessness, Crime and Offending

- Advice to Ex-offenders
- Advice to those in Prison
- Accommodation for Ex-offenders

4 Homelessness Prevention

Strategic Objective: To prevent homelessness wherever possible through maximising the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk of homelessness, and intervening at as early a stage as possible.

Targets:

- 100 cases of homelessness to be prevented or delayed through home visits and mediation in 2003/04
- The number of homelessness acceptances resulting from relatives/friends no longer able to accommodate, loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancies and accommodation being unreasonable to occupy to reduce by 10% in 2003/04. (From 692 in 2002/03)

Given the acute housing supply/demand imbalance in Westminster preventing homelessness is key to the success of our homelessness strategy. Prevention throughout the homelessness “cycle” is a feature of our strategy, whether through early intervention around known risk factors, crisis prevention around known trigger events, or ongoing prevention to stop repeat homelessness.

Our strategy focuses on tackling the most common causes of homelessness in Westminster, and reducing the instances in which households present as homeless in the following circumstances:

- family and friends being unwilling or unable to provide accommodation;
- accommodation being unreasonable to occupy; and
- termination of private sector tenancies.

In addition, our strategy recognises that providing people with appropriate and timely information and advice is crucial to successful homelessness prevention.

Housing Information and Advice about Options

A clear finding of our review was that the provision of good quality advice at an early stage is crucial to preventing homelessness. The review also found that among the large number of homelessness agencies in Westminster, over half offered homelessness, benefits and general housing advice services. These

agencies make a significant contribution to the prevention of homelessness in Westminster.

Consultation with advice agencies has indicated that clients are presenting with increasingly complex problems and that the need for intensive crisis management and casework is severely stretching resources.

During 2003/04 we will be reviewing the support given by the City Council to other agencies through our voluntary sector grants programme and looking at possibilities for introducing longer term funding arrangements.

Westminster's Community Legal Service Partnership, set up in 2002, is developing a strategic plan for advice and legal services in the City. A need for more housing related advocacy services has been identified and it is intended that this be set as a priority within the strategic plan.

In the last couple of years we have made significant customer service improvements at the Council's Assessment and Advice Centre (A&A). We will be introducing further improvements during 2003/04, including more outreach work with clients in temporary accommodation and offering out of office hours surgeries. We will also investigate the establishment of a shared client database, linking with other agencies and the emerging NOTIFY and Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) systems.

Advice services for "non priority" applicants have been expanded through additional staff resources at A&A. This element of the service will be reviewed during 2003/04 to ensure that the needs of all non priority applicants are fully assessed and appropriate advice provided.

In response to the new priority need categories, during 2002/03 the Assessment and Advice service ran pilot housing advice surgeries for ex-offenders in partnership with the London Probation Service, with an officer seconded from A&A to the Probation Service. Funding is available for this initiative to continue into the current financial year. We will review the success of this during

2003/04. We will also consider the possibility of extending the scheme to young offenders in liaison with the Youth Offending Team (see Chapter 10 – Homelessness, Crime and Offending).

We plan to re-launch our homelessness Assessment and Advice centre as a "housing options" service. With the introduction of initiatives that provide housing applicants with more choice about their futures, and the need to become more innovative in our approach to finding housing solutions, our homelessness service will become much more about working with other agencies to help people explore the various options available to them, while still recognising our statutory duty to assist homeless households.

The service will be well linked to other advice and advocacy services available throughout the City, and with many local authorities throughout the country. Redevelopment of the Westbourne Green area may provide an opportunity to move the service to more appropriate accommodation, and for better integration with other social care services.

Homelessness Assessments and Mediation

Relatives and friends no longer able or willing to accommodate now accounts for 41% of homelessness applications, the largest single reason for people potentially losing their accommodation. To address this A&A staff will undertake a home visit in all priority need cases to ensure that the application is genuine and to accurately assess the client's circumstances. At the same time, the Council will, where appropriate, offer independent mediation to the parties to try and prevent or at least delay homelessness. A new mediation service was set up on a pilot basis in

April 2003 in partnership with Alone in London; this will be reviewed after six months with a view to extending the scheme if successful.

The City Council operates a joint Housing/Social Services assessment procedure for people presenting as homeless who appear to be vulnerable as a result of mental health problems. During 2002/03 273 clients were fully assessed; of these 47 were accepted. The service also assesses the accommodation and support needs of clients. The Joint Homelessness Team and the joint assessment service they provide will be the subject of a review in 2003/04.

The City Council also conducts joint Housing/Social Services assessments for young people, through a dedicated Connexions Personal Adviser located at the Assessment & Advice Service. This is discussed further in Chapter 8 – Youth Homelessness.

Working with the Private Sector

The homelessness review identified a clear opportunity to improve joint working with the private rented sector (PRS). Westminster has a larger than average private rental market and we also have a high level of homelessness applications resulting from the loss of assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) – 11% of applications in 2002/03.

Housing benefit (HB) is clearly key to making best use of the PRS, in terms of helping people on low incomes access the sector, preventing arrears and encouraging landlords to let properties to those in receipt of HB. This is particularly crucial in Westminster where private sector rents are amongst the highest in the country and around one third of all properties are privately rented. Only about 10% of properties are, however, within HB limits.

The City Council already has a system of fast tracking HB claims where there is a potential loss of an AST. We will also be exploring the use of our discretionary HB fund where appropriate to top up rent shortfalls.

The Council's Assessment and Advice service has a small but well regarded team that deals with tackling harassment and illegal eviction in the PRS. In 2002/03 the team was successful in delaying homelessness in 80 cases, and prevented nine households from losing their homes. The team provides a pro-active service against illegal activities from landlords and in-depth legal housing advice, and also has a developmental role in raising awareness of rights and responsibilities in the private sector.

Westminster's Staying Put service aims to help elderly and other vulnerable owner occupiers remain in their own homes through the provision of a small repairs service. This service assisted 433 residents in 2002/03. It now comes under the new Supporting People programme and will be reviewed in 2003/04.

Homelessness and Council Tenancies

Like all local authority landlords WCC will sometimes face the dilemma of needing to take possession proceedings against one of its own tenants, with the possibility that the evicted household may be "picked up" as unintentionally homeless at a later stage. Although total numbers are relatively small, around one quarter of all WCC evictions (61 evictions in 2002/03) result in the ex-tenant being deemed to have become homeless unintentionally.

To minimise these situations occurring the Housing Needs Team and the

Assessment and Advice service will be providing training on homelessness for estate management staff and will forge closer working arrangements between the service areas, ensuring liaison at an early stage in identified cases. At the same time we will establish improved liaison arrangements between estate staff and the Council's HB contractor, and with Social Services where tenants in arrears are deemed to be vulnerable.

Where children are involved in an eviction the Council holds joint Housing/Social Services panels under the Children Act, chaired by an independent solicitor, which assesses and makes recommendations in relation to housing and care needs.

Debt Counselling and Maximising Incomes

The Council provides a debt counselling service to its tenants via the Catholic Housing Aid Society (CHAS). This was recently reviewed and is generally considered to be appropriate to the needs of clients. Discussions with the Council's estate management providers indicated a need for better awareness of the availability of welfare benefits advice amongst tenants and for the running of a benefits take up campaign. A take up campaign was run for eight months to March 2003, consisting of posters, targeted leaflets, promotion work with local community groups, and a telephone hotline.

Managing expectations

Given the limited housing options available within Westminster, service providers responding to our survey were very keen to find ways of helping homeless people to be realistic about the options available to them. The review also indicated a strong desire

among the homeless people interviewed for clarity in the information they received.

A particular concern raised was a wish for some reasonable estimate of the time households are likely to spend in temporary accommodation (TA). Despite difficulties in doing this, we will in future aim to give clients at assessment stage as realistic a view as possible of their likely stay.

Over the next year the City Council will also be running a publicity campaign on the wider realities of homelessness and the supply and demand situation regarding permanent social housing. This will be linked with the new sub-regional strategic approach to social and affordable housing investment.

Measuring outcomes

Measuring the outcomes of preventative work is not easy. One important indication is the incidence of repeat homelessness, where households present as homeless after having been accepted as homeless on a previous occasion. While this has not been measured in any systematic way up to now the Council will put in place a mechanism for doing so during 2003/04 which will include an analysis of the causes of homelessness amongst repeat presentations and ways in which these can be tackled.

We will also continue to maintain casework records of the outcomes of advice to potentially homeless households, in order to assess the effectiveness of our preventative work. At the same time we will encourage other advice providers in the City to develop comprehensive systems for measuring outcomes of their preventative work.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Review the support given to homelessness prevention agencies through the Council's voluntary sector grants programme	WCC	2003/04
Enhance A&A housing advice through further outreach work/surgeries	WCC	2003/04
Undertake a review of the A&A advice function to ensure that full needs assessments are done for non priority homeless	WCC	2003/04
Review Probation Housing Advice service	WCC/Probation	2003/04
Re-launch A&A service as a Housing Options service	WCC	2004/05
Undertake home visits in all priority need cases of homelessness resulting from exclusions by parents/relatives/friends	WCC	2003/04
Provide independent mediation where appropriate and review service after 6 months of operation	WCC	2003/04
Review the assessment service provided by Joint Homelessness Team	WCC	2003/04
Make use of HB Discretionary Payments to further prevent loss of ASTs	WCC	2003/04
Review Staying Put, as part of Supporting People review	WCC	2003/04
Provide training on homelessness issues for estate management staff and develop closer working relationships with the Assessment and Advice service	WCC & CWH	2003/04
Improve liaison arrangements between estate management and Social Services and HB contractor staff	WCC	2003/04
Provide homeless clients with a clearer indication of likely length of stay in TA at assessment stage	WCC	2004/05
Run education/information campaign on the realities of homelessness to discourage potentially homeless people from coming to Westminster	WCC	2004/05
Put in place a mechanism to measure and analyse the causes of repeat homelessness	WCC	2003/04
Encourage other homelessness agencies to develop comprehensive systems for measuring the outcomes of preventative work	WCC	2003/04

5 Provision of Accommodation

Strategic Objectives: To provide a range of quality accommodation for homeless households, where possible located within the City, but also by promoting rehousing opportunities in areas of lower housing demand

To maximise the supply of affordable housing within Westminster and the North London sub-region

To improve and make best use of the available supported accommodation for homeless households

- Targets:**
- By 31/3/04 no homeless family with children will be accommodated in B&B except for a maximum of 6 weeks from accepting a duty, in emergency cases
 - To reduce the proportion of B&B from 39% to 17% of TA by 2005/06 and maintain at maximum of 17% thereafter
 - To procure a minimum of 200 new units of permanent affordable housing per annum
 - To return 90 vacant private sector dwellings to occupation in 2003/04
 - To complete a review of hostel provision in 2003/04 and identify ways of making the sector, the City Council and the Homelessness Directorate work more effectively together in addressing single homelessness

There will not, in the foreseeable future, be enough affordable housing in Westminster to satisfy demand. We have become increasingly creative about the solutions we have developed to this housing supply crisis and our accommodation strategy is therefore focused on more than the traditional approach of developing units of social housing. Our strategy focuses on:

- providing appropriate temporary accommodation solutions, recognising that by necessity this has become a more semi-permanent form of housing;
- working with landlords to increase the availability of private sector accommodation;
- working with partner local authorities to maximise development opportunities for social housing; and
- ensuring there is an adequate supply of hostel places for those for whom this type of accommodation is most appropriate.

Temporary Accommodation Supply and Management

It is acknowledged that the City Council will need to continue to provide temporary accommodation (TA) for the homeless for the foreseeable future, given the current trends in the supply of and demand for permanent social and affordable housing. For the large majority of homeless households their stay in temporary accommodation will also be for a number of years. Such accommodation is therefore becoming increasingly semi-permanent in nature. Containing the cost of TA is a priority for the City Council, while also ensuring the appropriateness and quality of accommodation.

Westminster currently has almost 800 homeless households in B&B and a further 1,900 in self-contained units that we call "Stage 2". The large majority of B&B placements are within a small number of block-booked hotels, mainly located out of borough.

Through the block booking system the Council has secured considerable control over the management and standards of accommodation, stabilised costs and greatly reduced the movement of households within the B&B portfolio. All B&B hotels we use meet BABIE standards and are regularly inspected by a specialist Environmental Health Officer based at the Assessment and Advice Centre.

Stage 2 accommodation is provided through housing association or private sector leasing arrangements and is currently located approximately 80% in borough, 20% out of borough, with a large concentration of the latter being in East London where property prices are significantly cheaper.

The City Council is well on track to meet the Government's target of no longer accommodating families with

children in B&B (except for emergencies) by March 2004 and will continue to work to ensure that the target is met. We reduced the number of these households in B&B from 306 to 108 over the course of 2002/03.

Our success has predominantly been achieved through the procurement of further Stage 2 units using funding being made available from the ODPM's Homelessness Directorate. Changing patterns in the housing market have enabled a majority of these new units to be located in Westminster, thus increasing the overall proportion of in borough TA.

Wherever possible we aim to match household needs to type and location of accommodation, taking particular account of social services, schools and health needs. In the case of homeless clients with mental health problems we have introduced a policy of ensuring that those deemed to have a severe and enduring mental illness are automatically accommodated and supported in Westminster. It is acknowledged, however, that due to supply/demand pressures many households are placed away from their existing social networks and that therefore appropriate support needs to be made available. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

We will also be exploring, in partnership with the Westminster Domestic Violence Forum, alternative temporary accommodation options for women fleeing domestic violence.

As families with children are removed from B&B hotels there will be an increasing concentration of single vulnerable households, often with mental health problems, residing in this form of accommodation. We already have over 700 such households in B&B. Our programme for procuring new self contained accommodation

over the coming years will therefore contain a proportion of smaller units for single person households. Moreover through our review of homeless hostels in the borough (see below), Supporting People reviews and the Best Value Review of mental health services we will be looking at ways of better addressing the supported accommodation needs of single vulnerable clients in B&B.

A 24-hour supported TA scheme is currently in development and due to open by the end of 2003. Supporting 12 people with severe and enduring mental illness, the scheme will provide a service which enables individuals to maximise their abilities in managing their mental illness and preparing for moving to more secure accommodation. Look Ahead Housing and Care, who will provide this service, already have an established relationship with the Community Mental Health Teams which they will work with ensure a holistic service.

Given the scale and demand led nature of TA usage the Council continues to look for new and more cost effective means of provision. Westminster has been commended on its innovative approach to TA procurement particularly in relation to a scheme operated with Acton HA in which units initially secured for temporary housing for periods of 10 years ultimately become part of the Association's permanent portfolio.

Making Best Use of the Private Rented Sector

The City Council currently operates two major schemes that utilise private sector accommodation to temporarily house homeless households. Under one scheme, the City Council introduces homeless households directly to private landlords (PSLS – the Private Sector Letting Scheme),

while under the other, private units are leased by housing associations on the Council's behalf (HALS – the Housing Association Leasing Scheme). In the past year, with the assistance of Homelessness Directorate funding, we have been able to expand our portfolio in the PSLS from 104 to 209 units.

The City Council successfully lobbied for increased HB subsidy levels to reflect the costs of the central London rental market. This has enabled us to pursue private sector leasing agreements and it is our aim to procure an increasing number of units through this type of scheme over the next three years.

In procuring temporary accommodation in the private sector, we aim to achieve a balance in terms of location, size and length of agreement period in order to reflect the wide range of client need. The differing agreement periods avoid peaks and troughs in supply of self-contained accommodation.

In terms of homeless and potentially homeless clients directly accessing private sector lets, WCC already has a mechanism in place for underwriting rent deposits. We will also look at better ways of using discretionary HB payments to top up rent shortfalls and, as mentioned in Chapter 4, already have a system of fast tracking HB payments where there is potential loss of an AST.

As well as maximising occupancy in the private sector we have also taken concerted action to improve conditions in the 1,200 larger HMOs in Westminster. As the residential housing market picked up four years ago we noted an increase in homeless applications from HMOs as a result of changing use, as HMOs switched between tourist hotel, homeless hostels and backpack clientele. We were also concerned about standards

in these larger HMOs, in particular in relation to fire safety. We commenced a three year programme of identifying HMOs across Westminster and subjecting them to intensive enforcement activity. This culminated in the adoption of an HMO Registration Scheme for the entire City in 1999. We have seen a number of poor quality HMOs change use to residential and a consequential drop in referrals to our homelessness team from poor quality HMOs. At the same time we have developed a clear planning policy which protects HMOs that are delivering decent quality affordable shared accommodation.

To further assist with accessing private renting the City Council's Assessment and Advice service will be working with other agencies and our landlords forum, offer landlord advice and a landlord/tenant mediation service.

We will continue to offer assistance through grants to improve private sector stock in order to access units for the homeless and will shortly be introducing pilot HB sign up/advice surgeries at key locations such as the Bayswater Families Centre. We will also explore the possibility of advertising PRS lets via the Council's web sites, linking these into our Choice in Lettings and out of London promotion schemes and the wider sub-regional strategic approach to affordable housing supply.

Despite all these efforts there remains the major problem of the complex HB system, which effectively discourages private landlords from letting to homeless households who are invariably on benefits or in low waged employment. Alongside the ALG and other organisations in the housing field we will continue to lobby Government for further reforms to the system, in particular the introduction of payments

in advance and the removal of landlord liability for HB overpayments.

Permanent General Needs Social Housing

All new social housing available to the City Council is produced by housing associations and is subject to nomination arrangements in which the Council has access rights to a proportion of initial and subsequent lets. We will continue to operate a rigorous monitoring system to ensure that the Council receives its maximum entitlement. Through its arms-length management organisation - CityWest Homes - the Council will be closely monitoring the opportunities arising from being a 3-star ALMO and the ODPM's ALMO Plus proposals. Linked to this we will also be examining the City Council's land holdings within Social and Community Services and the possibilities of using disposal receipts for new affordable housing.

In terms of securing affordable housing through the planning system Westminster recently increased its requirement to 30% (including 5% for key workers), and does not consider it to be realistic to increase this further. In a mixed economy such as exists in Westminster, housing competes with other land uses. Developers will switch to more profitable uses if we demand too high an affordable housing requirement, with a subsequent loss of residential development overall. We will continue to lobby central Government to be given the freedom to spend commuted sums (held within the Affordable Housing Fund) out of borough. The City Council will also be playing its full part in the new regional arrangements for investment in social housing with the aim of maximising the number of new units available for Westminster households.

The Council has recently piloted a scheme on the Harrow Road for bringing empty flats over shops back into use as affordable housing. This will be reviewed shortly with a view to further promotion and extension of the initiative. We will also be seeking further to provide general needs and supported housing for homeless and other priority households through a major review of the Council's portfolio of sheltered and supported units, many of which are now considered to be unsuitable and surplus to requirements.

Twice a year the City Council reviews its allocations policy and the proportion of new lettings allocated to the various priority groups including homeless households. We now allocate around 90% of net family sized (2 bed +) lettings to homeless households. We recognise that this limits scope for tenant transfers and causes concern among existing tenants on our estates. We believe that it would not be appropriate to increase this proportion any further given our desire to achieve sustainable and balanced communities. Recent changes in the housing market and new subsidy arrangements for TA also mean that there are now opportunities to meet a broader range of housing needs within our permanent stock.

We have recently widened and enhanced our policy of encouraging under-occupying households to move to smaller accommodation. We also continue to make best use of our existing housing through good void turnaround performance and ensuring appropriate usage of the stock through regular tenancy checks.

As mentioned above, Westminster, along with other London boroughs, is working closely with the LAWN initiative to encourage its tenants and priority housing applicants to move into

social housing vacancies outside of the South East area. Despite a major publicity campaign and very generous financial incentives so far success on this front has been limited. Work on this will continue as part of our drive to present people with advice and information about their future housing options (see chapter 4).

The City Council's Choice Based Lettings pilot, which forms part of the LB Camden led Home Connections initiative, is being reviewed during 2003/04. To date the scheme in Westminster has been limited to sheltered and supported housing but may well be extended to cover the entire stock. Our pilot has been extremely well received by those applicants who have used the system so far, and early indications are that it has been successful in reducing void turnaround times, and given customers a sense of empowerment.

An additional incentive for extending choice is the new regional and sub-regional approach to social housing investment. While we will continue to work to maximise affordable housing opportunities within the City, the sub-regional approach is likely to result, over time, in a shift in the location of new social housing units to outer London boroughs. Choice in Lettings will play a crucial role in enabling us to promote alternative housing opportunities to many of our residents.

We will continue to press Government to consider the 'local connection' in homeless applications within a sub-regional context, as we believe it runs counter to a sub-regional approach to affordable housing supply.

The council also optimises the use of its scarce housing resources by encouraging homeless applicants to remain "homeless at home". We will continue to adopt this approach in

appropriate cases assisted by our new procedure of visiting all priority applicants who are asked to leave their accommodation by relatives or friends.

Homeless Hostels and other Supported Accommodation

There are around 1,100 homeless hostel bed spaces in Westminster and a wide range of other supported accommodation catering for various different groups of clients, many of whom may be otherwise homeless or vulnerable to homelessness. This provision is now strategically planned and financed through the Supporting People (SP) programme, overseen in Westminster by a commissioning body comprising the City Council, its partners in Health and Probation, and Provider representatives.

A comprehensive review of homeless hostel provision is currently being carried out. These hostels provide an important, albeit relatively short term, resource aimed at assessing people and preparing them to move on to either greater independence or the right form of more specialist support.

The review is focusing on the extent to which the hostels are achieving this aim, on ways in which they may be able to better work together and the need for additional move on accommodation. The outcomes and recommendations of the review will contribute to the ongoing development of this strategy, as well as the SP strategy and the associated programme of SP service reviews.

Although still in its early stages, the review has already indicated areas where the Council and/or the Homelessness Directorate may be able to provide a degree of co-ordination and common servicing which has the potential to release resources and promote good practice.

We are aware of potential changes to the HOMES scheme that may have a detrimental impact on our local hostel providers and their ability to access move on accommodation for their clients. We will be lobbying to ensure that, in shaping the final scheme, the particular needs of central London are addressed.

Throughout our homelessness review and strategy consultation, service providers have been supportive of the concept of operating “trainee flats”. Such a scheme, being run by at least one other London borough, involves a homeless applicant in hostel or B&B being offered the tenancy of a flat for a 12-week rent free period without losing their TA placement. At the end of the period their move on capabilities would be assessed. Such a scheme could help vulnerable people in hostels or B&B with the transition to more settled housing and prevent future tenancy breakdowns. The City Council has agreed in principle to run such a scheme and will be identifying funding and suitable premises.

Another innovative accommodation/support model is the Safe Stop scheme being run by Centrepoin in which young homeless people are provided with a short term stay in an intensive supported residential project which closes during the day and requires them to seek their own accommodation solutions either in London or possibly in their home town if they have come from elsewhere. The Council intends to work with partners in the voluntary sector to explore this model and the possibility of adopting and expanding it for other groups such as older homeless people.

The City Council will be working closely with Westminster Domestic Violence Forum and Westminster Women’s Aid to consider the provision of women only, or supported

accommodation for households fleeing domestic violence.

Actions and targets

Action	Responsibility	When
Continue the programme of action for meeting the BBU target re children in B&B	WCC	2003/04
Explore alternative temporary accommodation options with Westminster Domestic Violence Forum and Westminster Women's Aid	WCC/WDVF/ WWA	2003/04
Develop a supported TA scheme for single homeless with severe and enduring mental illness (SEMI)	WCC/Lookahed ad Housing Association	2003/04
Investigate ways of better using HB discretionary payments to prevent loss of ASTs	WCC	2003/04
Promote PRS lets to the homeless working with Landlords Forum and providing landlord advice and mediation	WCC	2003/04
Make use of WCC or Home Connections website to advertise PRS lettings	WCC and partners	2004/05
Lobby Govt to allow HB payments in advance and remove landlord liability for overpayments	WCC	2003/04
Consider ALMO Plus opportunities to increase permanent rehousing opportunities for the homeless	WCC & CWH	2004/05
Examine Social & Community Services land holdings/other development opportunities and possible use of disposals receipts for new affordable housing provision	WCC	2004/05
Review pilot schemes for bringing back into use empty flats over shops at Harrow Road, with a view to further promotion/ extension	WCC	2003/04
Maximise opportunities to develop new affordable housing through review of WCC sheltered/supported housing	WCC	2003- 2008
Incorporate the outcomes of the review of homeless hostels within this strategy with the aim of making better use of this resource	WCC	2004/05
Adopt "trainee flat" scheme for Westminster homeless households	WCC	2004/05
Extend Safe Stop scheme to cater for older homeless clients	WCC	2004/05
Consider the provision of women only, or supported accommodation for households fleeing domestic violence	WCC/WDVF	2003/04

6 Support for the Homeless

Strategic Objectives: To ensure that there is sufficient appropriate support to meet the needs of the various client groups in temporary accommodation

To ensure vulnerable children are protected

To provide appropriate resettlement and tenancy sustainment services for tenants vulnerable to homelessness

- Targets:**
- To reduce the level of repeat homelessness by 10% in 2004/05
 - By 2004/05 to establish, with CityWest Homes and RSLs, a baseline for measuring the success of tenancy sustainment activity in social housing
 - 40 homeless households in TA to access ICT and ESOL training in 2003/04
 - Establish a work experience placements scheme with local employers for homeless clients in 2004/05, and set targets for later years

Providing appropriate support to vulnerable homeless people when rehoused, either temporarily or permanently, is key to preventing repeat homelessness. This has been demonstrated through a number of studies in recent years and was a key message emerging from our homelessness review. Our support strategy has a number of strands:

- providing support to households placed in temporary accommodation, to improve quality of life and ensure necessary services are available and accessed;
- ensuring information about placements in temporary accommodation is provided to relevant agencies;
- providing resettlement services once households are rehoused to permanent accommodation, with the aim of sustaining tenancies and preventing repeat homelessness;
- improving access to education and training schemes for homeless people with the aim of improving employability and thus defeating the worklessness/homelessness cycle.

Support for Households in Temporary Accommodation

When households are accepted as homeless and placed in temporary accommodation our Assessment and Advice service provides advice and

information packs that give details of schools, health services, local support groups and other facilities and amenities relating to the area of placement. We also have an Education liaison officer who links families with children with local schools and assists families to access school places.

Valuable support to households with children living in TA is also provided by the Bayswater Families Centre (BFC), run by the National Children's Homes (now NCH) and part funded by the City Council. The BFC offers a range of services to homeless and refugee and asylum seeker families including housing and welfare benefit advice, general advice and counselling, drop in play facilities and early years classes, clothing and laundry facilities, ESOL courses, homework clubs and food donations. The Centre also hosts health and housing surgeries, and the Council is aiming to set up housing benefit surgeries in the near future, based at a number of key locations including the BFC.

Westminster was successful in securing money from the Homelessness Directorate to fund a co-ordinator post whose role will be to set up a client database and system for tracking households as they move location. This project supports the recommendations of the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The main aim of this project is to ensure that homeless families receive the range of support services they need and to better co-ordinate the work undertaken with families in TA by the Centre itself, the Health Support Team (see chapter 7), the Council and other agencies. It is also concerned with engaging with families who place themselves in B&B hotels in the area and whose support needs may otherwise not come to the attention of the statutory agencies.

Currently the BFC works with families in the north of the borough although ongoing support is provided to households who are moved out to other locations. As part of this strategy, and in partnership with the Cardinal Hume Centre, we will be looking to extend the type of multi-agency advice service offered at the BFC to the south of the City.

In the case of single person households accepted as homeless due to vulnerability the Council provides floating support, via Look Ahead Housing and Care, to around 30 - 35 clients at any one time who are living in B&B and have mental health problems. This service is to be reviewed alongside Year 1 Supporting People reviews, to ensure that clients with low support needs have access to the service, with the primary aim of preventing clients from becoming higher need cases.

⇒ Further information

Further information can be found in our Mental Health Strategy – Housing and related Support Services, contact Rachel Thorneycroft (details in Appendix 1)

There is a more general concern that with increasing concentrations of single vulnerable clients in B&B hotels as a result of the Council no longer housing households with children in such accommodation there will be a greater need to provide support to the former group. The City Council will aim to provide this over the coming years via the Supporting People programme, with additional funding as required made available from its TA procurement budget

Protection of Vulnerable Children

Earlier this year, Lord Laming's Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié was

published. Serious shortcomings and mistakes led to the horrific death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié and there were a string of failures to intervene across the many agencies involved.

In anticipation of the findings, Westminster had already taken steps to ensure vulnerable children were not 'lost'. One example is NOTIFY, the notification system for the placement of families in temporary accommodation (see below). In addition, we are developing shared communication protocols between housing and social services for children in 'unsuitable' housing and inter-agency training will be delivered around the new child protection guidance.

TA Notifications and Client Record Systems

The need to improve the information held on clients and making that information available to other agencies through the creation of shared databases was a strong theme emerging from the homelessness review. Similarly the review highlighted a need for the improved inter-agency sharing of information on services to homeless people in the borough.

Where it places a homeless household in TA out of borough the Council automatically notifies the relevant services of the placement. Recipients include the host borough's homeless persons unit, social services and education departments and the local PCT. The Council also tries to ensure that it receives information about households placed within Westminster by other authorities although this is not always forthcoming.

The importance of inter-agency notification was graphically illustrated by the tragic death of Victoria Climbié

and prompted the setting up of the GLA/ALG led NOTIFY project which aims to put in place a London wide comprehensive web based TA placement notification system. The City Council participated in a small-scale pilot to test the proposed system and will continue to work closely with the GLA/ALG on its roll out across all 33 London authorities, which is due to be completed by September 2003.

A major challenge will be to make sure that the client information held via NOTIFY is integrated with that held within the emerging Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) system being developed by social services authorities in relation to vulnerable children. In Westminster it will also need to integrate with a new system of client held medical records being developed jointly by the Health Support Team and the Bayswater Families Centre.

Housing and Education Liaison

Arising out of a study which highlighted the problems facing school children living in insecure temporary accommodation in terms of achieving their educational potential, the City Council set up a housing and education liaison project in early 2002. Its purpose is to ensure that pupils living in temporary accommodation, often out of borough, are able to access school places and educational welfare services and that the detrimental effects of living in such circumstances in terms of educational achievement are minimised.

A housing and education liaison officer was recruited in January 2002, the post being jointly funded by Housing, Social Services (Quality Protects) and the Westminster Education Action Zone (EAZ). Since then much work has been undertaken in this area including:

- Significantly reducing the number of moves within temporary accommodation for households with school age children, particularly for those at key stages
- Research into the accessing of school places and assisting with individual school access issues
- Policy reviews in terms of housing allocations involving households with Special Educational Needs (SEN) children
- Helping to set up our notification systems between agencies in relation to temporary accommodation placements
- Piloting the provision of play facilities for children in block booked hotels in partnership with the Westminster Play Association

Funding for 2003/04 has been secured and the project is now managed through a joint Housing, Social Services, Education and EAZ senior officer group. Key priorities for this year include representation and advocacy on behalf of clients to neighbouring boroughs, co-ordination of the NOTIFY project and further staff training around the issues of education and children living in TA. With the appointment of the new Partnership Manager within the Assessment and Advice service (see chapter 3) the project will become more integrated with the work of the Connexions Personal Adviser and the Bayswater Families Centre.

Resettlement and Tenancy Sustainment

The City Council currently provides, through Thames Reach Bondway, a floating support service to homeless households rehoused in its permanent stock. Numbers supported amount to around 50 at any one time. The contract for this service now comes within the Supporting People

programme and is one of the first services due to be reviewed in 2003/04.

Anecdotal evidence from estate management providers suggests that the current level of provision is now insufficient to meet the extent of need while the Best Value Review of mental health services suggests that the service could benefit from extending the client group to homeless households rehoused in RSL properties.

We will be working with RSLs and CityWest Homes to revise our existing joint protocol that sets out agreed minimum service standards across the social housing sector. This will include tenancy sustainment initiatives, and we will be working during 2004/05 to establish a baseline against which we can measure the success of such initiatives.

St Mungo's is currently providing a floating support service to 15 Council tenants with dual (mental health and alcohol/drugs) diagnosis, and have a highly successful tenancy sustainment team which has resettled over 100 rough sleepers into accommodation in Westminster, with a 97% success rate for sustaining tenancies.

The mental health BV review has also flagged up a need for a dedicated officer to resolve the HB problems of clients in supported housing and TA in order to prevent loss of future tenancies. HB was one of the most cited concerns of moving from a supported housing scheme into independent accommodation. This will be looked at further within the Supporting People review.

We will aim to work more closely with the resettlement services of the local hospitals and the prison service, to help vulnerable clients manage the

transition to independent living and ensure that independent living is sustained. We will also work with providers through Supporting People to ensure that long-term support is available to other vulnerable groups such as people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, people with drug and alcohol mis-use problems and women fleeing domestic violence.

Support for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Our homelessness review established that more than two-thirds of homeless applications now come from BME households. This is approximately double the proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities City-wide.

Although the review established few gaps in current provision specifically geared for BME clients we will be working with providers to develop more targeted services where they are needed, such as interpretive services for refugees and asylum seekers. We will also work to involve BME groups more in service planning and delivery.

The City Council has responded to the need for interpretive services by establishing a protocol that provides literature in 12 community languages, a language service providing on the spot translations, a representative Assessment and Advice Service User Forum, and BME community group representation on our Health Partnership Group.

The Council has also recently undertaken an extensive audit of ethnic minority needs which included an assessment of hidden homelessness among BME households. The audit is likely to have significant implications for the City Council's housing services

and for service provision to homeless households from BME communities. We will integrate the outcomes of the audit as we take forward the implementation of this strategy.

Additionally through the development of the City Council's BME Housing Strategy, the Assessment and Advice Service has adopted the Council's racial incident reporting and investigation procedure, introduced a support pack for victims of racial incidents, and has improved the levels of ethnic classification to better aid service planning. We also aim to ensure that our service delivery to individual clients is culturally appropriate.

We will look to improve provision of support services to BME, refugee and asylum seeking households by further developing our successful partnership with the Bayswater Families Centre (BFC). The BFC offers a range of services that are tailored to the specific needs of BME and refugee and asylum seeker families.

In partnership with Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES), we have had success in providing a pilot programme of ESOL classes in one of our block booked hotels – the Leinster House. Classes will be rolled out to the Judd House Hotel and the programme will be expanded to encourage take up from households who live in self contained temporary accommodation.

Although we are making progress the City Council is fully aware that it can do more to meet the needs of all groups within Westminster's culturally diverse communities - both through improving housing services and at a broader corporate level. To that end, and working closely with a wide range of BME community groups, we will build on the results of the City Council's Audit of

Ethnic Minority Needs to introduce better ways assessing the housing and related support needs of BME homeless clients.

Homelessness and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a serious crime which can affect as many as one in four women, and accounts for almost a quarter of all violent crime. It accounts for approximately 15% of homeless applications nationally, and will also have a considerable impact on other triggers which may lead to homelessness, such as mental health problems and youth homelessness.

In Westminster over the past five years an average of 200 women made homeless applications because of domestic violence, with 43 homeless acceptances in 2002/03. At 3.4% this is significantly below the national average and the Council will be working with Westminster Domestic Violence Forum to explore this further, to ensure that the service is accessible and appropriate.

Joint working protocols have been developed between the Assessment and Advice service and estate management in order to streamline management transfer procedures. This will be supported by ongoing cross service training.

We will also be developing written policy and guidelines for dealing with domestic violence cases within the Assessment & Advice service, and will be considering amendments required to the assessment process to improve accessibility of the service for those experiencing domestic violence. Proposals include providing improved privacy, fast-tracking interviews, better sign-posting, and the possibility of receiving applications in refuges rather

than requiring the applicant to visit the A&A offices.

The Council will continue to work closely with Westminster Domestic Violence Forum to pursue initiatives such as:

- Schools Domestic Violence Prevention Pack
- Prevention work with male perpetrators
- Development of an advocacy project in partnership with Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

Employment and Training

As has already been mentioned, education and training for employment were seen by homeless people themselves as the most sustainable solution to tackling homelessness in the longer term. Despite this the review also revealed that only a relatively small proportion of homelessness services offered specific training and employment schemes.

The Council has already made some progress in this field with the introduction, on a pilot basis, of ESOL classes and ICT training for residents of its block booked hotels. Training is being provided by Westminster Adult Education Service. One of the key lessons learned from this initial work is that to be effective in recruiting and sustaining interest courses need to be matched to individual skill levels and aspirations. Consequently during the early part of 2003/04 we aim to undertake outreach work on an individual basis with clients to properly ascertain their learning needs in order to match courses to them and explore other sources of education and employment training that could be separately accessed.

We will also seek ways of encouraging private and public sector employers to offer training and work experience for homeless clients who would benefit from such assistance. The Council has recently forged links with Jobcentre Plus and we will be working together on the new Progress2work initiative that seeks to help people recovering from drug mis-use problems obtain suitable employment and a separate initiative that encourages lone parents to re-join the labour market.

Providing Support Out of Borough

Providing accommodation solutions for homeless people and other priority rehousing groups within the borough has long been extremely difficult due to the acute housing supply/demand imbalance we face. Increasingly Westminster has to look to securing new supply, particularly of permanent accommodation, outside its boundaries, and this will be given further impetus with the Government's new regional approach to social housing investment.

At the same time Westminster remains a magnet for homeless people and others who may be susceptible to homelessness, an increasing proportion of whom are vulnerable due to mental health and other problems. We need to provide both accommodation and support for these clients in a flexible and responsive way.

One suggestion emerging from the review is the concept of a "dowry" or financial sum to cover support costs that is attached to an individual but which could be readily transferred from one authority to another. This would facilitate the moving of a client out of the area with the assurance that appropriate support would be available to enable them to settle and maintain their lives outside of the originating borough. The City Council will be looking at this concept in practice, with a view to lobbying central Government to facilitate its introduction, perhaps initially on a pilot basis within Westminster.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Introduce HB sign up/advice surgeries at key locations	WCC	2003/04
Extend the range and location of HB Verification Officers to simplify processing	WCC	2003/04
Extend coverage of multi-agency advice sessions to south of the City	WCC/PCT/vol sector	2004/05
Establish floating support team for vulnerable homeless clients in B&B	WCC	2004/05
Review the floating support currently provided to homeless clients permanently rehoused	WCC	2003/04
Protocol to be agreed for communication between Social Services and Housing when child in 'unsuitable' housing	WCC	2003/04
Roll-out of NOTIFY	WCC	2003/04
Inter-agency training to be provided on new Child Protection Guidance and All London Child Protection Procedures	WCC	2003/04
Review RSL protocol and establish baseline for	WCC/RSLs/	2004/05

measuring success of tenancy sustainment initiatives	CWH	
Improve the transition to independent living for people leaving institutions such as prison or hospital	WCC/PCT/Pro bation	2003- 2008
Ensure necessary long term support is provided to all vulnerable client groups including people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, drug and alcohol mis-use problems, women fleeing domestic violence and ex-offenders (through SP service reviews)	WCC	2003- 2006
Review findings of the Ethnic Minority Needs Audit in relation to support needs of homeless households	WCC	2003/04
Develop written policy and guidelines for dealing with domestic violence cases within the Assessment & Advice service	WCC & WDFV	2003/04
Consider amendments to the assessment process to improve accessibility of the service for those experiencing domestic violence, eg improved privacy, fast tracking interviews, better sign-posting	WCC & WDFV	2003/04
Domestic violence awareness to be included in Assessment & Advice service core training	WCC & WDFV	2003/04
Appoint an outreach worker to ascertain learning needs of clients in B&B and tailor training packages accordingly	WCC & WAES	2003/04
Encourage employers to offer training and work experience to homeless clients where appropriate	WCC	2004/05
Work with Jobcentre Plus on the Progress2work scheme and their initiative to encourage lone parents to re-join the labour market	WCC	2003/04
Investigate the concept of support “dowries” and how they might be introduced	WCC	2004/05

7 Homelessness and Health

Strategic Objective: To improve the availability and accessibility of health advice and personal healthcare for those who are homeless

- Targets:**
- Establish standardised referral routes from primary and community services
 - Introduce screening and immunisation protocols for those infectious diseases of particular relevance for the target group
 - Increase the number of homeless substance misusers who are referred into treatment by 10%

The links between homelessness and health have been long understood, with homeless people known to suffer disproportionately in both physical and mental health terms compared to the population as a whole. Unsurprisingly this was also borne out by the findings of our interviews and discussions with homeless people, which revealed significant poor health experiences and a notable low level of registration with GPs. The research also identified a need for training for health service practitioners on homelessness issues and for better health care access arrangements for homeless people.

Improving health care for homeless people in Westminster is now being addressed through a programme of initiatives in the following areas:

- Access to primary care services
- Outreach work through the Health Support Team
- Community based TB screening
- Improved education and awareness of homelessness and health issues

Access to Primary Care Services

Westminster Primary Care Trust (PCT) is running two Personal Medical Services (PMS) pilots which essentially offer an alternative framework for the management of a General Practice that allows greater flexibility of funding and the targeting of marginalised groups such as the homeless. The principal aims of the two pilots are to increase access to primary health care and improve service standards through greater continuity and improved care

pathways. PMS GPs will also provide access to specialist services such as substance misuse and mental health treatment. After the initial three years the pilots will be evaluated and continued if found to have been effective. The two pilots are:

Great Chapel Street Medical Centre: This is a joint service provided by Westminster PCT and Drs Ramsden and Reid, whose main surgery is in Notting Hill. This began in April 2002.

Westminster PCT-led Pilot: This began in October 2002 and provides services out of five voluntary sector day centres. Both pilots are mainly focussed on street homeless people and those living in homeless hostels, some of whom may be refugees or asylum seekers. They offer walk in services, a need for which was identified in the course of the review.

The PCT is also undertaking a needs assessment relating to the primary care needs of the hostels across Westminster to ensure that homeless people have access to primary care that is appropriate for their needs.

Outreach work through the Health Support Team

The Health Support Team (HST) provides health support to homeless households living in temporary accommodation in the north and west of the borough. The team offers health advice and assessment, screening services, referrals to mainstream and specialist services, group awareness sessions and outreach work both at GP surgeries and through home visits. The team is a key participant in the multi-agency advice surgeries operating at the Bayswater Families Centre. Currently, the PCT is considering proposals to extend the HST service to other parts of the City.

An important development initiated by the HST is the *Hand Held Record*. Key components of a patient's health profile are recorded in a book that the patient holds and entry sheets are carbonated, allowing copies to be retained by key clinicians for their own records. The Hand Held Record helps clinicians over the difficulties that arise from delays in obtaining patient records, particularly among transient groups.

Community Based TB Screening

A joint project has been established between the Chest Clinic at St Mary's Hospital and the PCT's HST. It offers community based screening for those at risk of TB and care for those with a diagnosis. The aim of establishing community based services is the avoidance of the perceived stigma of hospital based care, which may deter people from accessing services, and to bring services to the highly mobile Bayswater population.

The provision of HST and Chest Clinic services within one unit enables an opportunistic approach to be taken to the provision of services to patients within some of the hardest to reach groups. The service also has links with other PCT teams, City Council services and voluntary sector organisations.

Homelessness and Substance Misuse

Substance misuse is found disproportionately among those who are homeless. It may tend to be exacerbated within particular groups of people. Young people are more likely to be involved in using drugs and alcohol, leading to involvement in crime and loss of housing.

Street populations show high levels of substance misuse making accessing and remaining in housing far more difficult.

While substance misusers do not represent a discrete sub-set of homeless individuals, substance misuse cuts across all populations and can threaten interventions aimed at creating stable housing options

The cross-cutting nature of substance misuse makes it difficult to target services among homeless populations. It is for this reason that we aim to work with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team

(DAAT) to develop services that reach those who are most vulnerable.

The DAAT oversees the development and provision of services to young people and adults. It will continue to provide early intervention and prevention to those who are leaving care, those who are involved with the Youth Offending Team as well as those who are homeless on the streets.

The Strategy therefore will work closely with the DAAT to ensure that access to treatment is supported and built into the interventions that are developed

The DAAT's Criminal Justice Interventions Programme will provide a pathway into treatment for those arrested for drug-related offences. It will build on the Probation pilot to make the link between housing and substance misusers.

The DAAT will also work closely with the Street Population Strategy to ensure that the services it currently commissions support the aims of reaching those most vulnerable, maintaining their contact with services and linking them into treatment.

Improving Co-ordination and Information

Consultation throughout the review recognised that information about homelessness and health needed to be more widely available. Not only did health workers need more training about homelessness, but homelessness workers needed training about health issues. Information about accommodation and support services has been recognised as a particular concern for hospital discharge planning staff.

The PCT has established a Lunchtime Learning Programme that provides multi-disciplinary training to raise awareness of the health and social care needs of homeless people, including refugees and asylum seekers. This programme is regularly reviewed, with specific sessions developed to address learning needs that are identified. The PCT is also developing a series of learning opportunities for practice and clinic staff, that will involve staff from local voluntary sector homelessness services.

A training programme is also being developed for hostel staff, where there is an identified need for training around local health services and access routes. This programme is scheduled for delivery in Autumn 2003.

The Westminster Health Partnership Group for Homelessness, Refugees and Asylum Seekers produced a directory of services in 2001. We now propose to update and publish this directory on an annual basis.

PCT Health Strategy for Homeless People

In addition to a clinical lead for homelessness, the PCT has now established a senior management lead within its Public Health Directorate. This role is complemented by officers with responsibility for homelessness services within both the Primary Care and Commissioning directorates. The establishment of this team will facilitate the development and implementation of the PCT's strategy for the provision of care to Westminster's homeless populations.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Raise awareness among hospital discharge planning staff about accommodation and support services available, and nominate key contacts to provide advice to patients	PCT/NHS Trusts/WCC/Vol agencies	2003-05
Update the directory of services annually	HPG	Annual
Increase involvement of homelessness agencies in existing multi-agency forums in Westminster, eg Domestic Violence Forum, Substance Misuse Partnerships Group	HPG	2003/04 onwards
Improve access to health advice for homeless people in Westminster through providing Health Support Team services City-wide	PCT	2003/04
Review PMS pilots with view to further expansion	PCT	2005/06
Improve communication/liaison between "hands on" health providers for the homeless, by establishing a sub-group of the HPG for front line workers	HPG	2003/04
Define basic level of primary health care for homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers	HPG	2003/04
Undertake health awareness training for homelessness workers, eg hostel key workers	HST	2003/04 onwards
Investigate setting up a pilot project to increase access to GPs, eg through A&E registration, and planned outreach (GPs in hostels)	PCT	2005/06
Nominate lead health homelessness professionals eg dentistry, physio, opticians, diabetes, nursing, and provide appropriate advice, training and awareness for health professionals of homelessness triggers and housing related support services	PCT	2004/05
Develop a shared, multi-agency client database, eg building on NOTIFY and IRT	All agencies	2006-8

8 Youth Homelessness

Strategic Objective: To reduce youth homelessness through early intervention and education, improve accommodation options for young homeless people, and improve support for them in temporary accommodation

- Targets:**
- Work with 200 young people through the Safe in the City scheme over the 5 years 2003-2008
 - By 2005/06, to see 85% of care leavers turning 21 in suitable accommodation
 - To increase supported accommodation options for young people
 - To increase the proportion of young people aged 16-18 in employment, education or training to 88.4% by the end of 2003/04 (local Connexions target)

Whilst homelessness can have a detrimental effect on the lives of adults its effects on the lives of young people can be particularly devastating. For that reason this strategy has a particular focus on youth homelessness.

The review identified that there are a large number of services in the borough that cater for the support needs of homeless and other vulnerable young people but there is little provision aimed at preventing homelessness amongst this group. A need for early intervention projects was also highlighted, and young people themselves identified in particular the importance of education and training services geared to securing worthwhile employment as the most effective means of preventing homelessness.

Clearly while most of the existing services and proposed new initiatives outlined in the previous chapters are not targeted on any particular client group many of these will impact upon young as well as older homeless people. There are, however, a number of more specifically targeted existing and proposed services that are the subject of this chapter.

Specialist Advice and Support

In response to the Priority Needs Order the Council was successful in securing

a Connexions Personal Adviser post dedicated to helping homeless young people and undertaking preventative advice work with local schools. The postholder, based within the Assessment and Advice Centre, has also led on joint housing/social services assessments of presenting young people and has provided individual casework support to young homeless clients placed in temporary accommodation. It is becoming clear that the demand for this service may soon outstrip the resources available

and so consideration will be given to enhancing the service during 2003/04.

Working with local schools and colleges, the Connexions adviser has developed an innovative drama-based programme around the homelessness aspects of the citizenship curriculum. We will be looking to roll out this programme more widely across the City. Homelessness education activities also include presentations and surgeries at Westminster schools and colleges, and we are investigating the development of a peer mentoring scheme through which young people can learn from the experiences of others.

Consideration will also be given, during 2003/04, to extending the pilot housing advice service for ex-offenders (see Chapter 10 – Homelessness, Crime and Offending) to the young ex-offenders managed by the Youth Offending Team. Finding suitable housing solutions for this particular group has been persistently problematical despite the fact that securing appropriate supported accommodation is of crucial importance in the rehabilitation process.

Early Identification and Intervention

Perhaps the most effective means of tackling homelessness amongst young people is intervention at a very early stage when the signs of potential future homelessness, such as family breakdown, persistent truancy and offending behaviour, emerge.

The Council is developing its Local Preventative Strategy which aims to bring a new focus on early intervention to mainstream children's services. A key part of the strategy is the development of Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) which will allow early identification and therefore early

intervention for children and young people at risk of social exclusion.

A project dedicated to preventing youth homelessness through early intervention -Safe in the City- has been successfully running in a number of London boroughs. The project works by co-ordinating the efforts of a range or "cluster" of relevant service providers in the voluntary and statutory sectors focused on providing family support, personal development and skills and employment training.

Following discussions with Safe in the City, and having been successful in securing Government funding to cover the first year costs, we will be establishing a Safe in the City project in Westminster. The next step will be to recruit a project manager whose initial role will be to secure funding in the medium term, with a view to a 3 – 5 year project starting in 2004/05. Linked to this the Council will explore the possibility of developing a foyer scheme to provide accommodation and employment training opportunities for young people in the borough.

Through the Children's Fund, Westminster is also developing a Supporting Children Programme to prevent offending and anti-social behaviour through early intervention. The Acceptable Behaviour Contract scheme, a partnership between Housing, the Youth Offending Team and the Police, is just one of the preventative services which will be on offer.

Leaving Care Services

Westminster Accommodation and Leaving Care Service (WALC) is a multi-disciplinary team based within the Children & Families division of the Social and Community Services Department. WALC works with young people in and leaving care, aged 16 to

at least 21 (24 if continuing in full-time education). The team provides a comprehensive social work, advice and support service including individual allocation of Social Workers/Personal Advisers, group work and access to specialist workers as required, including Housing Support Workers and a Welfare Benefits Worker.

The WALC team ensures that accurate and thorough assessments are undertaken of each young person's capacity to take up and sustain independent housing. In conjunction with this a range of support is provided to prepare young people for independent living, such as individual work focusing on particular areas of concern identified within the assessment and participation in a leaving care skills group.

A flexible range of supported semi-supported and independent accommodation is provided to meet the varying needs of young people over a period of time. This includes flexibility about the age at which young people can access different types of accommodation, eg one young person may be able to take up an independent tenancy at 18, another may require a longer period of preparation and be ready for an independent tenancy at 20.

In addition, the team provides continuing outreach support to, and tracking of, young people following take up of a permanent tenancy.

Accommodation Solutions

Mention has already been made of the Safestop project run by Centrepoin, which has proved successful in helping many young homeless people find their own accommodation solutions. The numbers of young people that can be helped in this way is limited by the capacity of the scheme and so the

Council will be giving consideration to funding its expansion and/or extending the concept through working with other providers.

Supported lodgings are another potential accommodation solution for homeless young people that the Council will consider introducing. A scheme for young care leavers, which involves the Council securing lodging placements in private homes, is already in operation and could be expanded in due course to meet the needs of at least some young homeless people, depending on their support needs and behaviour.

The WALC team also has in place a floating support scheme which is run by Centrepoin in conjunction with four local housing associations. The scheme provides 16 Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) for care leavers which are converted after a successful minimum six month period into a permanent tenancy.

Other Special Needs

Westminster supports a number of young unaccompanied asylum seekers who, once they turn 18 and have not been granted leave to remain, cannot be granted a tenancy. They do, however, remain eligible for social services support until their asylum application is decided. Current Home Office processing times are placing many of these young people in an intolerable situation of uncertainty. This is a group which causes us particular concern and we will continue to lobby central Government about resolving this situation.

Another group for whom we need to develop appropriate solutions are those care leavers who are not able to live independently due to issues such as mental health or disability, but who do not reach the criteria for adult

services. Finding suitable accommodation is an issue once these young people are beyond the age at which WALC can continue to support them. In addition to care leavers, this is an issue for those young people who are supported in the community.

The Connexions Personal Advisor has uncovered and accessed a large caseload of pregnant young women and young mothers. A bid to Supporting People for a floating support service was unsuccessful, as no floating services were approved. Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator and Housing Needs team are now working together to find an alternative method of providing this support.

Potentially vulnerable young people are at higher risk of involvement in substance misuse. National data

suggests that among young people, use of illicit substances continues to increase and that young people are using drugs at an increasingly early age. Prevention work with young people involves identifying those who may be becoming involved with the risky use of alcohol and drugs. Through the DAAT's work in schools, the 48-hour call out and our work with the Youth Offending Team, we aim to reach young people engaging in risky behaviours that can lead to their loss of housing or to their involvement in street homelessness.

We will be working with providers through the Supporting People programme to ensure that support services are available in the long term for vulnerable young people including those with special needs.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Evaluate outcomes of Connexions PA and consider extending the funding for this role in relation to homeless young people and prevention work with schools	WCC/ Connexions	2003/04
Further develop citizenship and peer mentoring programmes in schools	WCC/ Connexions	2004/05
Pilot an extension of the Probation housing advice casework to cover young offenders	WCC	2003/04
Introduce Safe in the City project in Westminster	WCC & Safe in the City	2003/04
Explore foyer scheme for young people	WCC	2004/05
Evaluate outcomes of Safestop project and consider funding its expansion/extension to allow greater numbers of young people to benefit	WCC/ Centrepont	2004/05
Consider expanding supported lodgings schemes for homeless young people	WCC	2003/04
Develop provision for care leavers and 16-17 year old priority need cases	WCC	2003/04
Ensure support services are in place for vulnerable young homeless people including care leavers, young offenders and lone teenage parents, through SP reviews	WCC	2003- 2006

9 Rough Sleeping

Strategic Objective: To reduce the flow of people onto Westminster's streets and to protect the vulnerable by careful management of the social care and enforcement agendas

- Targets:**
- To reduce to under 100 the number of people sleeping rough on Westminster's streets by 31/3/04
 - In partnership with the Safer Streets Police Homelessness Team, to reduce related street activity including begging, street drinking and drug misuse

Rough sleeping in Westminster remains a significant challenge, and is a key feature of our Civic Renewal programme. We have had significant success in recent years in reducing the number of people sleeping rough on Westminster's streets, however there are a number of highly vulnerable people who remain.

Our Rough Sleepers and Street Culture Strategy was published in June 2002. It outlines our forward plan and long term strategy to reduce the number of rough sleepers in Westminster, initially to double figures, but then to as near to zero as is possible. This concerted effort requires a new approach which is outlined below.

Hot Spot Targeting

In order to meet the needs of the hard to reach rough sleepers a new integrated Housing and Social Services strategy has been developed that will in the first phase to be introduced in October 2003, concentrate on rough sleeping 'hot spots'. A hot spot is defined as a geographical location where there are concentrations of rough sleepers or a particular group with similar needs but who may be dispersed across Westminster. An example of the latter would be rough sleepers vulnerable through old age or mental health problems etc.

Building-based Services

The first phase will include awarding a Contract in July 2003, for the provision of a City Wide Rapid Intervention Street Services Team. This team will be fully operational in October 2003 and will pave the way for the *second phase*, involving a radical shift away from street provided services to building based provision. The effect of this will be that the street services including the Contact and Assessment Teams (CATs) will be disbanded and rough sleepers will be sign posted to multi-agency assessment units co-ordinated within existing day centre and hostel provision.

In order to ensure that the social care agenda remains at the centre of the

strategy, the Social and Community Services, Substance Misuse and Joint Homelessness Team (JHT) will continue. The Street Rescue Service will also cover Westminster and a 24-hour help line will be introduced.

An audit of hostel provision is being undertaken by the Homelessness Directorate and the City Council to ensure that provision is fit for purpose and is meeting the needs of rough sleepers. The hostel audit will also provide an opportunity to review whether Westminster's hostel provision should be adapted to meet the needs of particular groups such as drinkers and drug misusers. Building more hostels to create additional bedspaces is not the answer, but an integrated hostels system allowing residents to move from front-line hostels into second stage accommodation more rapidly and creating more vacancies in the process is a key objective for the hostels audit.

The new strategy will be facilitated by the existing Information Sharing Protocol which enables the identification of rough sleepers who are at risk because of poor physical or mental health and who may also be addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Enforcement

The Metropolitan Police, Safer Streets Homeless Unit, is a key partner in the delivery of this strategy and are committed to working with the City Council to reduce the number of rough sleepers and the anti social behaviour of those engaged in the broader street culture. They will be assisted by having their powers extended where appropriate by Byelaws applied for by the City Council. This will enable them to disrupt and use enforcement as appropriate whilst ensuring those that need the protection offered by the

social care agenda receive the appropriate support.

The strategy will be overseen and monitored by a cross departmental and multi-agency Steering Group chaired by the Director of Social & Community Services, to ensure the social care agenda and enforcement are well balanced.

Rough sleeping and mental health

Since October 2000, the Joint Homelessness Team (JHT) - a specialist team working with individuals who are homeless and mentally ill – have been responsible for over 130 psychiatric hospital admissions directly from the streets. This has enabled some of the most vulnerable people to move off the streets of Westminster and receive much needed treatment to improve their mental health before moving on to appropriate long term accommodation.

The scale of referrals has, however, had an impact on local health provision. The Gordon Hospital has been particularly affected in that admissions of local residents has not always been possible because of the pressure on beds.

It has been established that rough sleepers admitted to hospital take longer to recover and may require more intensive rehabilitation. This is possibly because their illnesses have gone untreated for some considerable time and are deep rooted. Discussions are taking place to explore the possibility of establishing a self-contained in patient unit for individuals who have been sleeping rough. This would enable staff to develop expertise appropriate to working with this group and ensure continuity of care for local people by freeing up beds in the Gordon Hospital.

Substance Misuse

Many of those who remain on the streets of Westminster are heavily addicted to hard drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin, or have serious drink problems. Some rough sleepers have both drug and alcohol problems. Drug use on the streets is an extremely detrimental activity, both to the addict and the local community who suffer from the problems created by drug dealers and paraphernalia such as syringes being left in public places.

Working closely with the Drug and Alcohol Action Team, a partnership which includes the voluntary sector and the Police, particular attention will

be given to tackling the drug problem amongst the rough sleeping population in Westminster. The approach will be to secure appropriate care through accessing treatment options, coupled with an enforcement approach in order to persuade users to take up services and dissuade dealers and others who seek to exploit vulnerable homeless people from operating in the borough.

⇒ Further information

Further detail can be found in our Rough Sleepers and Street Culture Strategy, contact Janet Haddington (details in Appendix 1)

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Tender for a new street services and hot spot targeting contract	WCC/HMD	2003/04
Provide a rolling shelter for entrenched rough sleepers	WCC/HMD	2003/04
Provide a wet day centre for street drinkers to support those prepared to work toward abstinence	WCC	2003/04
Assess and develop appropriate access points to treatment throughout the City to ensure engagement in services	DAAT/HMD	2003/04
Increase the number of Supporting People beds for substance misusers	WCC/DAAT	2003-05
Move to building-based provision of services for rough sleepers and disband existing street services	WCC/HMD	2004/05
Establish short term assessment units within existing hostel provision	WCC/HMD	2004/05
Develop a specialist mental health project to accommodate rough sleepers with a dual diagnosis or complex needs who are currently excluded from existing services	WCC	2004/05

10 Homelessness, Crime and Offending

Strategic Objective: To reduce the incidence of re-offending among ex-prisoners, through provision of timely and appropriate housing advice and support

- Targets:**
- Increase Supporting People bedspaces for ex-offenders from 20 to 80 (2% of total) by 2006
 - Ensure all offenders released on licence are assisted to access appropriate accommodation

Tackling crime and disorder is a key priority for the City Council and its partners.

There is a clear link between crime and homelessness. Contact with the criminal justice system is an identified risk factor for homelessness, and research has found that prisoners who are homeless after their release are much more likely to re-offend than those with a secure home. Housing has been identified by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) as one of the nine key factors that influence re-offending. Having stable accommodation can reduce the risk of re-offending by 20%.

In addition to our strategies around general homelessness prevention, accommodation and support, we have a three-pronged approach to tackling the interwoven themes of crime and homelessness:

- providing housing advice to those leaving prison;
- being proactive in identifying those at risk of losing accommodation while in prison; and
- ensuring appropriate, specialist accommodation is available for those who need it upon release from prison.

Tackling crime is the number one issue for residents in Westminster. It is a key plank of the Council's Civic Renewal programme and of our Housing Strategy.

There is a well established link between crime and homelessness. Often, that criminal behaviour is also linked to substance misuse. Research by the SEU found that around one in three prisoners were not in permanent

accommodation prior to imprisonment, while up to a third of prisoners lose their housing during custody. Many will face severe difficulty accessing housing upon release.

In a recent study of the accommodation needs of offenders known to the Probation service in the boroughs of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea, less than one-third of those not currently in custody

are living in their own rented or owner-occupied housing. A further 38% are living with family or friends. The remainder are living in some form of supported or temporary accommodation such as hostels or Bed & Breakfast, or are actually roofless (7%). A concerning statistic is that nearly 14% (146 in all) of the offenders in the study were either roofless at the time of the study, or had been roofless prior to going into custody.

Over 45% of those whose racial group was recorded are Black or "Other", markedly higher than their representation in the general population. While the bulk of offenders in the study are aged in their 20s to 40s, we do have concerns about the numbers of very young (14% are aged 16-21), and older offenders (11% are aged 50+). Further analysis of this data is currently underway.

Advice to Ex-offenders

Earlier this year, in response to the introduction of the Priority Needs Order, we initiated a pilot scheme providing housing advice to ex-offenders. From 1 April 2003, a full time Housing Caseworker has been seconded from the City Council's Assessment & Advice service to the London Probation Service, to provide housing advice, support and referral to ex-offenders who have been released from prisons after serving at least one year and who are on 'licence', ie are being supervised by Probation.

In the first two months of the pilot scheme, 54 clients were referred to the Housing Caseworker by Probation Officers, and 44 have been provided with assistance (10 failed to keep their appointments). Over half of the clients have been referred on to specialist Housing Association providers, and 4 have been accepted for rehousing by

the City Council. The rest have been given general housing advice and support, or referred to other local authorities.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, this pilot will be reviewed in 2003/04, with a view to its continuation and possible extension to include young offenders.

Related to this, we will explore opportunities to provide housing advice to prisoners who are not required to report to Probation Services upon release. Generally, these will be prisoners who are serving sentences of less than one year and are released with little or no ongoing case management.

Advice to those in prison

We have also identified a need to provide housing advice to prisoners at risk of losing their accommodation while in custody. Prisoners can lose their housing for a number of reasons, mainly being problems with Housing Benefit and failure to communicate with landlords to terminate or transfer tenancies.

Working with London Probation, we will investigate a protocol by which offenders who are sentenced to prison and are identified as being at risk of losing their accommodation, will be referred to the Housing Caseworker. In this way, communication between prisoners, landlords and HB services can be instigated, and arrangements put in place to terminate or transfer a tenancy as appropriate. This will also prevent cases of arrears building up and minimise resultant evictions.

Accommodation for ex-offenders

Through Supporting People, we have identified a need to increase the number of hostel beds available to ex-offenders who require support

immediately upon release from prison. As part of the hostels review, we will be exploring opportunities for

increasing the number of hostel bedspaces available for this group.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	When
Review the pilot Probation advice surgeries with a view to their continuation and possible extension to include young offenders	WCC/Probation	2003/04
Explore opportunities to provide housing advice to short term prisoners	Probation/WCC	2004/05
Investigate a protocol for targeting housing advice to offenders entering prison who are at risk of losing accommodation	Probation/WCC	2004/05
Through hostels review, explore opportunities for increasing bedspaces available to ex-offenders	WCC	2004/05

11 Monitoring and Review Process

To take the strategy forward the Council will put in place robust structures and mechanisms for carrying out the monitoring and review processes. The Strategy Steering Group, comprising senior officers from within the Council and representatives from health and the voluntary sector, will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to oversee the monitoring and review process. Regular reports on progress will also be provided for the Cabinet Member and relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. At the same time the Health Partnership Group will continue to act as the main body for ongoing consultation with the wider group of stakeholders.

To ensure that actions are carried out and targets achieved these will be integrated within the City Council's service planning process and feature in the key performance objectives set for individual members of staff. We will also agree with our partner organisations how they can similarly put in place mechanisms to ensure that actions and targets are delivered.

Although the review has provided a wealth of information on homelessness in the borough and a sound basis for developing our strategy there is still a considerable amount of further research to be carried out over the next five years. Not least is the need to gather information on repeat homelessness and its associated causes and undertake further audits in order to produce a comprehensive database of homelessness related services. To date only limited benchmarking has been done with neighbouring boroughs, and this is something the Council will wish to build on given the transient nature of many homeless people and the cross borough dimension to much service delivery.

Given the rapidly changing socio-economic environment in which homelessness is set, our strategy will need adapt and evolve over time. We will therefore be publishing updates on at least an annual basis and will produce a full new strategy, to meet the statutory requirement, by July 2008.

12 Resources

To achieve such an ambitious programme the City Council will need to draw to a large extent upon its own resources but will also need to make maximum use of the resources of other organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Where appropriate, opportunities will be taken to draw in new sources of funding such as the various pots of money made available by the Government and to look to joint funding arrangements. Above all the City Council will adopt an “invest to save” approach, particularly in relation to funding the prevention of homelessness.

In 2003/04 the City Council’s homelessness budget is £18.573m,

which includes £14.727m to cover the cost of temporary accommodation. The cost of the majority of proposals in this strategy can be met from within existing resources and are already included in relevant budgets, or can be financed through external funding sources.

However, a number of the proposals will require additional mainstream resources, estimated to be in the order of £300,000, and which could be offset against Temporary Accommodation savings. These proposals will be the subject of growth bids later this year as part of the City Council’s budget setting processes.

Appendix 1

Further information and useful contacts

	Contact	Email address
Homelessness Review	Jenny Campbell 020 7641 3214	jcampbell@westminster.gov.uk
Rough Sleepers & Street Culture Strategy	Janet Haddington 020 7641 3469	jhaddington@westminster.gov.uk
Mental Health Strategy – Housing and related Support Services	Rachel Thorneycroft 020 7641 3490	rthorneycroft@westminster.gov.uk
Homelessness, Refugees & Asylum Seekers Health Partnership Group	Anna Barnes Westminster PCT Emma Reynolds 020 7222 1602 Richard Williams 020 7641 2473	anna.barnes@westminster-pct.nhs.uk emma@cardinalhumecentre.org.uk rwilliams@westminster.gov.uk
City Plan	Gurjit Jessel 020 7641 3056	gjessel@westminster.gov.uk
Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy	Gordon Telling 020 7641 3384	gtelling@westminster.gov.uk
A Vision for Westminster – Westminster Community Network's Strategic Vision	Pamela Park 020 7723 1216	ppark@VAWCVS.org
Housing Strategy	Daniel McCarthy 020 7641 1913	dmccarthy@westminster.gov.uk
BME Housing Strategy	Jenny Campbell 020 7641 3214	jcampbell@westminster.gov.uk
Private Sector Housing Strategy	Jake Mathias 020 7641 3359	jmathias@westminster.gov.uk
North London Housing Strategy	Daniel McCarthy 020 7641 1913	dmccarthy@westminster.gov.uk
Unitary Development Plan	Margaret Handovsky 020 7641 1818	mhandovsky@westminster.gov.uk
Supporting People Strategy	Brian Matthews 020 7641 3491	bmatthews@westminster.gov.uk
Programme for a Healthier Westminster	Colleen Williams 020 7641 1962 Fidelma Carter Westminster PCT	cwilliams@westminster.gov.uk fidelma.carter@westminster-pct.nhs.uk
PCT Health Strategy for Homeless People	Anna Barnes Westminster PCT	anna.barnes@westminster-pct.nhs.uk
Affordable Warmth (under development)	Jeremy Hopkins 020 7641 2583	jhopkins@westminster.gov.uk
Westminster DAAT Action Plan	Lina Maslanka 020 7641 3467	lmaslanka@westminster.gov.uk
Crime and Disorder Reduction Action Plan	Ainslie O'Connor 020 7641 1240	aoconnor2@westminster.gov.uk
Youth Justice Plan	Eamon Brennan 020 7641 7799	ebrennan@westminster.gov.uk
Domestic Violence Strategy (under development)	Ainslie O'Connor 020 7641 1240	aoconnor2@westminster.gov.uk
Community Legal Services Partnership	David Ruse 020 7641 2496	druse@westminster.gov.uk

Voluntary Sector Grants Programme	Sharon Glen 020 7641 2565	sglen@westminster.gov.uk
Children & Young People's Strategic Plan	Lucie Reader 020 7641 1899	lreader@westminster.gov.uk
Local Preventative Strategy	Lucie Reader 020 7641 1899	lreader@westminster.gov.uk
Behaviour Improvement Plan	Pauline Bastick 020 7641 2377	pbastick@westminster.gov.uk
Teenage Pregnancy Strategy	Monica Patel 020 7641 6017	mpatel2@westminster.gov.uk

Appendix 2

Glossary

A&A	Assessment and Advice service
A&E	Accident and Emergency
ALG	Association of London Government
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation
AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
B&B	Bed and Breakfast hotel
BABIE	Bed and Breakfast Information Exchange
BBU	Bed and Breakfast Unit (part of Homelessness Directorate)
BFC	Bayswater Families Centre
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BV	Best Value
CAT	Contact and Assessment Team
CHAS	Catholic Housing Aid Society
CLSP	Community Legal Service Partnership
CWH	CityWest Homes
DAAT	Drug and Alcohol Action Team
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DTLR	Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (formerly DETR)
EAZ	Education Action Zone
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
GLA	Greater London Authority
GP	General Practitioner
HA	Housing Association
HALS	Housing Association Leasing Scheme
HB	Housing Benefit
HMD	Homelessness Directorate
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation
HOMES	Housing, Mobility and Exchange Services
HPG	Health Partnership Group
HST	Health Support Team
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRT	Identification, Referral and Tracking
JHT	Joint Homelessness Team
LAWN	London Alliance West and North
LB	London Borough
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (formerly DTLR)
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PMS	Personal Medical Services
PRS	Private Rented Sector
PSLS	Private Sector Letting Scheme
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SEMI	Severe and Enduring Mental Illness
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit

SP	Supporting People
SUF	Service User Forum
TA	Temporary Accommodation
WAES	Westminster Adult Education Service
WALC	Westminster Accommodation and Leaving Care team
WCC	Westminster City Council
WDVF	Westminster Domestic Violence Forum
WWA	Westminster Women's Aid