

Westminster Homelessness Strategy Update 2008-10

Key Objectives

Westminster developed a five year Homelessness Strategy, in line with central government guidance in July 2003 and reviewed and updated this in 2004 and 2007. The priority areas of the 2003 Strategy were subsequently underpinned by more specific local strategies and plans, including:

- The Westminster Homelessness Strategy
- The Westminster Supporting People Strategy
- The Westminster Rough Sleeping Strategy
- The Mental Health Strategy for Housing and Related Support Services
- The Westminster Learning Disability Partnership Housing and Support Strategy for People with a Learning Disability
- The Westminster Older People: Housing & Care Strategy
- Housing Equality Action Plan

Tackling Homelessness remains a high priority for the Council and this is reflected in our Local Area Agreement with key delivery activities related to 'securing the delivery of affordable housing', 'homelessness prevention', 'support to move off the street' and 'providing and managing rehousing opportunities' all of which have a detailed focus in the Housing Strategy and the complementary strategies listed above.

In particular our key objectives to reduce levels of homelessness include:

- Work with Registered Social Landlords to deliver 700 new affordable by 2010
- Deliver Local Area Agreement target to prevent 690 2007-10 households from becoming homeless
- Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation to meet the target of 1,574 by 2010
- Expand the provision of floating support services to prevent homelessness

- Enhance engagement by long term rough sleepers with buildings based services and reduce numbers
- Reconfigure homeless hostel services to provide additional provision for rough sleepers with low level mental health problems
- Develop a young persons housing strategy
- Use Places for Change funding to redevelop Berwick Street young persons hostel
- Support the PCT to develop a Homelessness Health Strategy, developing the commissioning framework for homelessness health services based within WPCT Provider Services
- Expand the range of high support provision for people with mental health problems
- Improve levels of move-on from homeless supported housing services to 75%
- Ensure the commissioning priorities of London Probation are met by the development of floating support services

Background

Westminster developed a five year Homelessness Strategy, in line with central government guidance in July 2003. The Strategy received positive feedback from stakeholders and the Department of Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM), reflecting the multi-agency partnership approach to its development. Comprehensive updates were completed in 2004 and in 2007 structured around the seven key themes of the main Homelessness Strategy:

- Homelessness Prevention
- Provision of Accommodation
- Support for the Homeless
- Homelessness and Health
- Youth Homelessness
- Rough Sleeping
- Homelessness Crime and Offending

The main strategy and the reviews highlighted the diversity within the homelessness field which covers rough sleepers coming into Westminster, includes families with children who are statutorily homeless, and vulnerable people with a variety of support needs who are at risk of becoming homeless. This diversity and the high level of activity within the 'homelessness' field has meant that there are clear decision making, resource allocation and consultative structures in place across these different areas and these are reflected in the relevant sections the Housing and Adult Social Services' Business plan and monitored accordingly.

The purpose of this update is to bring together the different strands of homelessness policy and practice setting out the national policy drivers and other initiatives that have impacted upon homelessness policy in Westminster and sets out commissioning policy in response to this. From this to highlight key areas of recent development in:

- Progress against meeting the TA reduction target
- Developments in commissioning homeless healthcare services
- Young persons homelessness services
- User involvement
- Development of Housing Advice Services
- Capital improvements to Westminster homeless hostels
- Move-on from supported housing services
- Work with London Probation Service on housing and offenders

National Policy Development

There have been several new policy and resource allocation developments since the publication of the last update which have impacted upon homelessness policy, practice and targets:

1. The Temporary Accommodation reduction target

In 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All' the Department for Communities and Local Government set a national target to halve the use of temporary accommodation by 2010. For Westminster this means a reduction to 1574.

1. The move to Buildings Based Services for Rough Sleepers

In July 2005 Westminster commissioned three organisations, The Passage, Connections at St Martins and St Mungo's to provide building based service provision for rough sleepers, supported by the Metropolitan Police Safer Streets Homelessness Unit (SSHU), City Guardians and Street Environment Managers.

2. The National Supporting People Strategy and Distribution Formula

The Supporting People programme funds housing related support services for a wide variety of different vulnerable groups. A key element of these services is to prevent tenancy breakdown and homelessness and to provide high quality hostel accommodation and support for rough sleepers. Westminster's grant allocation has reduced from £18.5m in 2003/04 to £17.05m in 2008/09 which has impacted upon the commissioning of services since 2003.

3. DCLG Best practice guides

In June 2006 CLG launched 'Homelessness Prevention: a guide to good practice.' The objective of the guide is to summarise what is meant by homeless prevention and how this can be delivered in practice. The guide focuses on six principal homelessness prevention initiatives:

- Housing advice
- Rent deposit schemes
- Family mediation
- Domestic violence victim support
- Assistance for ex-offenders
- Tenancy sustainment services

CLG have also issued: 'Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check' a self-assessment tool to help authorities review their homelessness strategy. Both documents have been reviewed against current policy and practice in the Housing Options service and the great majority reflect current working practice. The action points in this document reflects the outcome of this review

Commissioning Policy

In order to bring together different areas of homelessness commissioning policy, this review sets out a homelessness commissioning policy that includes the following principles:

- Available resources, whether financial, accommodation based or advice and support will be directed towards preventing homelessness acceptances and rough sleeping.
- In seeking to reduce levels of rough sleeping in central London, Westminster is providing a local response to a pan London and national issue and rehousing policy will reflect the need to reconnect rough sleepers with the area of their last settled home.
- Funding of services that meet a pan London and national need will be received from central government sources and resource allocation decisions will be made within available resources.
- Households making enquiries to homeless services commissioned by the Council will be advised on the housing options available and supported to make their own housing arrangements
- Housing related support services will be targeted at those most in need and at risk of becoming homeless in Westminster (whether rough sleeping or making homelessness applications)
- The supply of affordable accommodation (including social housing, clearing house applications and supported housing move-on options) available to homeless people in Westminster will be maximised.
- Homelessness services will be commissioned in partnership with healthcare, social, probation and employment services and homelessness issues will be presented at all relevant local fora.

Complementary Strategic Development

Having identified that there is a large amount of activity in the field of homelessness several key strategies are being/ have recently been developed that reflect and provide more detail on the objectives set out in this review:

- **Westminster Housing Commission**

In September 2005 Westminster City Council established an independent Housing Commission charged with the task of identifying new and creative ways to combat the City Council's shortage of affordable housing and addressing more effectively problems of homelessness, overcrowding and other housing need.

The Westminster Housing Commission launched its report in September 2006. In particular the Commission recommended that the City Council review its housing advice services and put in place measures to enhance and extend current arrangements. The content of this review reflects the findings and recommendations of the commission as well as the development of the Council's Housing Strategy mentioned below. The full report can be downloaded via the City Council's website www.westminster.gov.uk/housingcommission

- **Mental Health Strategy for Housing Related Support Services update**

This update sets out the priorities and objectives for the commissioning of housing related support services for people with mental health problems; in particular it describes priorities for homeless mental health services and tenancy sustainment

- **Learning Disability Housing Strategy update**

This document describes how housing and support services are developed and commissioned to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities to maximise independence and choice

- **Health and Homelessness**

Westminster PCT will develop a new Homelessness Health Strategy, developing the commissioning framework for homelessness health services based within WPCT Provider Services, GP's with a LES for Homelessness, specialist primary care service in Great Chapel Street and GP's with a special interest in homelessness.

- **Supporting People Strategy update**

CLG have developed a national SP Strategy and Westminster's five year strategy has been updated to reflect the priorities set out in this document

- **Housing Strategy**

Westminster's Housing Strategy 2007-12 was adopted in June 2007. The strategy sets out a wide range of commitments within four broad priority areas:

- Increasing the supply of homes
- Tackling high demand and improving housing advice
- Improving neighbourhoods and quality of life
- Developing our role as a strategic housing authority

Service Development

The following section provides detail of areas of recent development in homelessness services

1. Reducing the numbers of households in temporary accommodation

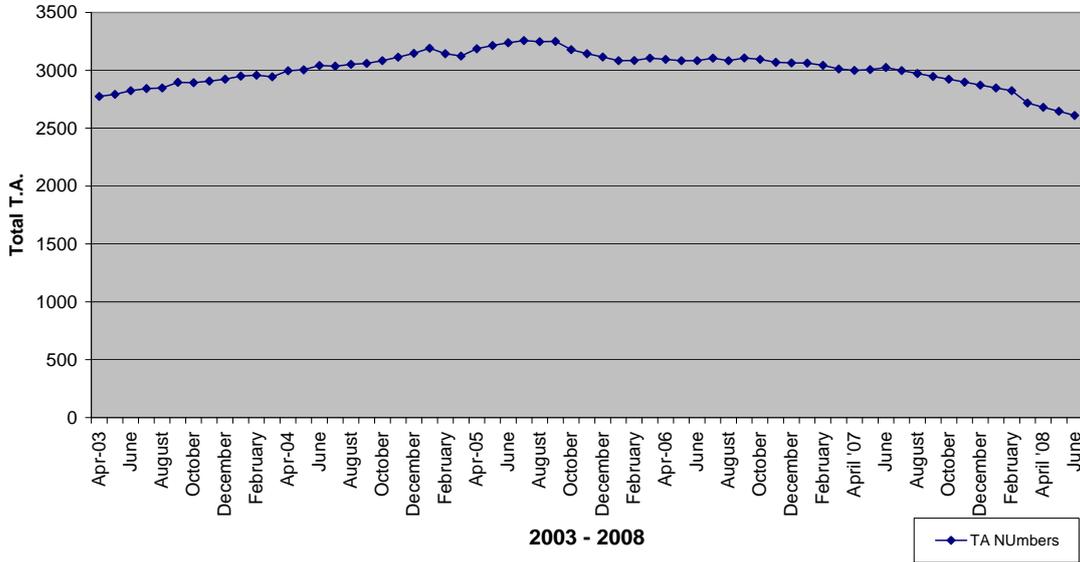
In 'Sustainable Communities: Homes for All' the now Department of Communities and Local Government set out a national target to halve the use of temporary accommodation by 2010. For Westminster this means a reduction to 1574 by 2010. Forecasts based upon past trends indicate that, without intervention, Westminster's TA population would in fact exceed 4000 in 2010. This is because each year the Council has been accepting more households as homeless than we were able to rehouse. Since October 2005 we have been able to first halt and subsequently reverse thus enabling us to reduce the TA population through both prevention and supply measures.

The following charts illustrate both the change in total levels of temporary accommodation and the make-up of this. In particular the decreased use of bed and breakfast as a temporary housing option is a key achievement.

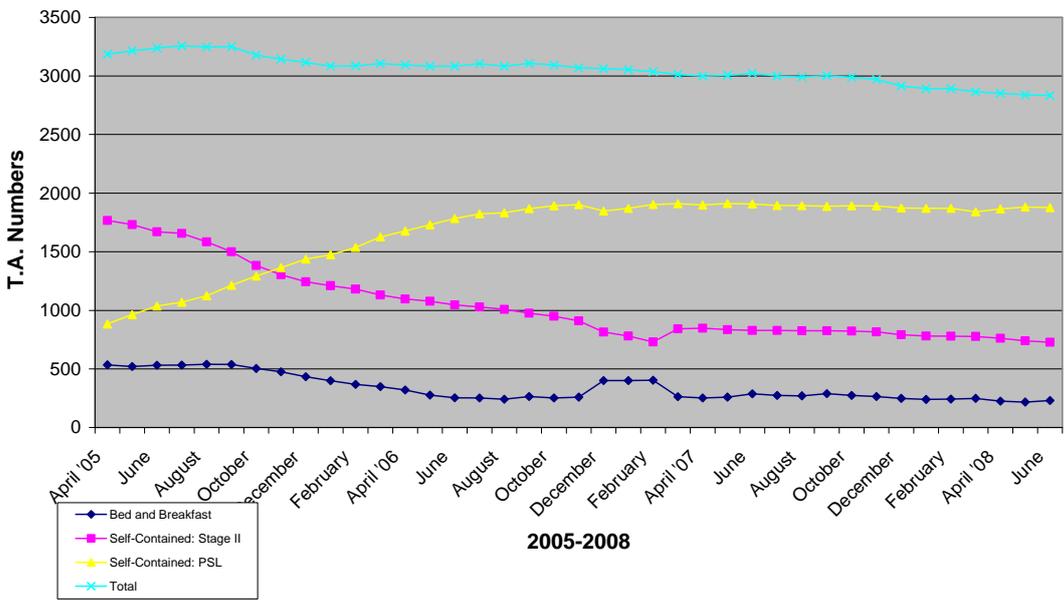
Achieving the above targets is dependent upon high levels of rehousing of homeless households into available social housing, continuing to reduce numbers of homeless acceptances and increasing the supply of social housing

It will require a continued focus on homeless prevention initiatives to reduce levels of homelessness applications and acceptances, increased supply of affordable accommodation and levels of rehousing of homeless households.

Total Temporary Accommodation 2003-2008



T.A. property type breakdown



2. Homelessness and Health

Reflecting the high priority the PCT have employed a Health and Homelessness lead. Based jointly across the City Council and the PCT the postholder will review and improve the The Local Enhanced Scheme (LES), "Care of the Homeless." The LES' aim is to provide an enhanced level of service for homeless people, enabling them to register permanently with mainstream GP practices. The postholder will work with GPs, primary care and secondary care clinicians to improve patient processes and care pathways with particular attention given to access arrangements for the most socially excluded.

This will include project managing the multi-agency Homelessness Health Group developing terms of reference, a project plan and liaising with stakeholders to deliver develop a Homelessness Health strategy for Westminster.

3. Developing Young People's homeless services and practice;

There are 11 young persons accommodation based housing and support services for young people in Westminster providing a total of 365 units of accommodation. 23 of these units are supported housing, the remainder are 24 hour hostel services, with varying lengths of stay. This level of provision for young people, according to DCLG Supporting People Grant funding figures, is greater than in any other London borough and is the fourth highest nationally.

Performance of young people's services against DCLG's key performance indicators is very good with over 900 planned moves in 2007/08 on from services secured (generally to services outside Westminster) a positive move-on rate of 76%

There have been several positive developments in young people's housing and support services: a reduction in the numbers of homeless 16/17 year olds placed in bed and breakfast, improved access to supported housing for care leavers, young offenders and other local priority groups, the reduction in numbers of young rough sleepers both on rough sleeper counts and accessing buildings based services and the development of two new young persons housing service. At the same time the majority of young persons hostel provision is for young people aged over 18 for whom there is no statutory obligation to provide housing and who do not have long standing connections to Westminster. Westminster remains committed to commissioning services that do not meet an immediate local need as a means of preventing homelessness.

Multi-Agency Young Persons Group

The establishing of the housing and young people multi-agency group has enabled the issues identified above to be taken forward comprehensively and in partnership with all stakeholders. The group's business plan sets out the key

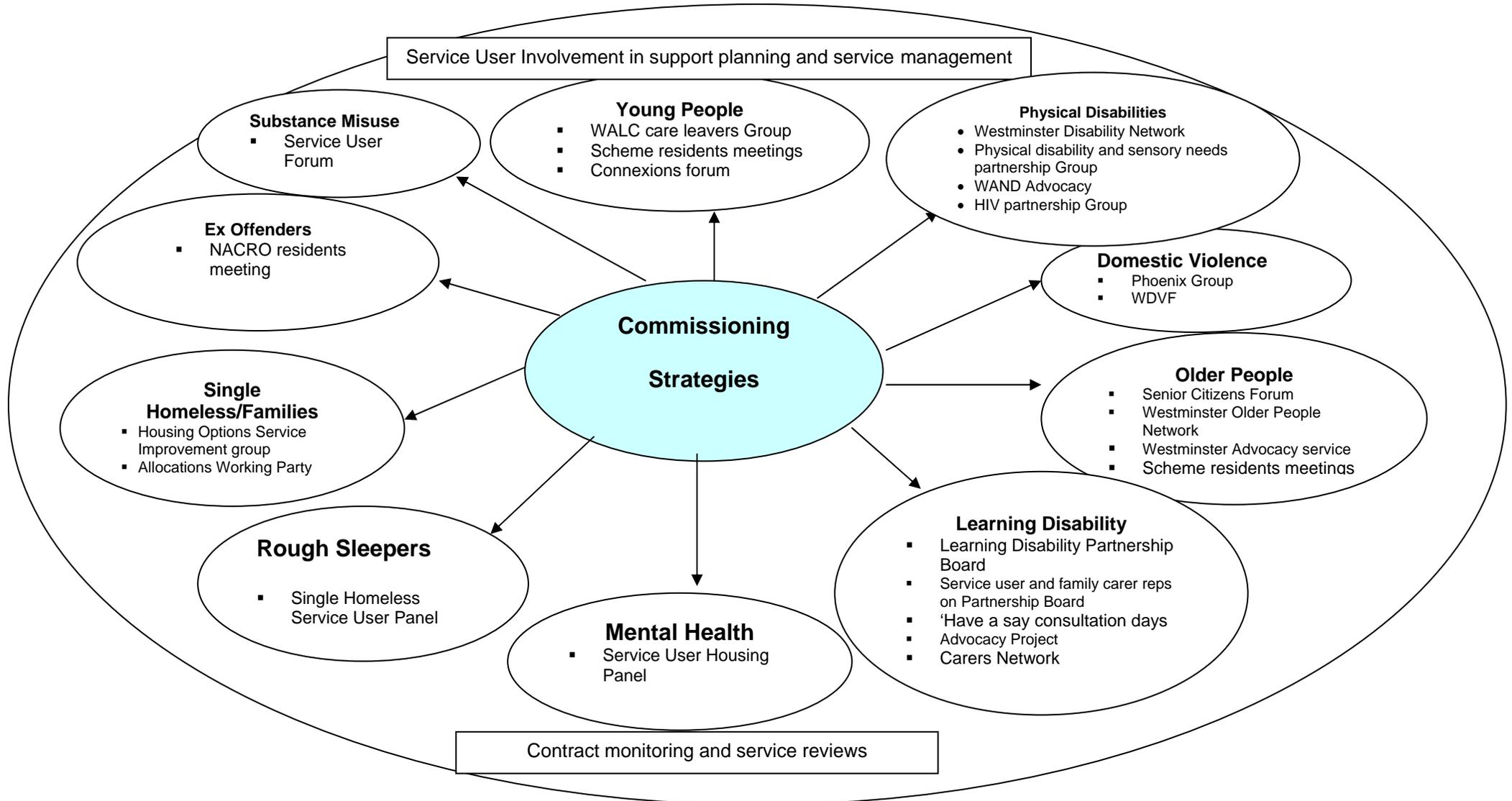
business objectives the successful delivery of which will support the delivery of the 2005/10 SP Strategy and establish a strategic, integrated policy delivered locally in response to identified needs.

A key action plan for the group is to develop a Young Persons Housing Strategy that will:

- Improve understanding of flows of young people through supported housing services to inform commissioning decisions
- Consider issues of diversity and ensure that there is equity in delivery and access to services
- Improve the range of move on options to young people
- Develop an effective mediation service model in order to:
 - Prevent homelessness
 - Improve quality of family relationships for young people in housing need
- Monitor quality and outcomes of education employment and training related keyworking with young people in supported housing services
- Reduce and maintain levels of young persons rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible
- Be based upon service user consultation with Young People
- Consider further methods to prevent youth homelessness in Westminster

4 Service User Involvement

Through the Supporting People housing related support commissioning process a user involvement strategy has been developed that describes how service users are involved across the full range of homelessness and supported housing services. Homeless prevention and broader housing issues are discussed at each forum and informed the development of each of the complementary strategies.



5. Development of Housing Advice Services

In 2007 we began a review of the broad range of housing advice services in Westminster, as recommended by the Westminster Housing Commission. This review will conclude in 2008/09 and we will consider options for enhancing the range of services on offer to provide Westminster residents with more comprehensive advice on the housing opportunities that exist for them. The advice project will evaluate the success of a tenancy reviews pilot that we have been undertaking with four housing associations in the north of the City. A key challenge for of a refocused advice service will be to link opportunities for training and employment with a wider range of housing options, including low cost home ownership.

6. Capital improvements to Westminster homeless hostels

Westminster has received an allocation of over £20 million in total from DCLG's Hostels Capital Improvement and Places for Change Programmes. The purpose of the funding is to enable local authorities to rationalise hostel provision in their areas and, in particular, to improve the remaining large, institutional hostels where the physical constraints are deemed to have a detrimental effect on the quality of the support work provided.

The principal schemes allocated funding in Westminster through the recent Places for Change Programme are:

Look Ahead Castle Lane SW1 - extensive remodelling of the reception facilities to improve interaction between staff and clients. Castle Lane is the largest hostel in Westminster and a prime example of the sort of institutionalisation imposed on a service by the building it occupies

Centrepoin't's 25 Berwick Street hostel which will be refurbished and the current shared rooms eliminated

Passage House, Longmoore Street, SW1. Formerly the Passage Night shelter, half the bed spaces are still in dormitories. The bid is to refurbish the building and remodel the communal and reception areas, and in particular to eliminate sharing without reducing the capacity of what, in its role as an assessment centre and gateway to the hostel network, is a valuable resource for rough sleepers

St Mungo's Westway Business Centre, W2. This is a woodworking shop which makes an income but does not cover costs and cannot develop into a genuine social enterprise in its current cramped accommodation. The proposal is to expand and re-equip the workshop so that it has the capacity to be viable, providing training, work experience and jobs for homeless people

Various minor sums for adaptations at English Churches King George's hostel, Church Army's Elgood House, Irish Centre Housing's St Louise hostel and Thames Reach's Shroton Street hostel for adaptations to buildings that are in otherwise good condition, typically to remodel reception areas, convert redundant space to more positive use, and improve training facilities.

Once completed, these works will represent the completion of what has been the very significant improvement of Westminster's hostels over the last 15 years or so.

With two exceptions, sharing will have been eliminated and the worst aspects of institutionalisation tackled.

7. Move-on from supported housing services

Securing effective move-on from all supported housing services into more independent supported housing and fully independent social and private rented housing is key to the successful delivery of all the strategies. The 2007 Homelessness Strategy update described the range of move-on options available and the performance and success of these. The Supporting People Strategy identified the target to improve the positive move-on rate from supported housing services to 75% from 71% in 2007/08. To support this we will:

- Develop and commission a private rented sector scheme for rough sleeping services, using the experience of services provided by Broadway and Hope International
- Work with CLG to ensure the Clearing House remains a key source of move-on for rough sleepers
- Expand the range of supported housing services for people with mental health problems with high needs, learning disabilities and rough sleepers with low level mental health problems
- Identify all residents of supported housing able to move on into more independent housing have a clear and deliverable move-on plan

8. Work with London Probation Service on housing and offenders

London Probation Service are clear that offenders are not a homogenous group and that support and housing needs span the full range of support needs. People at risk of offending are able to access housing and support services which best meet their individual needs which may include mental health, young people's or sheltered housing services.

The Probation Service is now able to refer into floating support services, the offender specific service in Westminster prioritises referrals from the probation service and the role of the Probation Accommodation Manager based at Housing Options reflects best practice.

The priorities for commissioning offender services are:

- Management of Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPOs)
- MAPPP and other high risk offenders
- Resettlement of offenders released from custody
- Offenders with complex needs, in particular those on Drug Rehabilitation Requirement and those in contact with the Drug Intervention Programme

To take forward these priorities we will review the success of the regional MAPPA floating support service and build the outcomes of this into the future plans for commissioning all floating support services to ensure the needs of MAPP are met.

