



*Homelessness Statistics
March 2004 and
Improving the Quality of
Hostels and Other Forms of
Temporary Accommodation –
Policy Briefing 8*

Improving the quality of hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation

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Summary

This briefing is eighth in a series produced by the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate to accompany the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's quarterly statistical release on homelessness issues.

The statistics, (previously announced on 4th May 2004), show that the long-term use of B&B for homeless families with children has been virtually eliminated with only 28 homeless families with children in B&B over six weeks in England as of 31 March 2004 - down from an estimated 4,000 in March 2002 when the B&B reduction target was set. This represents around 6,000 fewer children living in B&B for more than six weeks compared with two years ago. Data on the use of temporary accommodation will continue to be collected and published quarterly.

Following a general description of the key issues in the latest homelessness statistics, this issue focuses on improving the quality of hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation under the following headings:

- Hostels Pilot
- Capital Funding for Existing Hostels
- Improving Standards of Temporary Accommodation

We welcome feedback on your views regarding the usefulness of this and other briefings and also your suggestions for future titles.

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First Quarter 2004 Statistics

The quarterly statistics published by ODPM represent the number of households who approached local authorities and were found to be homeless through no fault of their own and to have a priority need for accommodation under the provisions of the homelessness legislation. This briefing accompanies the release of the statistics for the first quarter of 2004 (covering the period 1 January to 31 March 2004).

The statistics show that the long-term use of B&B for homeless families with children has been virtually eliminated with just under 30 homeless families with children in B&B over six weeks in England as of 31 March 2004 - down from an estimated 4,000 in March 2002 when the B&B reduction target was set. This represents around 6,000 fewer children living in B&B for more than six weeks compared with two years ago.

During the quarter, 33,950 households were accepted for re-housing by local authorities. This figure is 1% lower than a year ago, but 6% higher than the previous quarter (seasonally adjusted).

Around 15,670 of the households accepted as homeless in the last quarter were placed in temporary accommodation. At the end of March 2004, there were 97,290 households living in temporary accommodation, an increase of 9% compared to the same time last year.

The total number of households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation fell for the sixth consecutive quarter to 7,170. This represents a reduction of 4,900 households (41%) over the last year. Bed & Breakfast accommodation now accounts for 7% of all temporary accommodation, the lowest ever recorded proportion.

Following a public consultation on its proposals, the Government placed an Order¹ under the homelessness legislation making it unlawful for a local authority to discharge a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for any homeless household with family commitments (i.e. dependent children or a pregnant woman) by placing them in a B&B for more than six weeks from 1 April 2004.

The statistics provided by local authorities also show that over the same period 15,500 households were found a settled solution to their homelessness. Of these, some 14,600 (94%) were offered a tenancy in social housing with long term, or potentially long term, security of tenure, while around 900 (6%) accepted a fixed-term assured shorthold tenancy in the private sector. Around 25% of households provided with a settled housing solution did not have to spend any substantive time in temporary accommodation.

¹ A copy of the Order and related guidance has been sent to all local authorities and is also available at: www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_026585.hcsp

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People from different black and minority ethnic groups continue to be over-represented among those accepted as homeless. Of the 33,950 households accepted as homeless between January and March 2004, 21% were from a black or minority ethnic background. 5% of households were recorded as ethnic origin unknown, which shows there is scope for better data collection on ethnicity. From 1 April 2004 local authorities will provide information in line with the Census 2001 classifications for black and minority ethnic groups.

51% of all households accepted as homeless during the first quarter of 2004 were in "priority need" for accommodation because they were families with dependent children and a further 11% of households included a pregnant woman. These figures have changed very little over the past year.

Introduction and Background

Hostels have played an integral role in providing homeless people with a roof over their head. They have been vital in reducing the number of people sleeping on our streets from almost 2000 in 1998 to around 500 now. There are currently around 35,000 bed spaces throughout the country, and over 20,000 of them in London.

Hostels are a key source in both helping people to move away from the streets and preventing rough sleeping in the first place. They are invaluable services in providing essential help to people vulnerable as a result of rough sleeping. Voluntary agencies and local authorities have made significant achievements in helping people to move away from the streets through good co-ordination of hostel services supported by tenancy sustainment services and other specialist support to make permanent accommodation work. However, it is acknowledged that a significant number of rough sleepers -over 50% move out of first stage hostels for negative reasons, either through eviction or abandonment, possibly returning to episodes of sleeping rough.

The positive work already being undertaken in hostels needs to be developed further if rough sleepers are to be helped more effectively to move away from the streets. The Homelessness Act 2002 also ensured that every local authority had a responsibility to review homelessness and develop a homelessness strategy for its area. There is now a strategic link between local authorities and their partner agencies to ensure that not only is there enough hostel provision, but more importantly, there is appropriate and effective provision in their respective areas to meet local needs.

Whilst there is no doubt that hostels have played an important role in reducing the number of rough sleepers, there is still some concern about the quality of some first stage hostels and the impact they have in moving single homeless people into independent living. Much of this has come about mainly because of the changing nature of clients, especially over the past few years.

Research and data suggests that with the rise in the availability of drugs, hostels are now working with far more complex and challenging residents. Some agencies have argued that provision for rough sleepers, or former rough sleepers should be concentrated on a smaller number of specialist hostels. Others believe that the exceptionally high support needs of rough sleepers should be shared more equally between a number of hostels, so to avoid a concentration of problems. There is no easy solution. Alongside this is the need to reduce the size and configuration of hostels, and to provide more space for hostel staff to engage effectively with residents.

Some of the more recently developed hostels have been set up to target specific groups of people. This can work exceptionally well.

Graham House, Lambeth

Graham House in Lambeth, only targets entrenched rough sleepers - working with those that have been on the streets for very long periods of time. It offers excellent accommodation and additional resources, such as:

single rooms for each person and for couples where required

significant communal space

A bright clean and modern environment

facilities to cater for residents' pets.

Most importantly, Graham House works with residents at their own pace. Nearly all of the residents have been sleeping rough for much of their adult life. This makes it much harder for them to take up an offer of accommodation and then make it work. Most of them suffer from mental health and alcohol problems and are extremely intimidated by the prospect of living with and sharing space with others. It is therefore important that the people working with them allow them the time and space to adjust to a new way of life. This has allowed many of them to gain trust and confidence with their key workers and feel part of a socially inclusive society.

Another excellent example of a high support hostel that works mainly with young people and couples with a high drug dependency is Victoria House in Manchester, which is managed by the Carr Gomm Society.

Victoria House, Manchester

Victoria House was set up 4 years ago as part of a multi-agency approach to street homelessness in the Manchester area. As well as providing safe and secure accommodation, it offers a comprehensive resettlement service.

Prospective residents are referred by a small number of agencies who work closely with homeless people in Manchester and seek to accommodate people who have a desire and commitment to make changes to their life.

Each resident has its own Project Key Worker who they meet on a regular basis, to discuss the individual's own support plan, which can be reviewed and modified depending on their needs.

As well as providing a comprehensive resettlement service for residents in partnership with other providers, Carr Gomm's wider aim is to give people the skills to live a more independent life. This includes a full range of training packages to help those that wish to pursue further education or seek employment. This includes Information Technology and budgeting amongst the range of courses on offer. The hostel also offers vocational and non-vocational training and works closely with the Learning Skills Council to further improve people's chances of employment.

The project is guided by key people in the wider community including local residents, Councillors and representatives of the local authority and other housing agencies. This allows the relevant people to have a significant influence in how the project is operated and what services they would like to see developed at Victoria House.

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These are two good examples of how effective hostels can operate. However, it is clear that to spread this good practice more widely, changes in operation will be required in some projects and may also necessitate physical change.

Hostels Pilot

In order to gain a greater understanding of the issue of high bed turnover for negative reasons, the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate decided to look at what would make a real difference for those people who currently reside in hostels.

A small number of local authorities around the country (Westminster, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol) agreed to take part in running a pilot review. The review was aimed at direct access hostels for homeless people without children. The pilots were overseen by Geoffrey Randall, a consultant with Research and Information Services.

The pilot tested areas such as:

- Physical fabric of the building - is it reasonable?
- Cleanliness
- Is the hostel safe for residents?
- The initial welcome for prospective clients
- Are staff suitably trained and qualified?
- How do staff motivate clients?
- Is there good, accessible information about hostel procedures and facilities?
- What access is there to support services, including specialist health (eg. drug/alcohol services) or mental health support?
- What opportunities are there for accessing help with jobs, training and education?
- What advice is given on moving on to more independent living?
- What access is there to mediation services to assist reconciliation with families, partners and friends?
- Were there any barriers to receiving support/help etc?

It is acknowledged that hostels are already extensively regulated. Most are owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and so are regulated by the Housing Corporation. This ensures that hostels have appropriate procedures in place to ensure that the hostel has the right management systems for providing and maintaining good quality temporary homes, and where suitable, the right level of support services. The implementation of Supporting People also ensures a more in depth and systematic approach at local level through the collection of key and local performance indicators consistently across service providers.

The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate and those local authorities involved were keen to ensure that the pilots did not duplicate these substantial regulatory frameworks. The aim was to consider ways that hostel services could be improved and encourage best practice having taken

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account of hostel resident's perspectives. Therefore, the pilots included in-depth interviews with residents on a one to one basis and group sessions for their views and perceptions, all carried out by Geoffrey Randall.

The overall aim of the pilots was to help decide what was needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of hostels in helping people move away from the streets and homelessness more generally.

The pilots have recently been completed and the findings are now being collated. The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate will discuss with the pilot local authorities how best to take the findings forward in each of the areas initially and how the challenges identified can be addressed by the Directorate and others.

Capital Funding For Existing Hostels

To complement the current review of hostels, the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate has used its 2004/05 capital budget to start the process of improving the physical state of hostels.

Access to hostels has been subject to rigorous gatekeeping, to ensure that those with the greatest need/most vulnerable have priority access. Very few hostels, although categorised as direct access, are available to a client walking through the door and presenting in person. For 'rough sleeping' hostels, this usually means that there will have been an assessment process carried out by a street-based outreach service or a day centre. For generalist single homeless hostels access will normally be arranged through approved referral agencies (advice or community services) or through the local authority Homeless Persons Unit, in line with local arrangements.

Access to specialist services (mental health or substance misuse) will usually be via a community mental health team or substance misuse team/Drug Action Team. This means that hostel providers are increasingly working with more complex and challenging residents. The prevalence of drug use in the 'homeless' population has escalated rapidly in recent years (now 75%+ of direct access hostel residents admit to using Class A drugs).

Many hostels are ageing physically and not designed for the sort of chaotic clients using hostels today. The types of issue that could be rectified are the existence of ongoing dormitory provision and shared rooms - by providing single rooms. . In addition, there is a need for a creation of appropriate rooms for couples that have formed relationships on the streets and are seeking to be housed together. Equally important is creating some 'space' within existing schemes so that clients feel less threatened and where staff have a better opportunity to engage with residents and promote 'meaningful occupation'.

Hostels are a clearly key part of the solution but it is equally clear that these services need further help to maximise their effectiveness and help more people to move away from the streets permanently.

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The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate is now proposing to tackle these issues for hostel services as a key priority in tandem with Supporting People reviews. The Directorate is working alongside the current Spending Review process to determine whether there will be a continuing resource to develop this further.

Improving Standards of Temporary Accommodation

In May 2004, the Government announced success in meeting the challenging target "that by March 2004 local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children should have to live in a B&B hotel except in an emergency, and even then for no longer than six weeks".

Nevertheless, at the end of March 2004, there were many households who had been placed in some form of temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation. Even if homelessness strategies result in reductions in future, we recognise that housing authorities will continue to use some temporary accommodation. The Government is determined to ensure that such temporary accommodation is suitable for the applicant and that standards of temporary accommodation continue to rise.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance will be revised to:

- set out clearly the minimum standards that should apply to all forms of temporary accommodation;
- set out additional standards for B&B hotels used as temporary accommodation;
- provide guidance on arrangements to ensure that homeless households placed in temporary accommodation receive support to ensure that their health, education and welfare needs are met.

In 2005, subject to the passage of the Housing Bill, a new method of assessing the risk to occupants from poor housing conditions will be introduced. This will replace the current Fitness Standard. The Housing Bill also contains new powers to amend statutory overcrowding standards.

London Boroughs are already working in partnership to ensure the support needs of homeless households are met.

NOTIFY (case study)

NOTIFY is a new web-based notification and information system designed to benefit homeless people placed in temporary accommodation by the 33 London boroughs. The system was developed jointly by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Association of London Government (ALG), with support from the London boroughs, ODPM and London Connects, and is administered by the GLA's Bed and Breakfast Information Exchange (BABIE). The main aim of NOTIFY will be to improve access to services for homeless households by notifying relevant agencies when homeless people move into and out of temporary accommodation and between local authorities. The system will particularly benefit the children of homeless households by ensuring that the relevant education, health and social services providers know their whereabouts and so can plan and deliver services to them more effectively.

For further information please contact Debra Levison at the GLA on 020 7983 4677 or visit the NOTIFY website²

If local authorities need to use hostels as temporary accommodation for homeless families it is particularly important that appropriate accommodation and support services are provided.

Border House - Leicester : (case study)

Border House is an emergency direct access hostel providing 58 self-catering units for homeless families plus a separate unit catering for women and their children fleeing domestic violence. The hostel offers full disabled access and is managed by a team of over 20 staff who provide a 24-hour service, 7 days a week.

In 1999 a Family Support Worker was employed to provide support and assistance in addressing the individual needs of families. The primary aims of the support service are to work in partnership with parents and children in a comfortable, safe and healthy environment and ensure parents have the necessary skills and support to sustain semi/independent accommodation. This role has now developed and Border House currently offers its clients a Family Support Team consisting of 10 staff.

For further information on Border House please contact Toni Soni (Acting Head of Hostels, Leicester CC) on 0116252 6838 or at sonit001@leicester.gov.uk

Settled Housing in the Private Rented Sector

The Department for Work and Pensions is piloting Local Housing Allowances (LHA) Pathfinder in the private rented sector in nine local authorities for two years. The pathfinders started between November 2003 and February 2004, so it is still very early days. Claimants in these areas receive a standard allowance based on the area in which they live and the number of occupiers in their property. For the first time, if they are living in rented property that costs less than average rents in their area, they are entitled to keep the difference. This is intended to provide people with greater choice about

² www.notifylondon.gov.uk

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their housing. As now, entitlement will be subject to a means test and proof of a valid tenancy. The intention is that payment will normally be made to the tenant rather than to the landlord.

The Pathfinder scheme is more generous than the current Housing Benefit rules, and may give people access to a wider range of accommodation. There is also more transparency. For the first time, people will be able to find out before they claim how much rent Housing Benefit will pay for. It should be less likely that people take on tenancies they can't afford, which leave them at risk of rent arrears and eviction. Greater certainty about in-work benefits should help claimants bridge the gap between being out of work and taking a job. A full and independent evaluation is underway and will run for 2 years. The first of several interim reports on the pathfinder schemes will be available during the winter (2004/05).

Work is continuing across Government to explore policies that would make it easier for those living in temporary accommodation to take up paid employment. Reports produced in this area include "More Hope for Housing Benefit" by the Pivot initiative, published in 2003.

We also hope to work jointly with Shelter to arrange a cross-Government seminar to explore ways of reducing use of temporary accommodation.