

More Than a Roof: a report into tackling homelessness, March 2003

On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Foreword

This report has been prepared at the request of the Rt. Hon Stephen Byers MP, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government & the Regions. He asked for a document that was honest about the problem of homelessness in this country, and challenging in ways to tackle it.

We need a new approach to tackling homelessness. Discussions have been going on throughout the last few months with organisations and individuals to inform this, and I am grateful for all their help.

We are still living with the consequences of decisions taken and policies created in the 1980s. In 2002, we have growing levels of homelessness. One of its worst manifestations is the number of children forced to grow up in Bed & Breakfast hotels.

Reversing these problems will not be easy, as homelessness in 2002 is a manifestation of social exclusion.

Building more affordable housing is important but equally is understanding what is the most effective response to homelessness and what would prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.

Many factors cause homelessness. Relationships breakdown, women flee violent domestic situations, young people are thrown out of home and alcoholics spend their rent on drink.

Helping someone to rebuild relationships with family or friends, stay in education or take up training or employment and deal with a drug, alcohol or mental health problem is as much about tackling homelessness as ensuring a roof over their head.

In the years ahead, the number of people recorded as homeless is set to increase, not decrease, as the Government widens the group of people it expects local authorities to help.

Three years ago, some people thought that we would never reduce the number of people sleeping rough, but we have. Homelessness in 2002 might seem an overwhelming and intractable problem but that does not mean that it is right to do nothing.

Action can be taken now to make a real difference to people's lives.

Louise Casey
Department for Transport, Local Government & the Regions

Introduction

For the majority of the public when the term 'homeless' is used they picture a person sleeping in a cardboard box on a city high street. This is compounded by the images typically used by the media and some charities. However, the vast majority of homeless people are actually families or single people who are not literally sleeping on the street but living with relatives and friends or in temporary accommodation. For some, this means living in poor quality accommodation that is detrimental to their health and well-being.

In England, there are over 20 million households, most of whom are decently housed. Over 2 million of these move home each year, and most do so for positive reasons. For example families moving to a larger home to accommodate a growing family, couples or individuals setting up a home of their own for the first time, and people moving with jobs or to be closer to friends and relatives.

However, a relatively small but significant number of people may experience or be at risk of homelessness, for example where relationships or families break down, where there is domestic violence, or where they get into debt and can no longer afford the home they rent or own.

A number may experience a series of traumatic events, or suffer from drug, alcohol, mental health or other personal problems, which may lead to them being unable to pay their rent or mortgage. Many of these people are able to secure alternative housing on their own or with the help of family or friends, but some are not.

A significant number turn to their local authority for help. Under the current system about half of these are accepted as being 'unintentionally homeless' and in 'priority need'. In other words they are homeless through no fault of their own and either have children or are vulnerable for reasons such as disability, health or age. In these cases, local authorities have a duty to provide them with temporary accommodation until a longer term home can be found.

The overall number of the people in this category has been rising in recent years, although it remains lower than the peak that occurred during the recession in the early 1990s. In addition to this problem, the number of households in temporary accommodation has also increased, particularly in areas of high housing demand like London and the South East.

While much of the temporary accommodation used to house homeless people is of a very high standard, some is not. Of particular concern is the inappropriate use of Bed & Breakfast hotels for homeless families with children and the damaging effects that can be caused by the insecurity and disruption of having to move from place to place several times.

There are other people who are living in temporary or insecure housing, such as people in hostels or sleeping on friends' floors. No accurate measure currently exists of the number of these people. In contrast we know that the number of homeless people who actually sleep rough is comparatively low but the problems that they have are very complicated.

Historically, there have been years of under investment in affordable housing and little replacement of council houses sold under the Right to Buy scheme. However, while it is

obvious that in some areas of the country there simply is not enough affordable housing available for the people that want or need it, just using housing to tackle homelessness overlooks a fundamental issue.

Simply putting a roof over someone's head does not always solve his or her homelessness.

Critical to the future will not only be to provide more affordable housing across the community, but also to significantly change our approach to tackling homelessness.

This will include identifying the size and scope of the homelessness problem, compiling research and statistics more effectively, analysing the causes of homelessness, and identifying new approaches to both prevent and respond to homelessness.

For example we need to establish how many families are bringing up their children in appalling physical conditions. Likewise we need to know how many people become homeless repeatedly, and why, and who is becoming homeless for the first time, and why.

We also need to understand the reasons why some people are unable to stay in their own homes and what assistance would help them to do so.

This report outlines a new approach to tackling homelessness, building on policies set out in the Government's Housing Green Paper, *'Quality and Choice: A decent home for all'*, in *'Supporting People, policy into practice'*, and in the Rough Sleepers Unit's strategy, *'Coming in from the Cold'*.

It has been drawn up in consultation with stakeholders including the Local Government Association, the Association of London Government, the Greater London Authority, the Housing Corporation, the Housing Inspectorate, local authorities, the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the National Housing Federation, the Small Landlords Association, the Chartered Institute of Housing, the British Property Federation, Homeless Link and Shelter. Contributions and ideas were also provided by a number of other organisations and individuals through a consultation exercise on DTLR's website.

Any new approach will only work if action is taken by all key partners. Central government, local authorities, housing associations, mortgage providers, private landlords and the voluntary sector all have a vital role to play.

The Problem of homelessness

Extent

Reliable figures exist for the number of households who apply to local authorities for homelessness assistance (often known as 'statutory homelessness'), and for the number of people who are literally roofless and sleep out in the open ('rough sleepers'). However, there is relatively little information about the number of other people living in temporary or unsatisfactory accommodation or those who experience homelessness each year but manage to secure housing without the assistance of local authorities.

Statutory Homelessness

The Housing Act 1996 defines the type of help local authorities must offer homeless people. This ranges from a main duty to secure accommodation to providing advice and assistance for example through housing advice, referrals to other housing providers, or by being placed on a housing waiting list or being informed about local lettings schemes.

In 2000/1 local authorities in England received 252,780 homelessness applications from eligible households:

- Just under half of these (114,350) were found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
- Less than 4% (8,930) were found to be intentionally homeless and in priority need.
- 21% (52,370) were homeless but not in priority need.
- 31% (77,130) were found not to be homeless.

Statutory homelessness statistics have shown increases in recent years, although they remain below the peak of the early 1990s recession. The number of eligible applications has increased by nearly 4% between 1997/8 and 2000/1. The number of households found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need increased by 11% over the same period.

This increase has resulted in a rise in the number of households living in temporary accommodation. At the end of September 2001, 77,940 households in England were living in temporary accommodation, including over 12,000 in bed and breakfast hotels. Most worryingly, families account for more than half of these.

Other Forms of Homelessness

Many more people families and single people receive help from Citizens' Advice Bureaux, housing providers and other organisations to help with their homelessness.

Currently the information and statistics on the numbers and needs of this group is very patchy.

This is in part because definitions of homelessness vary. Different organisations choose to use different definitions of homelessness and collect information in different ways, or not at all.

Crisis, the homelessness charity, regularly use a statistic of 400,000 people who they believe are living in hostels, staying with friends or living in other temporary places.

It is not clear how many of these people regard themselves as homeless or inadequately housed, or how many require help to move into and sustain more secure housing. Some may be recorded in statutory homelessness statistics as people who have applied for homelessness assistance but who have been offered advice and assistance rather than provided with temporary accommodation.

Contrary to the trends on statutory homelessness, the number of people sleeping rough in England has fallen by just over 70% in the last three years. It is estimated that there are now around 550 people sleeping rough on any night, compared with nearly 2,000 in June 1998. This statistic should not be misinterpreted as indicating that only 1,450 people have been helped because it does not include the much larger numbers of homeless people, people at risk of homelessness or former rough sleepers who have been helped by policies and services outlined in the Government's strategy on rough sleeping.

Regional Variations

The extent of homelessness varies from region to region. By and large, levels of homelessness tend to be greatest in areas of high housing demand, where supply constraints are greatest. The largest increases in numbers of statutory homeless households since 1997/8 have been experienced in London, the South West and the South East.

As would be expected, London has the largest number of households accepted as 'unintentionally homeless' and in 'priority need', accounting for more than a quarter of all such acceptances across the country.

In addition to the higher levels of homelessness in high demand areas, families and individuals who are accepted as 'unintentionally homeless' and in 'priority need' are likely to spend longer in temporary accommodation before finding a settled home, than those in areas of lower demand.

| Table 1: Statutory homelessness by region | | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------|--|
| Region: | Unintentionally homeless and in priority need during 1997/8 | Unintentionally homeless and in priority need during 2000/1 | % Change | Number per 1,000 households in 2000/1 |
| North East | 4,380 | 5,220 | 19% | 4.8 |
| North West | 13,060 | 13,350 | 2% | 4.7 |
| Yorks & | 9,130 | 9,150 | 0% | 4.3 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|------------|
| Humber | | | | |
| East Midlands | 7,550 | 7,370 | -2% | 4.3 |
| West Midlands | 14,670 | 13,860 | -6% | 6.4 |
| East of England | 8,120 | 9,800 | 21% | 4.3 |
| London | 24,570 | 29,630 | 21% | 9.5 |
| South East | 12,170 | 14,760 | 21% | 4.4 |
| South West | 9,000 | 11,210 | 25% | 5.4 |
| Total | 102,650 | 114,350 | 11% | 5.5 |

Table 2: Households living in temporary accommodation

| Region: | At end Sept 1997 | At end Sept 2001 | % Change |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| London | 24,920 | 44,340 | 78% |
| Rest of England | 20,420 | 33,600 | 65% |
| Total | 45,340 | 77,940 | 72% |
| <i>Of which, number in B&B</i> | <i>4,630</i> | <i>12,290</i> | <i>165%</i> |

Causes

Homelessness is caused by a number of factors, some of which relate to the wider state of the economy and the housing market and others which are personal to the individual or family.

Structural Factors

The overall supply of affordable housing in England is a key structural factor. In some parts of the country demand is pushing prices up beyond the reach of a larger proportion of the population, thereby increasing pressure on the rented sectors. In turn, this pressure pushes private rents up, causing more people to apply for social housing.

Against this rising demand in some areas, the social housing sector has declined as a proportion of all housing in recent years. There are over one million fewer homes owned by local authorities and housing associations now than in 1977, with social housing falling over that period from 31% to 20% of all housing.

The decline in the number of homes in the social sector reflects in part dramatic cuts in public investment during the 1990s. The Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and credit approvals for local authority capital investment have been the main sources of funding for social housing during the last decade. Despite increased investment of over £4 billion by 2003/4, new social housing development has not yet reached the levels of earlier

years because of increases in land and construction costs.

In addition to cuts in investment, there are other reasons for the decline in available social housing. Nationally, 1.7 million council homes were sold, mainly under the Right to Buy scheme, between 1979 and 2001. While sales under the Right to Buy scheme have declined, they remain significant in high demand areas. In London, 11,400 council homes were sold in 2000/1.

Although this has resulted in many families and single people being able to buy their homes, with all the benefits to the community that this brings, it has nevertheless removed vast numbers of social houses from public ownership and limited local authorities' scope for housing homeless families and others in housing need.

The regeneration of housing estates is vital and often leads to higher sustained occupancy rates. However, it can result in fewer houses where high rise developments are replaced with lower density homes, without additional provision elsewhere.

In some rural areas of the country the purchase of properties as holiday homes or by long-distance commuters has driven up prices, with a resulting shortage of affordable owner-occupied housing for local residents on an average wage.

A growing need to accommodate asylum seekers has also reduced the options available to local authorities to house homeless people. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has been set up to relieve these pressures by identifying places where asylum seekers could be more easily accommodated.

Personal Factors

Across the majority of homeless groups, the 'personal' factors that cause homelessness are relatively unrecorded and unanalysed. Recorded triggers for households accepted by local authorities as homeless are shown below.

| Table 3: Causes of homelessness | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| | 1996/7 Number | % | 1998/9 Number | % | 2000/1 Number | % |
| Parents no longer able to accommodate | 18,800 | 17% | 16,530 | 16% | 19,900 | 17% |
| Friends no longer able to accommodate | 13,580 | 12% | 12,150 | 12% | 15,790 | 14% |
| Violent relationship breakdown | 19,920 | 18% | 18,040 | 17% | 17,950 | 16% |
| Non violent relationship breakdown | 7,720 | 7% | 6,910 | 7% | 8,020 | 7% |
| Mortgage arrears | 7,590 | 7% | 5,890 | 6% | 3,750 | 3% |
| Rent arrears | 2,310 | 2% | 2,780 | 3% | 3,750 | 3% |
| End of assured short hold | 13,380 | 12% | 15,180 | 15% | 16,970 | 15% |

| | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| tenancy | | | | | | |
| Loss of other rented/ tied accommodation | 10,560 | 9% | 8,360 | 8% | 8,910 | 8% |
| Other reasons | 19,440 | 17% | 18,310 | 18% | 19,310 | 17% |
| Total | 113,300 | 100% | 104,150 | 100% | 114,350 | 100% |

Local authorities are asked to record the reasons when they accept a household as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need, but it is recognised that these recorded reasons often obscure a complex chain of events that preceded the homelessness acceptance. In addition, the causes of homelessness can be exacerbated by overcrowding, living in deprived areas, racism and discrimination.

Overall, we know relatively little about the personal, social and economic circumstances of homeless families and other vulnerable people accepted by local authorities for housing.

We do know that people moving in and out of 'institutions' are vulnerable to homelessness. People leaving prisons, hospitals, psychiatric placements, as well as young people leaving care, are vulnerable to social exclusion which can lead to homelessness.

The DTLR should analyse all information available on these groups, including the forthcoming Social Exclusion Unit's report into reducing re-offending.

Although it is difficult to estimate the numbers involved, local authorities and other agencies report an increasingly large group of families who are very difficult to help within existing structures. They constantly move in and out of homelessness, may be involved with social services, in violent domestic situations, be financially poor or in debt.

In extreme cases they are sometimes called 'problem' families and are known to many of the agencies. In many cases no one issue is deemed serious enough to trigger a response beyond a homelessness move. One of the challenges faced is to ensure a more effective response to these families, particularly in light of greater emphasis on evicting difficult tenants for the benefit of the local community.

Much research has been conducted into the nature and needs of single homeless people, but what is missing is an accurate assessment of the extent of the problem.

In contrast, due to the 1998 Social Exclusion Unit study and the Rough Sleepers Unit strategy '*Coming in from the Cold*' there is a great deal of information on the causes, nature and extent of rough sleeping. This evidence ensured that the solutions that were put in place to reduce rough sleeping were effective.

Future Trends

There has been an upward trend in the number of households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, with increases in each year since 1997/8. The number of people living in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities under the homelessness legislation has also increased each year since the end of 1996.

New measures to widen the group of vulnerable homeless people for whom local authorities should secure housing will further increase the levels of statutory homelessness and use of temporary accommodation.

In addition, the upward trend in the number of single person or one parent family households will increase the pressure on housing supply and could lead to an increase in the number of households who apply for local authority assistance. Against this, continued stable economic growth should result in more people being better able to afford their own home or to rent privately.

However, any rise in unemployment, triggering mortgage and rent arrears, may also lead to greater levels of homelessness. The complexity of these and other interacting factors means that it is very difficult to predict future trends in homeless acceptances and wider homeless problems. But we can expect, at least in the short term, to see the level of homelessness continue to increase.

Tackling homelessness

Homelessness is complicated, therefore any response to it will be complex and involve working both at a strategic and practical level. Although it is important to tackle the worst manifestations of the problem - children in B&B hotels and people sleeping on the streets - it is vital that a new approach is taken to help all homeless people. One that focuses as much on the reasons why people become homeless as ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing.

STRENGTHENING HELP TO PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

The Homelessness Act is central to any new approach. Once enacted it will provide stronger protection and help for homeless people in a number of ways.

It will require all local authorities to carry out a homelessness review and develop a strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, and provide accommodation and/or support for people who are or may become homeless.

The legislation will repeal the two-year time limit that applies to the main housing duty owed to unintentionally homeless households who are in priority need. Local authorities will be required to secure housing for as long as it takes to find a settled home.

It will also allow local authorities to secure housing for homeless households who are not in priority need, giving them greater discretion to help people in their community.

The proposed introduction of an Order to extend the categories of vulnerable groups for whom local authorities must secure housing if they are unintentionally homeless is another major change. The duty to provide accommodation until a settled home is found will be extended to include all unintentionally homeless people who are:

- vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic, racial or other forms of violence, and
- vulnerable as a result of an institutionalised background in care, the Armed Forces or prison.

The Order will also extend protection to all unintentionally homeless 16 and 17 year-olds whose support networks have broken down irrevocably and who are not owed a duty by social services. However, every effort should always be made to reconcile such young people with their parents, other relatives or friends and to provide them with appropriate support wherever possible as an alternative to allocating separate accommodation.

The Government has commissioned research to provide guidance and best practice for local authorities on helping vulnerable homeless groups including those covered by the Priority Needs Order.

After consultation, the statutory Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness will be revised to reflect these changes in legislation. The Code will set out how local authorities should discharge their functions and apply the new statutory criteria in practice.

In addition to this, the Government's *Supporting People* programme will identify more clearly and strategically the ways in which housing related support, and associated programmes in health and social services, can help to maintain independent living. From April 2003, housing and social services departments will be required to work in partnership with their health and probation colleagues to address the support needs of vulnerable people within their communities.

Additional resources have been made available for the period 2001-2004 through the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund (£137 million over three years) and increases in housing capital spending through local authorities and the Housing Corporation (rising to £4 billion by 2003/4).

Transitional Housing Benefit and increases in Social Housing Management Grant will also help meet the revenue costs of supporting these groups in advance of *Supporting People*. Local authorities will receive £162 million of additional administrative resources to implement the changes required by *Supporting People*.

An additional £8 million per year has also been allocated to local authorities for the new duties imposed by the Homelessness Act and Priority Needs Order.

DEVELOPING MORE STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

As the number of homeless people continues to increase, a more strategic approach needs to be developed, not only to address the symptoms but to tackle the causes too. Housing supply is important in preventing homelessness but there are 'people' factors in addition to 'place' factors that must feature more in the way Government and its partners work. Homelessness is as much a manifestation of social exclusion as it is of housing market failures.

Key to the success of the Government's rough sleeping strategy was its focus on tackling the complex personal problems experienced by individuals. This approach needs to be replicated in tackling other forms of homelessness.

Equally, the aim of *Supporting People* is to focus on the needs of vulnerable people, including those threatened with homelessness, or those moving into the community from institutions, or facing institutional care.

There needs to be commitment from all partners to be open to change in order to make a real difference in future to the lives of those who experience, or are threatened with, homelessness.

Evidence Based Policy

At the moment statistics are collected centrally on the number of homeless households who approach local authorities for help with basic information on why they have become homeless.

However, despite this regular collection of data, there is relatively little analysis or understanding of the underlying causes and trends in homelessness. For example in some local authority areas the same families become homeless year in, year out. However this important trend would not be reflected by the statistics that are currently collected.

Other significant gaps include information on the standards of temporary accommodation or the length of time people spend living there. For example, some temporary accommodation requires over five families to use one bathroom and kitchen, whereas others have much better conditions. These differences are not reflected in the statistics.

Despite much research undertaken by different organisations into the needs of other homeless people, such as single people or childless couples, there is a considerable gap in knowledge about the number that exist. In addition to defining this group more clearly, we also need better information as to the extent of the problem.

Working closely with other partners, the Government should investigate further:

- the underlying causes and trends of homelessness including a better understanding of Black and Minority Ethnic issues and those relating to age, sexual orientation or gender;
- ways to collect information more effectively about homeless families and individuals including the central collection and use of homelessness statistics;
- cost effective measures which can be taken to reduce and prevent homelessness.

Joined-Up Government

In addition to tackling homelessness, Government is taking forward a range of new policies to tackle social exclusion. As these develop, they will also help to prevent homelessness.

The Government's *Supporting People* programme, which comes into effect from April 2003 will ensure vulnerable people gain greater independence. It will improve the quality, range and flexibility of support services to vulnerable people by focusing provision on local need, integrating support with wider local strategies and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services. This might include, for example:

- helping older people to remain in their own home as long as they wish to by funding visiting support services;
- helping young people leaving care to prepare for greater independence through training in basic skills such as cooking and hygiene; and
- helping people leaving institutions or who have been homeless to set up home.

Teenage pregnancy can often be both a cause and consequence of homelessness, and young parents are at particular risk of failing to sustain a tenancy. As part of its strategy on teenage pregnancies, the Government is committed to providing housing with support by 2003 for all lone parents under the age of 18 who cannot live with family or partner.

Because young people leaving care are vulnerable to social exclusion, the Government

introduced a number of changes to help them. One of the eight priority areas of *Quality Protects* relates to services for young people leaving care. Under this programme, more support is given to care leavers resulting in fewer young people being inappropriately discharged from care when they reach the age of 16. *Quality Protects* was extended from 1999/2000 to 2003/4 with an increased budget to £885 million.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 imposes new and stronger duties on social services to support and maintain young people leaving care until they are at least 18 years old and then to provide support, as necessary, until at least the age of 21.

Some young people are more at risk from social exclusion, including homelessness, than others. Factors such as exclusion from school, lack of life skills, learning disabilities, mental ill health, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy or a history of running away are all problems that can lead to social exclusion. The Government's radical new *Connexions* service will provide every young person aged 13-19 years old with access to a personal adviser and other support to help them make a successful transition to adulthood. *Connexions*, although available to every young person, is particularly important in preventing at risk groups from becoming socially excluded. In parallel, much work over the years has been undertaken in schools to help children and young people avoid homelessness particularly successful have been some of the peer education models and teaching packs.

The National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) is part of the Healthy Schools Programme, led by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Department of Health (DH). Local healthy schools programmes, based in education and health partnerships, support schools in becoming healthy using a school improvement model which supports learning and promotes health and well-being. The NHSS plays an important role in supporting all children and young people's learning, health, development and achievements and reducing health inequalities and social exclusion.

The Government's 10 year Strategy for tackling drug misuse *Tackling drugs to Build a Better Britain* recognises that drug problems do not occur in isolation. All Government departments, national organisations, local agencies and communities have a role in implementing the strategy. Partnerships with national and local homelessness organisations is important to ensure that the needs of homeless people are reflected in policy and service development and delivery

Other programmes such as *Sure Start*, *the Children's Fund* and the *Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy* are tackling deprivation and providing greater opportunities for disadvantaged members of society. In addition, targeted work with specific groups also prevents homelessness. For example the Government's work to reduce crime has shown that help to offenders as they leave prison with employment, benefits, housing and other issues, can mean that they are significantly less likely to re-offend. They are also less likely to become homeless.

Joining up Locally

While the Government will join-up policy at the national level, local authorities will need to do so locally.

A radical change that will be brought about by the Homelessness Act is the new requirement for every local authority to review its homelessness problem and develop a homelessness strategy for its area. Addressing all forms of homelessness, these strategies should be in place within a year of the Act coming into force and renewed at least every five years.

'Homelessness strategies: a good practice handbook' produced by Randall and Brown includes advice on conducting reviews and developing strategies. Local authorities should consult with other relevant public bodies, voluntary organisations, homeless people and others, and include action that they expect them to take in their strategy.

The Homelessness Act will require housing authorities to take local homelessness strategies into account in carrying out their functions. In practice, homelessness strategies need to be closely allied to, or included within, authorities' housing strategies. In addition, it will place a new duty on social services to work with housing authorities in formulating a homelessness strategy.

There also needs to be closer co-operation between housing associations and local authorities on tackling homelessness. The Housing Corporation, Local Government Association and National Housing Federation have agreed to work together to improve this as outlined in their *'Framework for Partnership'*.

The Housing Corporation expects housing associations to work with local authorities to enable them to fulfill their duties to homeless and other vulnerable people. Housing associations should be able to demonstrate their co-operation with authorities in homelessness reviews and strategies, in the delivery of homelessness services, and in providing a reasonable proportion of their stock to local authority nominations and temporary accommodation to the homeless.

Local homelessness strategies should include other programmes that address the wide range of problems that can cause or be associated with homelessness. Some examples are:

- Local and Regional Housing Strategies and Statements
- Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies
- Supporting People
- Community Care plans
- Children and Young People's Partnerships
- Sure Start
- Connexions
- Local healthy schools programme
- Quality Protects
- NHS Joint Investment Plans and Health Improvement Programmes
- Primary Care Group Trust commissioning plans
- Drug Action Teams
- Crime and Disorder Strategies
- Youth Offending Teams
- Anti-Poverty Strategies
- Learning and Skills Councils

This wide range of strategies and programmes reflects the range of problems which can cause or be associated with homelessness and the range of services which local authorities can provide or secure to tackle homelessness.

The Government should provide practical support to help local authorities undertake homelessness reviews and develop local strategies. Part of this will be work with the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Local Government Association, the Association of London Government, Shelter and others on:

- the publication and promotion of 'Homelessness strategies: a good practice handbook';
- a series of seminars to help organisations prepare for the new Homelessness Act, focusing on practical implementation issues;
- a revised statutory Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness, reflecting changes brought about by the new Homelessness Act and the Priority Needs Order;
- the dissemination of research and lessons learnt from pilot schemes to identify and promote new approaches to tackle homelessness.

ENCOURAGING NEW RESPONSES TO TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

There are a wide range of policies and services that can tackle homelessness which local authorities can either provide themselves or commission others to deliver. These range from family mediation services to the provision of permanent social housing and everything in between.

The Government recognises the expertise and the huge amount of work undertaken by voluntary organisations at both the local and national level to alleviate homelessness. However, there exists a considerable gap in the knowledge about the size and scope of the 'homelessness voluntary sector'. The Government should work in partnership with organisations such as Homeless Link to improve co-ordination, avoid duplication and ensure services are in place where gaps currently exist.

Equally, homeless people are part of the solution and not the problem. In many circumstances where they have helped themselves to move out of homelessness and supported others in doing so, much success has been achieved. It is important for local authorities and voluntary organisations to recognise this and use this expertise in the planning, development and delivery of services.

Critical to the success of any future work on homelessness will be all stakeholders' commitment to radically re-thinking approaches to tackling homelessness. We need to learn and be prepared to replicate policies and services that prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place as well as those that successfully rebuild people's lives away from homelessness completely.

In too many cases the response to someone's homelessness is to consider the availability of a hostel bed or, for homeless families, to place them in temporary housing until a permanent home is available. While this is important, it is vital that the reasons why someone has become homeless are addressed, in order to create effective long-term solutions. Statutory, private or

voluntary bodies should be encouraged to test innovative and new approaches.

Effective Partnerships

Local authorities are best placed to take the strategic lead in tackling homelessness. However, it is vital that partnerships are created to deliver locally.

This means that all the disparate services in any local area, who are in contact with homeless people or those at risk of it, must work effectively together. This includes basic co-ordination of services to avoid duplication and the sharing of information about clients in order to address needs.

As well as bringing together partners from health, probation and social services, housing associations, private landlords and the voluntary sector, it is important to consider others such as homeless people, the police, schools and colleges, town centre or estate managers, and agencies with wider social exclusion responsibilities.

Real partnership means that once the overall strategy has been agreed locally, individual organisations are accountable not only for their own services but also for ensuring that people are helped by the most appropriate provider. In practice, this could mean that homeless families get support from a local Sure Start scheme or someone living in a hostel goes to a local college to undertake basic skills training.

As part of developing local homelessness strategies, local authorities need to review services taking into consideration the role the service plays within the strategy, the views of service users, and the effectiveness of the service provider in working with other organisations.

Some local authorities already operate strong local partnerships delivering effective services. This should, however, become the norm rather than the exception.

It is also important for local authorities and service providers to work across different local authority areas to offer homeless people the most appropriate solutions. This should range from arrangements to enable families fleeing domestic violence to move either temporarily or permanently to other local authority areas, to the resettlement of homeless people to different areas of the country.

Information, Advice and Mediation

At the moment, local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that advice and information about homelessness is available to everyone in their area. Many local authorities provide advice, either directly themselves or sub-contracting to the voluntary sector.

Shelter and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux receive the DTLR's single largest Section 180 grant - £2.4 million - for the National Homelessness Advice Service. This ensures that everyone using Citizens Advice Bureaux are able to receive expert information and housing advice.

Models vary around the country but many local authorities support the move towards 'one-stop-shops' that provide a holistic approach to homeless people provided by both statutory and voluntary sectors. This approach should include benefits and employment advice, access to rent deposit schemes, help to return home, family mediation, links to health and social services as well as housing or debt advice. Careful consideration should be given to the location and operation of 'one-stop-shops' to ensure that they are accessible to the groups of people most at risk and in need of help.

For some advice and information agencies specialising in homelessness this means a radical rethink in their approach. Best practice helps homeless people to help themselves and find answers outside traditional housing solutions. Giving homeless people tools to tackle their own problems is more empowering than simply organising a hostel bed for the night.

It is absolutely vital that organisations promote information, advice and mediation services. Getting the right help at the right time can sometimes prevent homelessness completely or ensure that someone's experience of homelessness is less costly, both in human and financial terms.

Building on the expertise and experience of the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate, the Government should consider the varying standards of homelessness advice services in order to promote good practice across all local authorities.

Tenancy Sustainment and Arrears Management

It is important that we reduce the failure rate of tenancies across both the private and social housing sectors. Many people have had secure tenancies or have been living in the private rented sector prior to becoming homeless.

This is as relevant to homeless families as it is to single people and is as relevant to the private rented sector as it is to the social housing sector. Successful schemes focus on practical ways of sustaining the tenancy, rather than seeking to solve all the tenant's problems, and are assertive in engaging those who are at risk of losing their homes.

Help with a wide range of problems can be offered such as money management, help with benefits or employment, and access to specialist support with mental health and substance misuse problems. This can be done as part of, or in addition to, existing housing management. Although it involves increased resources some local authorities, such as Brighton, have found it more cost effective than the cost of tenancies breaking down.

Resettlement services can help former homeless families and single people make an effective transition to a new home. Homeless people often move into new properties with few financial resources or personal possessions and may have lost contact with friends, family and other social networks. Schemes that provide practical, emotional and financial help, often combining support from paid staff and volunteers, have proved successful in ensuring that tenancies do not breakdown. These schemes should be as much a part of *Supporting People* as a homelessness strategy.

The Government should consider the feasibility of targets that measure how effective local

services are at sustaining tenancies.

In addition to helping tenants stay in their own homes, it is important that help is also available to homeowners. Mortgage Payment Protection Insurance and flexible mortgages that permit underpayments help borrowers avoid falling into mortgage arrears. Where mortgage arrears do occur, lenders should follow the Council of Mortgage Lenders guidelines on handling arrears and repossession cases. These state that lenders should always approach borrowers to try to develop a financial plan to clear the arrears and that possession of the property is sought only as a last resort.

Where lenders do not follow best practice, county court representation schemes are successful ways of helping the public with possession actions, and should be considered as part of the services available in a local authority area.

As many people become homeless due to rent or mortgage arrears, the Government should investigate the cost effectiveness of arrears mediation services. By helping resolve problems between landlords or lenders and tenants or borrowers, these can ensure courts become the last, rather than the first, resort of resolving rent or mortgage arrears.

Meaningful Occupation

Two of the most commonly reported factors in tenancy breakdown are debt and isolation. For people in education, training and employment the likelihood of these factors is significantly reduced. Also encouraging homeless people into courses, apprenticeships or jobs is a crucial part of helping them out of homelessness. Fifty three per cent of all London Big Issue vendors identified employment as the key to moving away from selling the magazine and homelessness.

Around the country the Government has funded schemes to help homeless people rebuild their lives. These types of projects range from farming and gardening work, and furniture restoration skills, to information and computer technology training and catering courses.

There is a strong business case for investment in social enterprises due to the 'feel good' factor experienced by the public when they purchase goods or services that they want and at the same time know they are contributing to the community by helping to redress disadvantage.

It is vital that we never give up on routing people into education, training and employment as a way of ensuring they are full and equal members of society. There is now a wide range of opportunities offered by mainstream training and employment providers that are specifically targeted at disadvantaged groups including homeless people.

Volunteering or work experience schemes can provide the stepping stones required, and help people, not able to take up paid employment, do something productive with their days. In addition, the public must be encouraged and supported to volunteer. Experience has shown that homeless people sometimes respond differently to unpaid volunteers who provide positive role models and friendship.

It is important that all projects for homeless people both provide and promote meaningful occupation activities. The term 'day centre' is used to describe very different types of projects. Some provide food, showers and clothing. Others have remodelled their services to become 'learning zones' or 'healthy living centres'. What is important is that day services are part of an overall strategy to prevent or alleviate homelessness within local authority areas.

Day services and hostel providers should try to help their clients avoid becoming involved in street crime and anti-social behaviour. This could include finding places for people to drink off the streets during the day, or helping them into employment or training schemes to avoid boredom.

People who beg will often have a roof over their heads but need money to maintain their drug addiction. On a strategic level local authorities need to consider this problem as part of their homelessness or crime and disorder strategies and local Drug Action Team Treatment Plans. Service providers also need to consider their responsibilities to this group of people as many of them use day centres or live in hostels. Not only because they need help to address their drug misuse but also because it is important that they keep out of the criminal justice system and are not engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The Home Office want to ensure that drug users who beg receive drug interventions and will develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle this, within the overall drugs strategy.

Addictions and Ill Health

People who are homeless, or at risk of it, often suffer from physical or mental ill health. In addition, they may also be addicted to drugs, solvents, volatile substances or alcohol. Their needs are often complex, exacerbated by their lack of housing, and cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Around the country, services for people who fall into this category are patchy, but are improving. For many years, individuals, organisations and policy makers have wrestled with an ideological debate about whether it is better to 'bend' the mainstream to ensure it is able to provide services for this disadvantaged group or whether it is better to provide specialist services outside mainstream ones. It is important to do both, but to ensure co-ordination and planning.

However, there will always be a critical role for the mainstream in providing services for all, identifying problems early and helping to prevent homelessness.

Any person, whether homeless or otherwise, is eligible to register with a GP. However, in practice, there are many barriers to this happening, both within the doctor's surgery and from misconceptions about services by homeless people themselves. Currently, for many homeless people, health issues may only become a priority at a time of crisis. Accident and Emergency departments often then provide the easiest route into the health system. This is costly for both the health service and for an individual's long term health.

One practical way of getting mainstream health care to disadvantaged groups is through Personal Medical Service (PMS) pilots. For homeless people these pilots enable GPs to

provide the time and space to address all of their needs, from physical and mental health problems to drug and alcohol addictions. Similarly, local development schemes, administered by the Primary Care Trusts, can offer financial support to GPs who provide services for homeless people.

It is particularly important that homeless families with children placed in temporary accommodation, especially in Bed & Breakfast hotels, have regular health checks. Babies and young children must receive follow up visits from community midwives and health visitors. Good practice includes multi-agency teams which notify primary health services, organise health visits and monitor arrangements.

Other methods of taking health care to homeless people include GPs running services in hostels and day centres, or providing surgeries where no appointment is necessary. These can be very successful in targeting help and advice at people who would otherwise overlook health concerns.

Many homeless people have mental health problems, such as personality disorders, which make it harder for them to engage with people and services. Whilst the Government's Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative has funded specialist schemes to help some of these homeless people, there are others who service providers find extremely difficult to help.

Modernising mental health services is a key priority for the Government. The modernisation strategy consists of three elements investment, reform of services and the reform of legislation. The NHS Plan announced £300 million investment to provide better and faster care to people with mental health problems who need treatment and accessible community-based support.

The Mental Health National Service Framework (NSF) sets out for the first time new national standards for the care and treatment of mental illness. In addition, the reform of legislation will provide an up to date legal framework to complement the contemporary patterns of care and treatment created by the investment. Together, these changes will help those who are already homeless and prevent others with mental health problems from becoming homeless.

Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) play a critical role in ensuring that mainstream services have the flexibility to meet the needs of homeless patients, including families. PCTs will have a duty to draw up Health Improvement and Modernisation Plans, which will ensure that the needs of all people, including the most disadvantaged, are met. They will be required to work with local authorities and other local agencies on these plans. The Government is keen that PCTs also work with local authorities on their homelessness strategies.

Drug addictions, in particular, are responsible for making people's lives more chaotic and unstable. Tackling substance misuse can help prevent homelessness and is an important step in stabilising those who may have already lost their home. Agencies that work with rough sleepers report that drug use is increasing rapidly and are concerned that these addictions lead to other issues relating to crime, anti-social behaviour and ill-health.

Treatment services will therefore need to be flexible in the services that they provide if national targets on treating drug misuse are to be met. Experience of the Rough Sleepers Unit has shown that detoxification and rehabilitation facilities need to be available, as well as harm

minimisation, if entrenched and complex addictions are to be tackled.

Existing services must also remove barriers that prevent homeless people from accessing the help they need. Homeless people are often unable to qualify for treatment as their chaotic lifestyles mean that they miss appointments or have moved on before they reach the front of the waiting list.

Drug Action Teams and in some cases, Drug and Alcohol Action Teams have responsibility to plan and commission services for all people including those from hard to reach groups. Local authorities homelessness services and voluntary sector providers should work with DATs and the National Treatment Agency to ensure that the needs of homeless people are taken into account and appropriate services are commissioned.

At the sharp end of health and addictions are the many homeless people who have multiple needs, or a dual diagnosis. These complex and interwoven issues often prevent vulnerable people from accessing health care, drug detoxification and housing support. Local service providers will need to work in partnership to support people with multiple needs so that their problems are not examined in isolation, otherwise people will continue to fall between gaps in service provision. Homelessness strategies will provide a framework for agencies to examine how they can provide a seamless service for homeless people, which does not exclude anyone. Around the country there are good examples of how this can be achieved, ranging from guidance on how to assess an individual's needs, to the provision of supported accommodation units with access to health care and life skills training.

Housing Solutions

Homelessness strategies should ensure that everything is done to prevent homelessness and reduce the number of people living in temporary accommodation. However, realistically, many people will still need help to secure temporary and sometimes permanent accommodation. Therefore, its availability needs to be maximised.

Everything should be done to remove the barriers to accessing private rented accommodation. Wider use of rent deposit schemes can encourage landlords to rent their homes and help prospective tenants who otherwise cannot afford a deposit. Every local authority should consider establishing a rent deposit scheme in their area as a cost-effective response to preventing homelessness, and be proactive in promoting their use.

In addition, the Government will consider proposals for a pilot scheme that eases access for homeless households to the private rented sector, with 'accredited' landlords who agree to meet minimum standards of accommodation and care.

As part of a drive to improve the information available to policy makers and service providers, it is important that the extent of hostel use by homeless people is measured. This will involve defining, and establishing the number of, different sorts of hostels. It will be important for this exercise to tie in with the assessment of housing related support and supported accommodation for vulnerable people through *Supporting People*.

The best hostels around the country resettle people in all sorts of ways. This means not just

waiting for the next council or housing association flat to become available but helping reunite people with family or friends, access a rent deposit scheme or find a job so they can afford to rent their own home.

The Government should ensure that this best practice is replicated throughout the country and explore the feasibility of establishing a hostels 'inspectorate' either within the voluntary or statutory sectors. Critical to any initiative will be ensuring that the views of hostel users are taken into account.

Currently, the proportion of social rented housing let to homeless households varies widely across authorities. The Government should encourage protocols for both the setting and monitoring of lettings targets.

There are a number of aspects of temporary accommodation that are a cause for concern, particularly when they impact on children's health and education. Poor physical standards, high financial cost, and the effects of either long stays or constant moves, make temporary accommodation inappropriate for many homeless people.

However as the new homelessness legislation takes effect and those accepted as homeless increases, it is likely that the numbers of people placed in temporary accommodation will also increase. Therefore the Government should work with others to ensure that appropriate use is made of temporary accommodation and to improve management and property standards where required.

It is recognised that for many homeless people appropriate and well managed temporary accommodation can meet their specific requirements and offer an effective response to their immediate circumstances. It is important, however, that minimum standards apply.

Improving Performance

As part of encouraging new responses to tackling homelessness, it will be important to continuously improve performance in delivering services.

The new system of Comprehensive Performance Assessments, announced in the White Paper, '*Strong Local Leadership Quality Public Services*', will ensure that the complete range of local authority services, including work to tackle homelessness, is assessed.

In addition, the Housing Inspectorate arm of the Audit Commission will continue to work with local authorities to improve performance across their services.

Housing associations will be held to account for continuous improvement in the services they provide under a new best value system adopted by the Housing Corporation. It will expect housing associations to produce local performance plans to be scrutinised by a new inspection system which will also pursue poor performance.

Supporting People will introduce a new performance measurement and monitoring regime for housing related support services.

Work is also underway through the Strategic Framework on Housing for Older People to develop national performance measures including those relating to particularly vulnerable groups of older people including older homelessness.

Best Value Performance Indicators for housing and other local services will focus more tightly on the performance of local authorities and the delivery of services to local people. A new Performance Indicator on the use of temporary accommodation is being introduced into the indicator set for 2002/3. This will measure the average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation and hostel accommodation of households which include dependent children or pregnant women who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

Tackling homelessness should also be considered as a future Beacon Council theme.

REDUCING THE USE OF B&B HOTELS FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

The number of homeless people housed by local authorities in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) hotels has risen from 4,630 in 1997 to 12,290 in 2001. If this trend were to continue, the number would rise to around 14,000 in 2002 and around 15,700 in 2003. As the Homelessness Act 2002 takes effect and those accepted as homeless increases, there is a danger that numbers of families placed in B&B hotels may also increase.

In October 2001, the Government set up a Bed and Breakfast Unit (BBU) to focus on reducing the use of 'non self-contained' private B&B hotels and 'annex' accommodation. That is to say properties where households are placed in one or more rooms on a daily/nightly charged basis where they have to share bathing, washing, toilet or cooking facilities. Even if breakfast, laundry or cleaning facilities are provided, the existence of shared facilities is the key factor.

One of the Government's chief concerns is to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a better start in life. We should be extremely worried about the large number of children that are brought up in B&B hotels.

Living in overcrowded rooms, sharing bathrooms and kitchens with many other families, and moving every few months are some of the factors that increase the likelihood of poor health and lack of educational attainment.

The Government will want to consider doing everything it can to ensure that no child has to live in a B&B hotel, except in emergency situations. It will also be important to ensure, in the short-term, that any B&B hotels used have decent facilities and standards of cleanliness.

Local authorities should also have in place appropriate education, health and welfare support for families in B&B hotels. And although the BBU is set to end in December 2003, it will be important that a longer-term strategy for tackling inappropriate B&B hotel use is in place.

As with information on wider homelessness groups, there is a lack of consistent and reliable data on the type and use of B&B hotels. For instance, figures are not collected on the number of families with children or their length of stay in B&B hotels and there are inconsistencies in how local authorities interpret which households are to be included.

The BBU has ensured that measures to correct this situation are being put in place. These include the collection of new data as part of the local authority P1E statistical returns and the development of a new Best Value Performance Indicator to collect the average length of stay in B&B hotels for families with children.

In London, where the problem is most acute, a BBU survey found that 55% of all those placed by London boroughs in B&B hotels are families with children. This, combined with other information from local authorities outside London, indicates that around half of the 12,290 people currently in B&B hotels are families with children.

The DTLR has issued statutory guidance making it clear to local authorities that, if they do have to use B&B hotels, they should ensure that the accommodation meets statutory standards for houses in multiple occupation. However, the BBU is concerned about the standard of B&B hotels and therefore will look at the Greater London Authority's B&B Information Exchange (BABIE) grading system to see if this can be adopted more widely.

Achieving a reduction in B&B hotel use is not just about change and additional help from the Government. Local authorities need to have the commitment and expertise to adopt a proactive approach. Some around the country, even in areas of high housing need, have proved that it is possible to avoid the use of B&B hotels or to use them only as a last resort in emergency situations for homeless families.

To reduce B&B hotel use, the Government should target action on the local authorities around the country that use the most B&B hotels. It will also need to introduce enough accommodation, in the short-term, so that homeless families can be moved out of B&B hotels. Work with other Government departments will be critical, not only in helping with the health and welfare of families in B&B hotels, but also in considering ways of improving the Housing Benefit system.

SUSTAINING THE TWO-THIRDS REDUCTION IN ROUGH SLEEPING

The Prime Minister announced on 3 December 2001 that the Government had met, ahead of time, its target of reducing rough sleeping in England by at least two thirds by 2002. This is a testament to the hard work and determination of local authorities, voluntary sector agencies, other public and private bodies, as well as countless individuals, who helped deliver the Government's strategy on reducing rough sleeping.

Whilst this is a tremendous achievement, there is still much to be done.

Firstly, there are a number of people still sleeping rough and more needs to be done to establish why they are out there, and what the most effective response should be.

Secondly, critical to sustaining the reduction will be preventing people ending up on the streets in the first place and rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers through education, training and employment.

In determining ways to sustain the reduction, the Government has taken into account the views of local authorities, voluntary organisations and others, an evaluation of the rough sleepers

strategy, and the current extent and nature of rough sleeping.

In consultation with local voluntary agencies and other partner organisations, key local authorities will be asked to draw up strategies for their areas for the period up to 31 March 2004. These strategies will have to outline clearly how they will sustain the reductions in rough sleeping and also indicate how they will integrate into the new homelessness reviews and strategies under the Homelessness Act. They will also have to be linked in with future arrangements for *Supporting People*.

In some areas strategies will also need to link in with Community Safety and/or Crime and Disorder Partnerships, Drug Action Teams, Local Strategic Partnerships, or wider town centre initiatives.

Around the country there are wide ranging differences in the resources local authorities themselves allocate to rough sleeping services. In future, the Government will want them to identify the resources they will contribute to the local strategy.

Once these strategies have been agreed, in some areas funding will be allocated to local authorities to commission and pay for agreed services. Where this is the case, local authorities will enter into arrangements similar to local Public Service Agreement targets.

Although strategies may vary from area to area, reflecting the progress that has been made in reducing the level of rough sleeping, all will need to have a greater emphasis on preventing rough sleeping and rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers.

In the areas of the country, where local authorities have so far not been able to reach a two-thirds reduction, the Government will want to work closely with them to identify future action and continue to directly commission some services. Work should be undertaken in London with boroughs, the Greater London Authority, the Association for London Government and the Government Office for London on cross-authority co-ordination and the commissioning of services.

Much has been learnt over the last three years in delivering effective policies and services to tackle rough sleeping. It will be important in the future to ensure that what has worked is replicated and promoted and lessons learnt about less successful work is disseminated. The RSU's good practice handbook, *'Preventing tomorrow's rough sleepers'*, published in 2001 is a useful tool to identify the policies and services needed as part of local strategies.

ENSURING THE OPPORTUNITY OF A DECENT HOME FOR ALL

The Government's housing strategy *'Quality and Choice: A decent home for all The Way Forward for Housing'* sets out plans to improve the condition of existing housing, the supply of new housing and the choices available to all. This followed the Government's Housing Green Paper, the most comprehensive review of housing policy since the 1970s.

'A Framework for Partnership' published by the Local Government Association, National Housing Federation and Housing Corporation encourages a better understanding of partners' potential roles and contributions to meeting agreed local housing objectives. It also provides a

basis for agreements between housing associations and the local authority as a whole, rather than the housing department alone.

Providing Affordable Housing

In 1997, the Government inherited a capital investment programme for housing through local authorities and the Housing Corporation that had fallen to £1.5 billion.

By 2001, it had more than doubled this level of investment to £3.3 billion and is determined to increase it by over 250% by 2003/4, compared with 1997/8, to £4 billion.

In particular, the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme for 2003/4, the main vehicle for the development of social rented housing, will be increased to over £1.2 billion. This compares with an average spend of less than £0.8 billion in each of the five preceding years.

In addition, the £250 million Starter Home Initiative will provide around 10,000 low cost homes for key workers in high demand areas.

Together, these resources will deliver 100,000 new affordable homes between 2001/2 and 2003/4.

Over the last two years, local authorities have successfully negotiated with private developers to gain planning permissions for over 30,000 more affordable homes. In London, 12% of affordable homes completed in 2000 were achieved in this way and the proportion is set to increase to 25%, based on developments started in 2000. The Government is currently consulting on a range of options to increase the scope for delivering affordable housing through the use of planning obligations. These include allowing local authorities to seek a contribution towards affordable housing, either in cash or in kind, from a wider range of development proposals, including commercial schemes.

The Government has established a new Affordable Housing Unit to tackle the lack of affordable housing in London, the South East and other areas of high demand. Working closely with partners in regional and local authorities, professional housing managers, developers and others in the public and private sectors it will need to identify how each can contribute to improving the delivery of affordable homes.

Increasing Access to the Private Rented Sector

The Government's strategy for housing encourages higher standards in the private rented sector. Policies include support for landlord accreditation schemes and more effective regulation through targeted licensing schemes.

A critical factor in removing barriers for private sector landlords to rent to homeless people is improving the administration of housing benefit.

To raise the standard of housing benefit administration, the Department for Work and Pensions

have implemented the following initiatives:

- expert teams set up to help struggling local authorities tackle immediate problems;
- a new performance framework to raise standards, including a standard for effective relations with landlords;
- reform of the single room rent restriction to increase the range of accommodation available to young people who are dependent on benefits to meet their housing costs;
- measures to make housing benefit easier to administer by streamlining the process for making claims.

Making Better use of Existing Housing Stock

Much has been done in recent years to reduce the number of empty homes. Overall, the number of empty homes fell from 868,600 in 1993 to 744,200 in 2001. Currently, the void levels across the country in local authority and housing association stock average 2.9% and in the private sector 3.7%, although void levels tend to be lower in high demand areas.

To help make even better use of existing housing, the Government is:

- bringing all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010 and developing new approaches to support the renovation and improvement of private sector housing;
- consulting on a range of proposals to give local authorities discretion to bring more empty homes back into use, for example by removing exemptions from Council Tax for empty homes;
- commissioning a business study to persuade commercial property owners to bring redundant properties back into use, and;
- introducing fiscal incentives to encourage the renovation, refurbishment and sale of properties which have been empty for a number of years.

It is also important to promote mobility, especially in the social housing sector, to make best use of the existing stock. Helping people who want to move from high demand areas to areas of lower demand could greatly reduce pressure on housing supply and reduce homelessness.

The Government has carried out a review of the HOMES service designed to help social tenants move between local authority areas. Consideration is being given to establishing a new electronic service giving information and advice about housing choices, linked to job opportunities.

The Government has allocated £200,000 to LAWN (London Authorities West and North) to help homeless people and existing tenants in high demand areas find, and transfer easily to, better accommodation in other areas of the country. This will build on the innovative work of local authorities and housing associations in London and the South East in setting up agreements with local authorities and housing associations in other areas, to facilitate viewings of properties and areas by potential tenants, and to help with moving costs.

Conclusion

This Government should be proud of the achievement on reducing rough sleeping. There are now fewer people sleeping rough on our streets than 10 years ago but rough sleeping is only part of this country's homelessness problem.

In the years ahead the number of people recorded as homeless is set to increase not decrease as the Government widens the groups of people it expects local authorities to help. But this does not mean that action cannot be taken to help alleviate this problem now.

Tackling homelessness will not be easy because it requires more than one single change. Progress to tackle homelessness will need determined and co-ordinated action over a period of years. This report is broad in its remit, challenging in its thinking, and honest about the need to find out more in the areas where not enough is known to develop lasting solutions.

Housing is fundamental to tackling homelessness but in isolation it will not deliver an effective solution. In 2002, homelessness is a manifestation of social exclusion.

The causes of homelessness vary enormously with individual instances including family breakdown as a result of domestic violence, unemployment leading to inability to pay rent or a mortgage, debt resulting from a drug or alcohol addiction, mental or physical difficulties, discharge from prison, hospital or the Armed Forces.

In many situations people can be helped before they end up in crisis. This report urges the Government, organisations and individuals to consider what policies and services can be established to prevent people from becoming homeless.

It also recognises that areas around the country differ and therefore the solutions that are needed will be different too. The new homelessness legislation recognises this by giving local authorities a new impetus to tackle their local homelessness problem.

But the responsibility for changes does not just lie with local authorities. It lies with the whole community. The cost of homelessness is too high. As well as the huge financial cost of housing families in private Bed & Breakfast hotels, there is an even greater cost caused by the damage to the children whose health and education suffer because of where they live.

Tackling homelessness is more than providing a roof. This report sets out a new approach and importantly it marks the beginning, not the end, of the thinking, re-shaping and development of policies and services to help homeless people and those at risk of it.

