

LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

2007 – 2010

Draft 7 - Feb/08

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Executive Introduction.

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Homeless Strategy 2007 – 2010

Background – Key Factors

Luton is one of the largest towns in Eastern England, with a population of 187,000 residents, and about 71,000 households. The population is projected to rise to 189,000 by 2010.

Luton is 30 miles north of London but faces many housing problems similar to those experienced by some London Boroughs. Luton is densely populated, facing high demand for housing particularly affordable housing, but there is effectively no more land left for development; all housing development has to take place on land previously built on and there is a shortage of brownfield sites. Equally similar to London, Luton experiences high levels of homelessness, poor housing in the private sector and high levels of deprivation.

Luton has seen a steady decline in the availability of socially rented housing – numbers reduced by the Right to Buy, compounded by increases in rental prices in the private sector, and also by the demand amongst students at the university. A more recent feature to Luton has been the migration of accession states Europeans choosing to settle in Luton as a base for seeking employment in and around the area. The current stock portfolio is xxxxxxxxxxxx and XXXX RSL properties

A separate review of Homelessness 2008 to 2011 has been prepared which documents in detail the trends over the last 5 years, the results of which has influenced the development of this strategy and objectives that have been developed. The review also sets out in detail the data around homelessness in Luton and should be read in conjunction with this strategy.

Luton has some XXXX households registered on the Housing Needs Register as of December 2007. These are households who are already in some form of accommodation and are applying for a property and 796 homeless households in temporary accommodation. There is no question that even as a stock retaining authority the demand for affordable housing outstrips supply within Luton or that Luton has the largest number of homeless households in temporary accommodation within the region.

Housing Requirement Study

The 2005 Housing Requirements study demonstrated an overall shortfall of 934 dwellings per annum, of which 449 units (48%) should be affordable and 485 market housing. Of the affordable housing 80% should be social rented and 20% some form of intermediate housing (shared ownership / sub-market rented).

Levels of multiple deprivation in Luton are high with three super output areas (SOAs) in the town identified within the worst 10% in England. These are located in the Biscot, Dallow and Northwell wards. There are a further 23 SOAs that fall within the 20% most deprived areas nationally.

Average house prices in Luton have increased by more than 100% between 2000 and 2008 with even larger % increases for flats and terraced houses. Based on the average prices for sales in 2008 and assuming mortgage of 3.5x family income the following earnings requirements can be assumed:

Property Type	Detached	Semi	Terraced	Flat
Earnings req'd	£70,900	£47,100	£39,600	£30,400
Average earnings	£25,000	£25,000	£25,000	£25,000

This means that it is becoming increasingly more difficult for people to access the owner occupied market in the town. This impacts on the social cohesion within the Borough.

The Council's response, working with partners in both the statutory and voluntary sector has been to develop a range of *Housing Options*, which aims, within the available resources to address as many of the issues and challenges faced by local people who are facing homelessness or have become homeless.

Tackling the housing problems of the Borough is recognised by the Council as being a fundamental quality of life issue for the citizens of the town. Poor housing and limited access to good quality housing is more than just about bricks and mortar, it has proven links to other social consequences such as poor educational attainment, poor health, social exclusion, deprivation and other well being issues. Delivery on the housing agenda has the potential for a much greater impact on place shaping.

What has been achieved since the last strategy?

Despite the challenging statistics, Luton has made great inroads to tackling the issue of homelessness within the borough and has taken the lead from the Department of Communities and local governments strategy on homelessness “Sustainable Communities; settled homes, changing lives” launched in March 2005. The main focus of the government strategy was to reduce by 50% the numbers of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. We have set ourselves challenging targets and whilst we may not have reached them all yet, we have made some significant improvements reflecting our commitment to address homelessness and the causes of homelessness.

Since the publication of the last Luton Homeless Strategy some of the areas of achievement have been;

- The Council has recognised the importance of the challenges of homelessness and has appointed the Housing Executive portfolio holder as the *Homelessness Champion*.
- Conducted a rough sleeper's count in November 2005 and identified only 3 people sleeping rough on the streets of Luton.
- In partnership with the Supporting People Team, introduced a team of floating support staff gathered from four partner agencies, Luton Accommodation Move On Project (LAMP), Mary Seacole Housing Association, Luton Community Housing and Centre for African Families Positive Health to provide support for homeless household's in temporary accommodation and enable them to sustain their tenancies and consider moving on to a qualifying offer.
- Introduced and increased, with the assistance of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and Local Private Sector Agreement (LPSA) funding, the number of staff from 4 homeless officers to now include 4 prevention officers and one assistant prevention officer, all working in conjunction with the Customer Service Centre as the first point of contact for homelessness and housing advice. The aim is to access potentially homeless households far earlier than waiting until actual homelessness occurs and the opportunities to prevent homelessness are reduced.
- Funded 2 posts within the Revenues and Benefits teams to assist in the processing of Housing Benefit claims for homeless households.
- Introduced guidelines for staff on dealing with victims of domestic abuse and we have become members of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) assessing the risk and needs of victims of domestic abuse at high risk and preventing fatal injury.
- Continued to provide financial support to Luton Women's Aid in order to assist in the prevention and support of homelessness caused by violent relationship breakdowns.

- Introduced more practical options for homeless households as a prevention tool such as the restructure and additional resources added to the Rent Deposit Scheme. This has enabled 186 homeless households and 110 single homeless (April 2007-March 2008) to secure accommodation in the private sector rather than take the homeless route and take up temporary accommodation.
- Introduced a dedicated homeless visiting officer to address the issue of one of the key causes of homelessness, family and relative ejections. This is households where members are being asked to leave.
- Commenced a programme of qualifying offers in the private sector with 38 participating during 2007 and an additional 2 expected to participate by 31 March 2008. A qualifying offer is arranging for a property to be made available in the private sector rather than from Council stock as a long term solution to the household's homelessness rather than being in temporary accommodation. Such an offer discharges the Council's duty.
- Successfully completed and achieved a LPSA bid to reduce the government target time of 6 weeks that homeless households with children or a pregnant woman, spend in bed and breakfast accommodation to no more than 4 weeks. This has been maintained for the last 2 years.
- Set new targets to minimise the use of B&B still further for these groups still further, to a maximum of 3 weeks.
- Launched a sanctuary type scheme in partnership with Beds Police and the Bobby Man Scheme, called "Homesafe" to prevent victims of domestic violence being forced to leave their own home.
- Reduced the number of accepted homeless households from xxxx to xxxx in 2006/07
- Stopped the increase in number of homeless households entering temporary accommodation and started to reduce the numbers of households occupying temporary accommodation from xxx in December 2004 to 796 as of February 2008.
- Agreed protocols with our partners in the Youth Offending Team, at the Mental Health Trust and at the Luton and Dunstable Trust on referral processes; and with the 16 + team, to reduce the number of homeless 16-18 year olds in Luton.
- Part funded with assistance from CLG funding, a post to work with homeless 16-18 year olds in the 16+ team and provide accommodation with our partner agencies.
- Achieved recognition from the Community Legal Service as specialists in casework (CLS award).
- Reached finalist level in the National Procurement Award for the introduction of a new partnership contract with accommodation providers that is more equitable and provides good value for money.

- Commenced a full procurement and tender exercise for the provision of temporary accommodation in order to continue to achieve best value and improve the quality of the accommodation provided.
- Introduced into our contractual terms with temporary accommodation providers, a 2 for 1 scheme, this means for every 2 units of accommodation they provide they are expected to make available 1 property as a qualifying offer, to enable more households to take up offers in the private sector as an alternative to remaining in temporary accommodation or waiting for an offer within the council stock.
- Commenced a pilot of providing mediation to 16+ clients as a prevention method.
- Provided financial support to Luton Accommodation Move on Project (LAMP) in order for a deposit scheme to be managed by them securing private rented accommodation for young people. This has been provided for from our prevention fund *financed from Luton Borough Council base budget*.
- Provided financial support to voluntary sector providing hostel spaces for young and single homeless people.
- Managed and reduced the overall budget for the provision of temporary accommodation and monitored the budget regularly at a senior level to ensure value for money.
- Commenced a joint Social Service and Housing homeless strategy for 16+ and young people of Luton to address the causes of homelessness with this client group.
- Developed a distinct housing advice and prevention service
- In partnership with Luton Community Housing provided 40 units of high quality long term temporary accommodation.
- Completed a self assessment of the service using the Audit Commissions' Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's) Toolkit.

Going Forward – The next Three years

The focus on our strategy is to meet the government target on reducing by half the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010, and to reflect the key priorities contained in the governments own strategy. Our objectives therefore for this strategy are:

- Prevent homelessness
- Support people when they are vulnerable
- Tackling wider cause and symptoms
- Sustaining reductions in rough sleeping
- Providing more settled homes, and
- Developing choice based approaches

The Audit Commissions' KLOE will continue to assist us in how we provide good services and improve to become excellent in the field of homelessness and tackling the causes of homelessness. Having completed the CLG self assessment toolkit, we have identified areas for improvement that feature within our Homeless Strategy Action Plan.

We recognise there are still many challenges before us and how fragile the service can be to socio economic, legislative or policy changes but are confident we have written our homeless strategy action plan to be responsive to any threats or further challenges as well as subject to an annual review.

The targets to be achieved in reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation are:

Date	No. of homeless households in temporary accommodation.
07/08	668
08/09	556
09/10 (31 st December)	444

Objective 1- Prevention of Homelessness

Good housing advice can prevent homelessness at the earliest stage and making sure homeless households have access to advice is a priority for Luton. The work of the corporate Customer Service Centre and investment in the skills set of staff, will be improved to enable more officers to deal with the wide range of enquiries and intervene at the earliest possible point of homelessness or threatened homelessness.

We will;

❖ Review all our information portals and provide an options pack accompanying the options interview. All advice supplied will be confirmed in plain English.

❖ Continue the prevention agenda and strengthen the front line advice provided to the public.

❖ With the introduction of the new IT system in Autumn 2008, the approach to meeting the needs of our community will change as we move from a housing application system to an “options” interview for all applicants. This will give us the opportunity not only to more accurately assess but meet the housing needs of our community. The options model will consider the holistic circumstances of the homeless household and explore a variety of options according to the household’s income, experience of differing tenures, needs and ability to manage the varying types of tenancies available. Options such as Homebuy, shared ownership, key workers, mutual exchange and grants to vacate will all feature in the options menu.

❖ This review of options will include linking with social care colleagues to ensure that a joined up approach is achieved

All staff will;

❖ Will receive refreshed customer care training annually

❖ Continue to receive annual refresher training on tenure and homelessness as well as attending regular training on the full range of housing related law. This training will be offered to our key partners working with us in preventing homelessness.

❖ Staff will also receive refresher training on working with clients fleeing domestic abuse, the protection of vulnerable adults and care protection issues to ensure that

Tackling the causations of homelessness

Our review of homelessness demonstrates that in tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness, the principle causation remain in line with the national profile.

Homelessness via Family and Friends

Family and friends who are asking members of their household to leave is the most common cause of homelessness in Luton.

The recruitment of a dedicated visiting officer to conduct home visits confirming occupancy and discuss with families the housing options available is one of the tools we use to reduce this cause of homelessness.

With young people made homeless due to family or friends ejecting, we will;

- ❖ Continue to work in partnership with our colleagues in the 16 + team and mediation service to ensure homelessness is prevented, aim for reconciliation with the family and then, where necessary, a planned move on for the young person to independent living.

The development and launch of a joint housing and 16+ strategy is expected by 2009 and we will;

- ❖ Set in place a framework for a series of dedicated actions built around the identified needs of this client group and address the causes of youth homelessness in Luton.

Loss of accommodation in the Private Sector

The second highest causation of homelessness is due to termination of assured short hold tenancies, in effect loss of private rented accommodation. Despite the fact these households have already secured accommodation in the private rented sector, the loss of this accommodation at the end of a term does make them a valid causation of homelessness under the provisions of the Housing Act 1996.

Changes to the way possession orders are obtained has meant it is more difficult to determine where such a loss has been due to any rent arrears as fewer landlords are seeking money judgement orders and favouring accelerated proceedings at the end of the term.

Continued funding from the Department of Community and Local Government will enable us to continue the excellent work of the Prevention Team and the provision of options to enable households to access the private sector or prevent themselves becoming homeless. This work includes advice and assistance on tenancy related matters, defending possession orders, unlawful eviction, debt and mortgage advice, nuisance and crisis intervention.

❖ Prevention staff will be exploring with each individual landlord what if anything, will encourage that landlord to renew or continue with the tenancy, even if it requires input or resources from the council to achieve that. Examples might be the provision of floating support for the household, assistance with housing benefit problems or even in some cases a financial incentive.

❖ We will provide deposits to households unable to otherwise access the private sector. The provision of deposits will remain available to both priority and non-priority need households during the term of this strategy whilst funding permits.

Relationship breakdown is in the top five causes of homelessness, especially those where there is incidence of domestic abuse. The introduction of HOMESAFE and the continued work with the MARAC group will provide viable options for victims of violence or abuse rather than leave the security of their home.

Our Partners Contribution to the Prevention Agenda

A variety of voluntary sector organisations already receive financial support from the Council to provide accommodation and help to young people in Luton. This will continue during the life of this strategy. With the introduction of a revised allocations policy being produced for the Choice Based Lettings Scheme it is anticipated that there will be adequate move on facilities to prevent bed spaces being blocked in our specialist hostels.

The Homeless Steering Group originally formed to create the 2003 Strategy, has representatives from all the key stakeholders and has a role to play in the delivery of the actions within the new strategy.

❖ The Homelessness Steering Group will meet on a quarterly basis to review performance against the strategy, as well information sharing on local and national initiatives, and best practice.

As well as auditing and monitoring our own role as a landlord, the strategy will address the role that the Registered Social Landlord (RSL's) now play in the homeless arena. Supplementing the work of the Housing Corporation, the strategy will;

❖ Require each of our partner RSL's to develop, by 2009, their own homeless strategy and for each partner RSL to identify a "Homeless Champion" within their organisation to work directly with the council in measuring the effectiveness of the strategies and develop good practice as partners. This will ensure there is a collective and shared responsibility towards tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness.

Objective 2 - Support People when they are vulnerable

Homelessness can often occur where a person or household could have been assisted had support been available. That support could be in the form of Benefit advice, tenancy sustainment etc. Not all vulnerable people are necessarily readily identified within the community or may only be identified once a crisis has occurred. This strategy has targeted some groups it believes require specific actions.

Each RSL homeless strategy will be expected to include objectives on support for vulnerable people.

Domestic Abuse

Victims or survivors of domestic abuse have already been recognised as featuring high in the causes of homelessness. Luton borough Council is committed to tackling and supporting the victims of domestic abuse. We also endorse the Luton Domestic Violence Strategy 2007 and will continue to support victims of abuse by:

- ❖ Financially supporting bed spaces at Luton Women's Aid within a refuge setting where accommodation and support needs can be met.
- ❖ Continuing membership of the Luton Domestic Violence Forum.
- ❖ Providing practical and homeless prevention assistance and support via our HOMESAFE scheme in conjunction with Luton Domestic Violence Unit and the Bobby Man Scheme.
- ❖ Continue and develop the multi agency work with the MARAC group, developing a specialised data base and skills set to address and support the victims of abuse. This includes ensuring staff attending the MARAC receive the specialised recognised training from Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA)
- ❖ Continue to train our staff on guidelines for dealing with the victims of abuse or violence and provide specialist training on domestic abuse.
- ❖ Attend regular surgeries with the Luton All Women's Centre and provide direct confidential advice to female victims of abuse.
- ❖ Develop in conjunction with Luton Domestic Violence Unit, a policy to address the needs of the Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgender community who may be victims of violence or hate crime. Seeking examples of good practice from other authorities and forces in the UK.
- ❖ Ensure as landlords, that our tenancy agreements include a statement on domestic abuse, anti social behaviour and commit to taking effective action against the perpetrators of violence/abuse.

- ❖ Working with the Police and Social Service colleagues on tackling the exploitation of women & children, including sex trafficking.

Ex offenders and Youth Offending

As part of our existing working practices, the Housing Needs team already have agreed a protocol for young people leaving custody to ensure they can not slip through the net but have a pre planned discharge from custody. This work will continue and be supplemented by a protocol that addresses adult ex –offenders.

This work will be conducted with our partners in the Youth Offending team, Probation and drug and alcohol services. We will:

- ❖ Agree a protocol with probation and other agencies for ex offenders to be implemented by 2009

- ❖ Attend where required, MAPPA meetings to plan and assist in the co-ordination of management of offenders or those presenting risk to the community.

- ❖ Include the probation service in our housing related training events and conferences.

Drug and Alcohol problems

Many users of drug and alcohol find themselves experiencing problems securing and maintaining tenancies or securing alternative accommodation away from known associates when trying to abstain from drug and alcohol use. Others may find themselves coming into conflict with landlords or the community as a result of their drug and alcohol use. Often alcohol and /or drugs will be contributory factors feature in the dynamics and history of domestic violence. Therefore this group require support in accessing and keeping accommodation. In our strategy we will:

- ❖ Agree operational procedures with our colleagues in the drug and alcohol services both statutory and voluntary and aim for a protocol on cross referring in order to provide support and advice to this client group.

- ❖ Build effective partnerships with the drug and alcohol services, Social Behaviour Unit, Police, Probation and PCT and develop by 2010 a strategy framework for the support and aftercare of drug and alcohol users.

- ❖ Liaise with the drug and alcohol services when considering possession proceedings of tenants with known drug and alcohol history within our own housing stock.

- ❖ Continue to financially support the out reach work of NOAH and the provision of a day centre for the street homeless.

Gypsies and Travellers

A separate dedicated piece of work has been conducted to identify and address some of the issues for gypsies and travellers, in particular a study to identify the needs of this client group both locally and sub regionally.

The gypsy and traveller assessment of need – Luton, South Beds, Bedford and Mid Beds 2007 identified 72 plots required for the region. This was increased to 85 plots by the Regional Group. 15 plots were identified as being required in Luton.

Currently Luton has 20 plots consisting of 6 double plots and 14 singles. Luton is also unique in that it has successfully integrated Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English gypsies within our gypsies' traveller site.

Where a gypsy or traveller is faced with homelessness which can not be prevented, the council will need to make a provision for the household. Within this strategy, we intend to:

❖ Explore the possibilities of a pitch for use as emergency accommodation or enter into an agreement with a landholder or site for the provision of dedicated temporary accommodation for gypsies and travellers.

❖ Offer options interviews to this section of the community to explore how best the needs of the gypsy and traveller household can best be met.

❖ Liaise more closely with the Traveller Liaison Officer, Equality and Diversity Education Officer and Specialist Health Visitor for Gypsies and travellers in order to introduce more preventative actions and avoid homelessness.

❖ Explore the use of floating support for this client group in order to maintain stability for the household and children of gypsies and travellers.

❖ Explore establishing a Gypsy and Traveller Forum with a view to conducting a feasibility study on the Gypsy and Traveller community purchasing and managing their own site.

Teenage Pregnancy

The council work along side the Teenage Pregnancy advisor to help implement the strategies to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy in Luton. This is a cross cutting piece of work that involves Lifelong learning, children and families, Supporting People and the Housing and Community Living department.

Within the life of this strategy we shall work to:

❖ Work with partner agencies to bid for a provision of specialised accommodation and support for single women with children or expectant mothers, which shall include teenage pregnant women.

❖ Continue to share information on this client group and support any teenage pregnancy campaigns aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy e.g. Condom awareness, Chlamydia testing, etc.

❖ Improve our attendance and interaction with the teenage pregnancy forum by allocating a dedicated officer to this area of work.

Children Leaving Care

There has been for a number of years, a protocol between the 16+ team and the housing service aimed at young people leaving care and the provision of move on units.

❖ The Council have an agreement for 12 units per annum for young people leaving care. This protocol will be reviewed and amended during the life of the strategy to ensure it continues to meet the needs of this client group.

❖ There will be an analysis of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme to ensure this client group will receive an appropriate level of priority for assistance.

Families and Children in temporary accommodation

The government target on reducing the time spent by homeless households with children in bed and breakfast of 6 weeks has already been achieved by the council. Indeed the council exceeded this target and no household with children or a pregnant woman will spend more than 4 weeks in bed and breakfast. From January 2008 – the Council have set a further reduction to this maximum stay target of 3 weeks.

The Council support the Government's target to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in the private sector for homeless households. Homeless families in temporary accommodation require a range of support to assist them not only to overcome the effects of homelessness but also to maintain their accommodation and prepare them for their transition to secure accommodation.

We will:

❖ Provide support for any homeless household in temporary accommodation and conduct a needs assessment and access to our floating support team.

❖ Keep occupants in temporary accommodation informed on the progress of their application and the number of offers we have made during that particular financial year.

❖ Regularly review and offer households in temporary accommodation, the opportunity to accept a qualifying offer in the private sector.

❖ Ensure homeless households in temporary accommodation have full access to the sub regional choice based lettings scheme.

❖ Ensure all occupants of temporary accommodation are provided with decent good standard temporary accommodation.

To ensure that we target our temporary accommodation at those in the greatest need and that we manage the service efficiently we will;

❖ Conduct a door to door audit of all temporary accommodation units to confirm occupancy and verify household.

❖ We will investigate and explore options around converting temporary accommodation into “permanent” offers.

Single People in Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

The Council continues to use Bed & Breakfast as temporary accommodation for single people who have been accepted as homeless. Although there are no national targets limiting the stay in Bed & Breakfast, from 2008 the Council will commence applying the 6-week limit but will create a target of 4 weeks maximum stay. This will require close working on a cross agency basis to ensure that the settled accommodation provided is sustainable.

Disability

Some homeless households will identify themselves as having a disability which could either affect them accessing the service or allowing them to have their needs met. This could be particularly noticeable where there are mobility problems or in the provision of temporary accommodation provided in the private sector. Therefore, to ensure we can meet the needs of people with disabilities we will;

❖ Ensure all our points of public access conform to the disability Discrimination Act and recognise our disability equality duty

❖ Ensure our contractual terms with accommodation (including temporary) providers include homes that have been adapted or adaptations would be permitted.

[Drafting comment – no mention of the supporting people programme – which I think we ought – perhaps a discussion with Paul could tease out some words around shared and complimentary priorities.

I think we also ought to mention that we are aiming to develop some data on outcomes as per our discussions at a recent HDMT]

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Objective 3 – Tackling Wider Causes and Symptoms

Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness within our strategy is ensuring the correct links are made with our partner organisations and the government departments to ensure we are always appraising the latest initiatives and assessing the service to ensure we are addressing homeless causation early enough to reduce the incidence of homelessness within the borough.

A key part of the strategy is the protocols (as above) in place with other agencies and the development sub regionally of the East of England Regional Homeless Action Plan 2006-7. By working on a sub regional basis we are able to pick out trends and variations unique to the locality and share best practice with out neighbouring boroughs.

We therefore intend during the life of this strategy to:

- ❖ Continue the work of the sub regional homeless group – exploring trends and outputs of homelessness and develop common protocols and procedures in the field of homelessness.
- ❖ Consult with the Home Office on the development of new bail accommodation within the borough.
- ❖ Support the bids of our partner voluntary sector providers in developing new accommodation and employment services for homeless households and unemployed.
- ❖ Provide advice and support to our partner agencies in the voluntary sector in order that they can deliver positive outcomes for the people of Luton, especially those who may be socially excluded.
- ❖ Set a standard for the quality levels expected for temporary accommodation both in Luton and the sub region.
- ❖ Work closer with our Social Behaviour Unit to identify potential homeless households earlier and intervene to resolve future homelessness.
- ❖ Work closer with our revenues and benefits teams plus the DWP, monitoring our impact on the private rented market and the implications of the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance.
- ❖ Work towards higher standards of accommodation and decent homes in our private rented sector including the introduction of a target specific to this form of tenure.
- ❖ Delegate responsibility for utility reconnection from our Environmental Health Officers to our Homeless Prevention Officers in order to tackle issues of harassment and prevention.

Objective 4 – Sustaining reductions in rough sleepers

Luton Borough Council last conducted a rough sleeper's count on 4th November 2005 this determined there were 3 people classified as rough sleepers within the borough. The results of our count were very reassuring that we do have good services in place to offer real choice and alternatives to sleeping rough within the borough.

Successful reduction in rough sleeping can only be achieved by ensuring there are good links between the primary care trust, alcohol and drug services, and voluntary sector hostel providers.

We do have a wide range of hostel providers within Luton offering bed spaces as well as one night shelter. Working with our colleagues in NOAH and floating support, there is provision for a day centre for the homeless which offers washing facilities, lunch, and contact with health workers, support and a clothing bank.

The council provides financial support to the voluntary sector to achieve this and we will be supporting a bid to obtain joint RSL, Government and Housing Corporation funding to replace the aging facilities with purpose built provision offering residential units for the acute and street homeless.

We shall also:

- ❖ Increase the frequency of the rough sleepers count to ensure we are successful in targeting rough sleeping in Luton.

Whilst a rough sleeper count will identify those sleeping on the streets there is potentially a group of "hidden homeless". These will be those who have no accommodation of their own but stay very temporarily on friends or relative's sofas/floor or other tenuous arrangement. To help quantify the numbers involved we will:-

- ❖ Explore with our Policy team the potential for some research around "hidden homeless" in Luton.

Objective 5 – Providing more settled homes

The provision of more settled homes is the ambition of every local authority that has homeless pressures or households in temporary accommodation. As a stock holding authority, “Right to Buy” still has an impact on our ability to provide homes to the households in temporary accommodation.

The government sets out methods of how providing more settled homes can be achieved within the *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All* paper published January 2005.

Within this paper the target to reduce homeless households in temporary accommodation is set out and consideration of making greater use of the private sector. The government also recommend transferring temporary accommodation stock into a more permanent solution. A further part of ensuring the provision of settled homes is to make wider choice available to households, something we aim to achieve by 2009 when the 2nd phase of choice based lettings becomes live.

The natural result of implementing choice based lettings has meant we have already begun the process of reviewing our allocations and nomination arrangements locally and across the sub region. The purpose of this is to increase the number of lettings available to homeless households in properties they choose to make their home.

The council have also recently launched a comprehensive development scheme which is targeting unused brown field sites such as old vacant allotment sites, garages and other areas that attract anti social behaviour (as featured on *BBC Look East* xx February 2008). This scheme hopes to identify suitable sites for redevelopment and provision of new homes.

The council aims to support the building of 80 new homes per year within its existing program of development in partnership with RSL's.

To further make provision of settled homes we aim to:

- ❖ Continue to monitor our voids and allocations to make sure we are making best use of our existing stock.
- ❖ Enforce the 2-1 qualifying offers from our temporary accommodation providers which comprise part of the newly agreed contract and tender bid.
- ❖ Continue to invest in the council's Rent Deposit Scheme and explore the potential for a sub regional scheme between the sub regional members.
- ❖ Continue the current lettings plan of 60% of family sized accommodation being made available to homeless households, with an annual review to measure the effectiveness.

As the council is faced with wards where deprivation is identified, the concerns are not only about the provision of settled homes but also the standards of these homes. Therefore we intend to make greater use of our powers to ensure that some hardened targeting is aimed at this area for improvement in standards in order to bring up the number of properties meeting the decent homes standards.

As many of our temporary accommodation units are situated within these wards, we are well placed to ensure our contracts include provision that homes meet these standards. This ensures not only that our homeless households enjoy a good standard of property, but when these properties are released back into the market, we can be satisfied they have met a fitness standard for any future occupier.

We shall also:-

- ❖ Undertake research into trends within the private rented sector
- ❖ Maximise the use of our own stock – increased incentives to people under occupying
- ❖ Renegotiating all the nomination agreements with partner RSL's to maximise the numbers of new tenancies
- ❖ The appointment of a landlord/property accreditation officer to aim to make better use of the private rented sector

Objective 6 – Developing Choice Based Approaches

Luton Borough Council has already begun the introduction of a sub regional choice based lettings scheme that will launch in October 2008. The introduction will be dual phased with phase one being the adoption of the common allocations policy between the partners in the sub region, South Beds, Mid Beds Bedford BC and Aragon HA.

Phase 2, due in 2009 will see the full integration of the bidding element whereby our applicants and tenants will place bids for the properties they wish to be considered for.

This will mean Luton has achieved the target of introducing a choice based lettings system by 2010.

Some work will be explored on a central options service delivered in conjunction with the sub region. This would mean a sub regional approach to housing options while still providing local services to the individual communities.

Our own options interviews will offer all customers choice by providing them with information to make decisions about their housing, its type and location whilst informing them of what is actually available within the borough which in turn will manage their expectations on how the council can assist them.

We will also:-

❖ Include the private rented sector on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by 2010

❖ Develop a temporary to permanent scheme

Further information can be obtained from xxxxxxxxxxxx

Consultation

To achieve an effective responsive strategy, the council has consulted widely on this strategy, including in the exercise our sub regional partners, homeless households and our partners and stakeholders. The consultation process has been:

- ❖ Meeting with partner RSL's to work through the action points of the strategy and agree commonality
- ❖ A small focus group of homeless households currently occupying temporary accommodation
- ❖ Distribution and comment from our partner agencies and stakeholders
- ❖ A survey based on the principals of the strategy delivered to a sample of homeless households
- ❖ An exit survey on clients using the Customer Service Centre
- ❖ An exit survey on household leaving temporary accommodation
- ❖ A survey of all households taking up Qualifying offers
- ❖ Adopting a critical friend to examine our strategy
- ❖ Submission to the Council's Scrutiny group
- ❖ Submission and agreement by the council's executive
- ❖ Luton Against Poverty Forum
- ❖ Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- ❖ Survey of Rent Deposit clients

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