

# **London Borough of Croydon Homelessness Strategy**

**2008 - 13**

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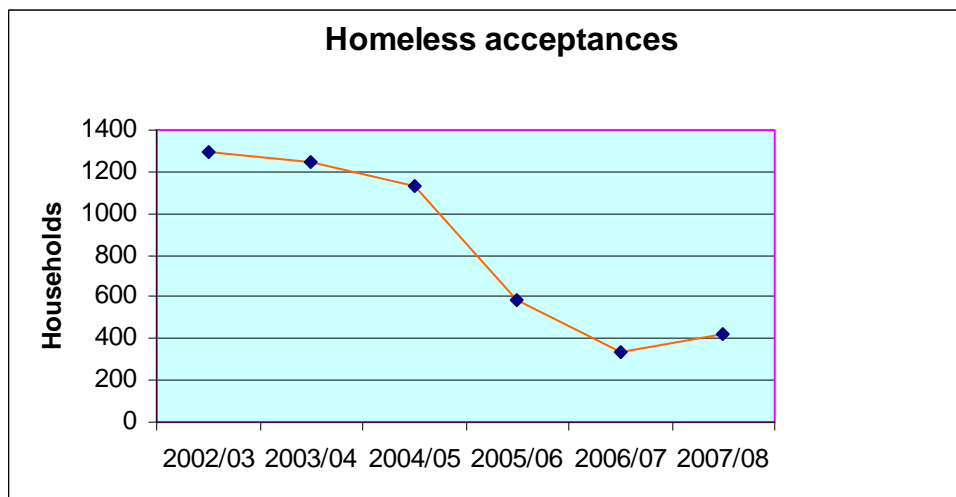
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## Chapter One - Introduction:

Croydon council's first homelessness strategy was published in July 2003 and set out a comprehensive approach to addressing the causes and effects of homelessness over the following five years.

Much has been achieved during those five years:

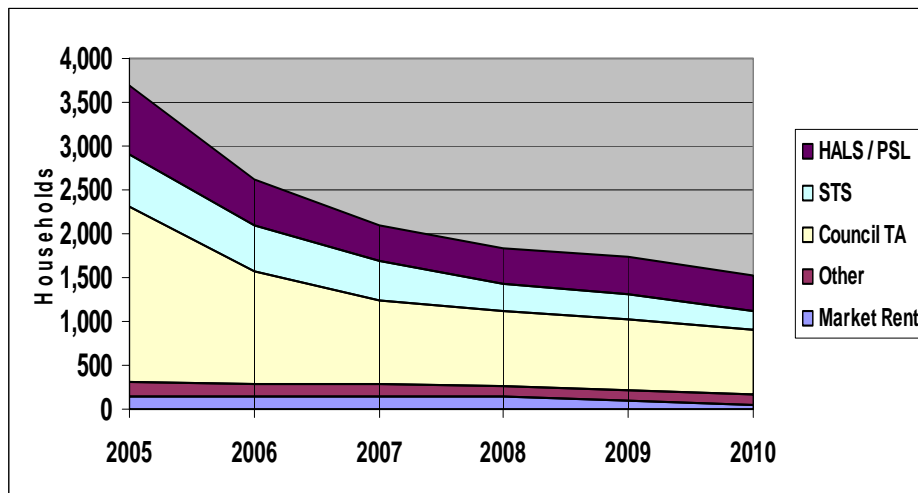
- The level of homelessness acceptances reduced from a total of 1247 in 2002/03 to 426 in 2007/08.



- Croydon was awarded regional champion in homelessness status in 2006/07.
- We responded successfully to the requirement that no family with dependent children should stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (B&B), except in an emergency and then for no more than 6 weeks, by March 2004 and have continued to comply since that date.
- The housing options service was launched in November 2005, the final stage in the development of choice-based lettings which included the introduction of a simplified banding system in April 2003, providing a more transparent route into social housing. The homelessness strategy has resulted in lettings to families with a high level of housing need on the housing register increasing from 14 in 2003/04 to 124 in 2007/08.

The HAP<25 young persons' housing advice service became fully operational in January 2005, expanding from a service for 16 and 17 year olds which opened in 2003, to include all single people under 25 years. The success of this unique multi-agency advice project has been recognised in the form of shortlisting for a number of awards and Croydon being selected as a regional centre for excellence in youth homelessness in 2007/08.

- We have introduced joint working in a number of areas to ensure access to early preventative advice. Examples of this include referral protocols with Mayday Healthcare NHS trust (Mayday), integrated adult mental health service (IAMHS) as well as a joint working protocol between the housing service and the leaving care and independence service.
- We achieved the government target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation two years ahead of the 2010 target and were the first London borough to do so.



- This was in part achieved through promotion of qualifying offers, where a homeless household accepts a private tenancy in discharge of the council's homelessness duty. A record number of households accepted qualifying offers.
- We continue to find innovative solutions to providing settled homes and launched Croylease, a new scheme to help households to access homes in the private sector, in May 2008.
- In June we established the new support needs assessment and placement (SNAP) service, providing a central access point to both accommodation-based and floating support. The service ensures a systemic assessment of support needs and monitoring of move-on into independent accommodation to ensure optimum use of support services. The SNAP team will gather clear information on gaps in services to inform future Supporting People commissioning plans.

This updated strategy seeks to build on these achievements and make yet further progress and service improvement.

## ***The Wider context:***

### **National and strategic policy on homelessness**

In January 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published “Sustainable Communities: Homes for All” setting out the government’s strategy for tackling homelessness through expanding housing opportunities, offering a wider range of preventative measures and increasing access to settle homes. “Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives” published in March 2005, expanded on this, setting out the government’s five year strategy to tackle homelessness and to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 by:

- Preventing homelessness
- Providing support for vulnerable people
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping
- Providing more settled homes

The London housing strategy recognises homelessness as a major problem in London and sets additional aims including ensuring that placement in temporary accommodation does not deepen social exclusion and halving the number of single homeless people placed in bed and breakfast hotels.

### **Links to other strategies**

This homelessness strategy has been developed within the context of the council’s housing strategy and wider social inclusion, social care and health plans for the borough. The prime reason for homelessness is a shortage of affordable housing, in Croydon in particular and the south-east of England in general. A housing need survey in 2002 identified the need for 21,000 new affordable homes (social rented and low cost home ownership homes) over the next five years to meet both existing and future housing need in Croydon. New housing supply has not been keeping abreast of this requirement. The former Mayor of London set supply targets for London boroughs.

Croydon’s housing strategy 2006 to 2010 incorporates other objectives to improve housing supply by making the best use of existing homes, preventing homelessness, and promoting housing options to help access other tenures. For most homeless households, the bricks and mortar solution is the only one needed. However, many people, through vulnerability or disadvantage have other needs such as the need for support to help them maintain tenancies, manage independently or access suitable housing. Croydon’s Supporting People strategy 2005 to 2010 sets out our plans for housing-related support for a range of vulnerable client groups including single homeless people, rough sleepers, and people fleeing family violence. A commissioning plan is updated each year, and the plan for 2008 to 2013 includes a commitment to fund several new services which will benefit homeless people.

*Improving health and well-being: our plan for a healthy Croydon 2008-11*, produced by the Healthy Croydon Partnership, recognises that homeless people experience health inequalities and sets out how access to health

services will be improved. This strategy indicates how homelessness services will contribute to improving access. Homeless people also experience inequality more generally, for example in terms of employment, education, income and access to other services, and Croydon's plans consistently consider how socially excluded groups can be assisted. A range of client group-based plans, such as the mental health, learning disability, physical disability and sensory impairment, and alcohol strategies, are of relevance to a number of groups at risk of homelessness.

The homelessness strategy has clear links to Croydon's new local area agreement (LAA)<sup>1</sup>. Targets relating to maximising the amount of new housing supply, including affordable housing supply (NI 154 and 151), will clearly be central to the council meeting the housing need of homeless people and reducing numbers of households having to live in temporary accommodation. The strategy will also itself help significantly towards the achievement of a number of targets within the LAA:

- Proposals for the new support needs assessment and placement service, for an increase in funding to maximise access to the private rented sector, and for ongoing access to social housing will play a major role in increasing the proportion of supported housing residents to move on to more independent forms of accommodation (NI 141)
- The Sanctuary scheme will help reduce the incidence of family violence (L2)
- Supported or settled housing will help people with substance misuse problems to remain in treatment programmes (NI40)
- Chapter 6 deals specifically with young homeless people, and our homeless prevention programme (including for example mediation between young people and their families) should make it much more likely that they will remain in school beyond the school-leaving age and be better placed to achieve educational qualifications (NI80 and NI117)
- The strategy sets out a new area; a partnership and work programme which will ensure that homeless people are referred on for advice and guidance in securing employment and training – which will help contribute to the target to reduce worklessness (NI 152)
- A staff training and induction programme and continuous monitoring to improve the quality and consistency of service delivery will contribute towards satisfaction with local public services (L8).

### ***Needs and issues***

We have undertaken a review of our homelessness services and data about needs; this provided evidence of need and gaps in existing accommodation and support services that future work will need to address and has given us a picture of current and future homelessness. This review can be found on the council's website.

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<sup>1</sup> An agreement between the council and central government setting out the top priorities for the borough and specific outcomes we will be striving to achieve as measured through national indicators (NIs) taken from the government's list.

## Key findings

- I. There is an overall shortage of housing, including affordable housing in Croydon. A housing needs survey was conducted in 2002 and found that around 4,214 affordable homes were required each year for the following five years.
- II. Approximately 6000 households approach the housing options and advice services every year because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Around 2000 more receive advice and assistance through the HAP<25 service.
- III. Of these households 1400 were referred to the homeless person's service in 2007/08 for a fuller investigation and 426 were accepted for a full housing duty because they were in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
- IV. A further 291 were helped to secure private sector accommodation because they were threatened with homelessness.
- V. 15 to 24 year-olds make up 12% of Croydon's population. Croydon has a relatively young population structure: 21% of the population are under 15, compared to 19% in London and nationally (2001 census).
- VI. Population forecasts to 2018 show an overall decline in the numbers of children and young people aged 6-19 and an increasing older population; with the number of people aged 66-89 showing the greatest increase.
- VII. Croydon has a large number of people looked after by the local authority. Around 200 of those leaving council care reach 18 in any one year. Teenage conception rates remain high in comparison with other London boroughs.
- VIII. 282 young people were placed into supported accommodation through the HAP<25 service between April 2007 and March 2008, thereby preventing homelessness. 114 of these young people were aged 16 or 17.
- IX. The three main causes of homelessness are:
  - IX.1 Exclusion by parents, relatives or friends (49% of all homeless households)
  - IX.2 Loss of private sector accommodation through assured shorthold tenancies being brought to an end (27% of homeless households)
  - IX.3 Family violence (7% of all homeless households)
- X. Applications from homeless people are concentrated in the most deprived wards of the borough.
  - X.1 43% of applications due to loss of private rented accommodation arise from the deprived wards in the northwest of the borough, with a further quarter of all applications arising from central Croydon.

X.2 74% of applications due to family violence are from these areas, together with Addiscombe and New Addington, which comprise only 43% of the population. However, half of applicants are from outside the borough.

X.3 The majority of applications come from the most deprived areas; the north-west, New Addington and central Croydon. Half of all applicants are from the north-west of the borough and central Croydon and a further 16% are from New Addington.

XI. 36% of Croydon's overall population is from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities (defined here as all non-white British groups). This includes 13% black African or Caribbean people, 11% Asian, 4% mixed race, 2% other, e.g. Chinese, and 6% white Irish or white "other".

XII. There are links between ethnicity and causes of homelessness:

XII.1 Black African and Caribbean households are represented at a slightly higher rate than white households amongst those homeless as a result of family violence (39% against 32%)

XII.2 Black African and Caribbean households are highly represented among tenants who have to leave at the end of the term of their tenancies (53% against 27%) and excluded by friends or relatives (45% against 30%)

XII.3 Black African and Caribbean households are less highly represented among those excluded by parents (25% against 52%)

XII.4 A single homeless survey conducted in May 2007 found that Black African and Caribbean respondents were over-represented compared to the population in Croydon but in line with homelessness acceptances. Black respondents from other backgrounds were over-represented compared to the population of Croydon as a whole and compared to homelessness acceptances. Asian respondents were under-represented compared to the population (but in line with homelessness acceptances), possibly suggesting poor access to the advice sector

### **Future homelessness**

The most important issue to consider within this strategy is the downturn in the economy and the housing market. With forecasts of house prices falling by as much as 25% and, the credit crunch restricting the availability of borrowing, we anticipate an increase in homelessness or threatened homelessness resulting from mortgage repossessions. Both home owners and private tenants are affected. Inflation and unemployment would compound this issue with more people falling into rent and mortgage arrears. Our strategy will need to address the likely increase in homelessness or threatened homelessness resulting from mortgage repossessions and problems with debt.

The weakened housing market may also carry risks for our private sector procurement programme. Success in procuring good quality temporary accommodation and preventing homelessness by enabling households to access the private sector has been aided by a buoyant buy-to-let housing market within the borough. The current credit crunch and predicted fall in capital values may result in lack of growth and possibly shrinkage in this sector. However, we have already seen some short-term gains with investors in properties built for sale choosing to let properties through our procurement programme.

One element that we cannot predict is the extent to which falling house prices will increase affordability to those on lower incomes and divert demand from social housing.

## ***The Strategy***

### **Priorities**

This document sets out our plans to deal with homelessness. There are four priority areas:

- I. Increasing the supply of affordable housing and good quality temporary accommodation.
- II. Providing good quality advice and information. To promote a range of options and encourage people to plan for their housing needs and seek advice in a timely manner.
- III. Ensuring that vulnerable people with housing and support needs encounter no wrong doors when seeking advice and support by building on our successes in multi-agency working.
- IV. Ensuring good customer care and consistent service delivery through effective and tailored communication with our customers.

### **Outcomes and targets**

The strategy will enable us to achieve the following outcomes and targets:

- I. To prevent homelessness for 25% of all households who approach the housing options and advice service when they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- II. By 2010 no 16 or 17 year old should stay in bed and breakfast except in an emergency, in which case the stay will be limited to no more than 6 weeks.
- III. To further reduce the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation to 1575 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

- IV. To further increase allocations to non homeless households on the housing register as the temporary accommodation backlog is addressed and thereby address other types of need, e.g. overcrowding and disability related need
- V. To ensure that no more than 10 people sleep rough in Croydon on any one night.
- VI. To extend existing protocols between the housing options and advice service and agencies supporting homeless people to include Bronsfield Prison and the Westminster Drug Project.
- VII. To establish referral protocols between the housing options and advice service and Jobcentre Plus and Croydon adult learning and training service (CALAT) to ensure that homeless people are signposted or referred to advice and support on accessing employment and training.
- VIII. Increase the level of employment amongst single homeless people in supported accommodation

### **The Homelessness Strategy**

A number of key themes were identified in the homelessness review:

- Encouraging early use of advice services and publicising alternative housing options
- Tackling the major causes of homelessness
- Maximising affordable housing
- Reducing temporary accommodation
- Good quality temporary accommodation
- Supported accommodation
- Housing options and the credibility of the housing register
- Supporting people in their homes
- Developing supported housing
- Advice and assistance to homeless households
- Tackling the wider causes of homelessness
- Tackling youth homelessness
- Customer service and service user involvement

### **Structure**

These themes are developed in the following chapters under the headings of: prevention, accommodation, support and tackling the wider causes of homelessness. A further chapter on tackling youth homelessness highlights the key strategic priorities that we will need to address within all these themes to address youth homelessness within Croydon. These have been developed into a comprehensive action plan and set of targets over the next five years in appendix 1. In the final chapter of the report we set out how we intend to deliver, implement and evaluate progress against the key actions and targets in the plan. An equality impact assessment (EIA) has been carried out. The

EIA looked at whether any group was adversely affected by the strategy and whether any measures should be put in place to mitigate this effect.

## Chapter Two - Prevention

There are three main ways in which we can prevent homelessness occurring:

- I. Encouraging early use of advice services
- II. Early prevention initiatives targeting specific groups and communities
- III. Tackling the major causes of homelessness

### ***Encouraging early use of advice services and publicising alternative housing options***

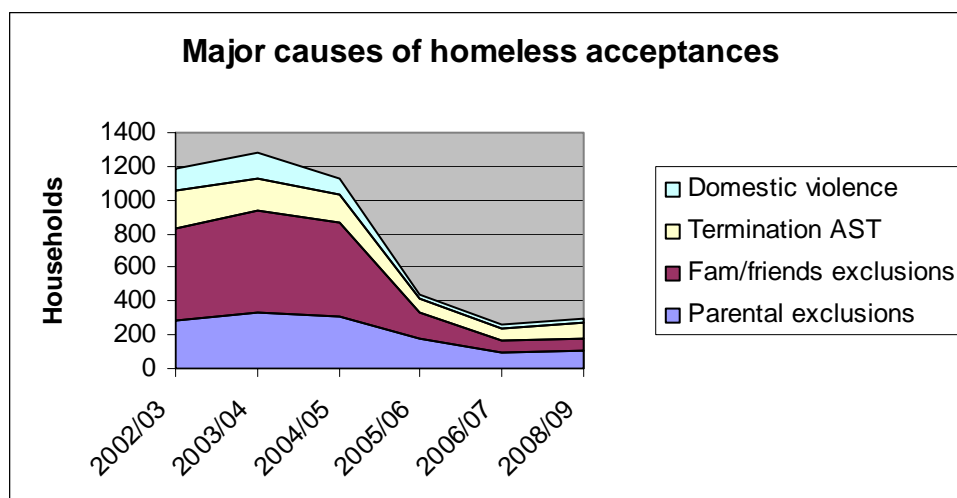
A recurrent theme throughout the 2002/03 review and the current review is the need to promote early access to housing and other advice services. Action since the last review has had some impact, but too many people are still seeking advice too late. Feedback both from a postal survey carried out in late 2007 and focus groups with homeless households in 2008 has made it clear that a great number of applicants are unclear about housing options and routes. We will to devise a wide ranging promotion campaign for those threatened with homelessness using diverse and relevant methods to reach the different groups, for example posters, leaflets and web-based information. This information will be distributed through voluntary sector services, the criminal justice service, drug and alcohol services, libraries, hospitals, GPs, schools, clubs and faith based services. The information will deal with the realities of homelessness, the housing supply situation, housing options, support services and the operation of the housing register.

Discussions with front line staff during training sessions have made clear the lack of knowledge of services amongst agencies and their unrealistic expectations of housing services. We already work with a number of statutory and voluntary organisations and carry out joint training. We will extend this to cover most agencies. A rolling programme of joint training and information briefings will ensure that agencies identify housing problems at an early stage and refer clients for advice and assistance.

#### **Key actions:**

- Implement a promotion campaign to raise awareness of housing options and housing services to encourage those in housing need to seek advice as early as possible and consider a wider range of housing solutions
- Develop and deliver a rolling training and information programme for other agencies and professionals on the available housing options and how to access housing services
- Widen existing referral protocols to include more agencies to include a wider range of agencies supporting homeless households, for example childrens' centres. Monitor and review their effectiveness.

## Tackling the major causes of homelessness



The main causes of homelessness among households for whom a housing duty was accepted during 2007/08 were:

- Exclusion by parents, relatives and friends (42% overall, including 26% exclusion by parents)
- Ending of assured shorthold tenancy (20%)
- Family violence (7%)

A survey of applicants suggests that those recorded as homeless because of exclusion by relatives or friends (other than parents) may have had a different underlying reason for homelessness. Loss of rented accommodation, family violence and non-violent relationship breakdown accounted for more cases than officially recorded. Analysis from the survey is detailed in the homelessness review. The review showed that the level of homelessness applications varies across the borough with the majority of applications being made from three of the most deprived areas: the north of the borough, central Croydon and New Addington. We will be targeting action to prevent homelessness at these areas.

### Exclusion by parents, relatives and friends

Whilst young people (aged 16-17) account for a low number of homeless acceptances (5 in 2007/08), 2000 young people approached the HAP<25 service for housing advice. The triggers for homelessness and needs of this group are significantly different than those of older people and families. Youth homelessness is covered in Chapter 6 "Youth homelessness".

The most significant decline in homelessness has been amongst people excluded by family (other than parents) and friends which fell by 70 percentage points between 2002/03 and 2007/08. Applications from people excluded by parents fell by 40 percentage points during the same period.

Encouraging early use of advice services and publicising alternative housing options are key elements of this strategy. Applicants are seeking help too

late. Almost three quarters of applicants with dependent children are lone parents aged under 25, indicating a need to encourage households to plan for their housing future. We have recently employed home visiting officers who visit applicants who are threatened with exclusion from the family home and provide housing options advice. Mediation is already available where appropriate.

### **Loss of private rented accommodation**

Applications from households which were homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of ending of assured shorthold tenancy declined by one third between 2002/03 and 2007/08. Our successes have been achieved through intervening as early as possible, liaison and negotiation with landlords, liaison with the housing benefit section over claims issues, ensuring that housing benefit payments for vulnerable tenants are made directly to their landlord, payment of grants, and arranging support for vulnerable tenants to manage their tenancies. Where the applicant cannot remain in their existing home, alternative private sector accommodation is arranged.

A further strand of this work is to encourage early access to information and advice. The review identified concerns that the economic downturn will put pressure on housing advice services and that officers need to be able to respond with appropriate advice. Links between the housing advice service and financial and welfare advice agencies need to be improved and we will be setting up referral arrangements and ensuring staff are equipped to signpost and refer applicants. Housing officers will also receive specialist training in debt advice and dealing with mortgage arrears. Outreach with community organisations will be improved to ensure marginalised communities have access to early intervention and advice.

### **Family violence**

The homelessness review identified anecdotal evidence that an increased number of young women are approaching HAP<25, the housing advice service for young people as a result of family violence. There is a connection to partners being involved in gang violence. These incidents are under-reported; young women may not perceive the abuse as family violence and may be reluctant to report it due to their links with their partners' gang activity. Actions to address this issue are contained in chapter 6 "Youth homelessness".

The Metropolitan police have recorded 2211 family violence incidents per year in Croydon. In the last five years a number of services have been established in Croydon which have between them completely modernised our approach to assisting people fleeing family violence: the Family Justice Centre, specialist court, sanctuary scheme (making homes safe), short-term emergency accommodation, and supervised child contact centre have been developed. Homelessness applications have reduced by 57% as a result. The council will continue to raise awareness of services for victims of family violence through the housing options promotion campaign, liaison with private landlords and a programme of training for housing department and registered social landlords (RSL) staff. These services are particularly sensitive to the

needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people who experience family, homophobic violence or harassment.

### ***Key actions***

- Visit all applicants where homelessness is caused or threatened by parental exclusion
- Improve links between the housing advice service and financial and welfare support services
- Train housing officers in providing advice on debt and mortgage arrears
- Maintain liaison arrangements with the housing benefit service
- Raise awareness of services and support mechanisms for people fleeing family violence
- Implement a rolling programme of training for housing department and RSL staff on the options available for victims of family violence and the needs of LGBT people who experience family violence, homophobic violence or harassment
- Continue to fund the Sanctuary scheme, providing security measures to enable households to remain safely in their home in partnership with the police service
- Refer 250 households threatened with homelessness to the landlord deposit scheme; a scheme offering financial and practical assistance to access the private sector

### ***Prevention outcomes***

- Housing options service to prevent homelessness in 25% of cases where there are home visits, mediation, advice, offering information about housing options and liaison with other agencies
- Housing advice service to prevent homelessness in 30% of those cases involving landlord liaison, liaison with the housing benefit service, use of frontline prevention fund, and referral to the landlord deposit scheme.

## **Chapter Three - Accommodation**

Maximising the supply of affordable housing is a key priority in Croydon's housing strategy. Our successes in reducing homelessness and achieving the target to halve numbers in temporary accommodation would not have been happened without significant success in promoting access to the private sector. In order to maintain these successes, we will continue to maximise the supply of affordable housing within Croydon and promote and facilitate access to the private sector for low income households in housing need.

We will continue work to change people's expectations and perceptions of housing, informing newly formed households of the options available to them such as low cost home ownership and private sector renting. We can build upon the experience of housing options advisers in developing an effective communications strategy to deliver this information.

### ***Maximising affordable housing***

In Croydon, demand for affordable housing considerably exceeds supply. Although house prices in Croydon remain lower than the London average, household incomes are below the norm. The number of households applying to the housing register has grown year on year. We have managed to reduce homelessness demand against this by widening the options available to households in need, in particular by promoting access to the private sector.

Our ongoing strategy depends upon us continuing to maximise housing supply and to use the private sector more widely. Our work with homeless households involves setting out realistic expectations and perceptions of housing and informing them of the options that exist and new households are better placed to plan their housing future.

It is important to maximise new affordable housing development within the borough. Croydon has had a healthy development programme and we are confident that we will maintain this in the upcoming development programme through effective working with RSLs. Croydon doubled the amount of grant funding it received from the government in the 2006/08 national affordable housing programme enabling us to deliver 493 social rented homes. We will also continue to make the best use of existing social housing through actively promoting and enhancing under-occupation initiatives which free up larger homes for overcrowded and other larger families. We will maintain a high turnover rate of empty council homes.

Capital resources for social housing in London are now channelled through five sub-regional partnerships. Croydon is a member of the South West London Housing Partnership. The partnership has been successful in ensuring resources are allocated for new social housing. An average of 272 affordable homes has been developed within Croydon every year during the last five years. The projected supply of new social rented homes for 2008-11 is 585 and a further 581 homes are available through low cost home ownership initiatives. Any development is on behalf of the sub-region as a

whole and so not all properties will be available for local households. Despite this development programme there is an estimated need for 4000 new homes a year (identified in the 2002 housing needs survey). Given this situation we need to control the allocation of social housing (council and RSL homes). We do this by producing a target allocation policy each year setting targets for each re-housing channel and balancing the needs of homeless households against other high priority groups on the housing register. This is achieved by producing a clear estimate of supply, producing a profile of need by each re-housing channel and taking into account the net effect of transfers. Average waiting times are projected for each re-housing channel.

The target allocation policy is monitored throughout the year to ensure that targets are met. Outcomes by ethnicity are projected for the year and results are monitored to ensure that the policy achieves an equitable allocation of homes.

In 2008/09 we estimate that 1100 units of social rented housing will become available to let and we anticipate a net homelessness demand of 225 households.

The shortfall in supply affects some household types more than others. People needing larger properties and wheelchair accessible properties face lengthy waits for social housing.

The council continues to maximise the development of affordable housing through planning powers. Private developers are required to ensure that 40% of homes on sites of more than 0.5 hectares or 15 homes and 50% on sites with 30 or more homes are affordable. This provides for mixed, balanced communities.

Targets set for the overall housing development programme recognise the need for larger family-sized accommodation. The programme continues to focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable people moving out of supported accommodation.

- 35% homes with 3 or more bedrooms
- 25% homes with 1 bedroom
- 10% wheelchair accessible homes

We have negotiated to ensure that all new homes built by RSLs are offered to nominees from the council housing register at first letting and 90% of any homes are available to nominees from the housing register when they become vacant again.

We will continue to make best use of our existing stock by extending our enhanced under-occupation programme which gives generous incentives to council tenants who move from a home with four bedrooms or more and release two bedrooms or more. We will also continue our existing under-occupation scheme, available to tenants who move from smaller homes or release fewer bedrooms. We use a range of initiatives to enable tenants to buy in the private sector, leaving their homes available for others in need.

## ***Key actions***

- Fund housing associations to develop 585 homes for rent in 2008-11
- Maximise new affordable homes through planning gain powers
- Ensure that 20% of homes developed through the new-build programme have 4 or more bedrooms and 30% is one bedroom accommodation.
- Ensure 60 new homes built for rent are wheelchair accessible
- Release 82 family homes through under-occupation incentives, (12 of which will have four or more bedrooms through the enhanced under-occupation scheme)

## ***Temporary Accommodation***

### **Reducing Temporary Accommodation**

We achieved the government's target of halving the number of households in temporary accommodation two years ahead of the 2010 deadline. Our success was attributable to a strategy that included expanding the range of prevention measures and housing options, increasing the credibility of the housing register, control of allocations, maximising the use of supported accommodation and maximising affordable housing opportunities. We forecast homelessness demand using housing supply and demand projections and set clear reduction targets for each type of temporary accommodation.

## Key actions:

- We will continue to set and review targets for temporary accommodation
- We will help homeless households in temporary accommodation to access alternative settled homes where they do not wish to or unable to accept their existing accommodation on a more secure basis
- We will continue to actively promote qualifying offers (where a homeless household accepts a private tenancy in discharge of the council's duty towards them under the homelessness legislation). This will be promoted to new homeless applicants, and tenants in all forms of temporary accommodation. We will enable existing tenants in temporary accommodation to make it their settled home wherever possible.
- We will seek additional resources to enable RSLs to purchase existing temporary accommodation on 10 year leases and convert assured shorthold tenancies to permanent RSL assured tenancies
- We will increase the number of available larger homes through Croylease, a pilot scheme whereby private landlords lease their properties to the council for 5-10 years. The scheme will release two-bedroom council homes to accommodate homeless households.
- Whilst we will continue to use some homes as council temporary accommodation, we will target those households who have been living in council temporary accommodation for some time and grant them

## Good quality temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation remains useful and necessary, for example to assist people who are unable to give little or no notice of their homelessness. We will continue to ensure that the temporary accommodation we provide is of good quality.

We monitor our use of B&B closely and no household has stayed in bed and breakfast for more than 6 weeks since March 2004. The quality of B&B is checked on a regular basis with visits from the private sector team the temporary accommodation team. All accommodation is within Croydon or neighbouring boroughs with good access to central Croydon. Households moving into B&B are provided with support through a temporary accommodation resettlement worker who carries out regular surgeries.

B&B accommodation cannot be considered as a suitable solution for longer periods and we will continue to provide good quality alternatives offering self-contained accommodation. We offer a range of different schemes and incentives in order that we can attract landlords with varying circumstances. Our strategy for the next five years is contained in the key actions below:

## **Key actions**

- Continue to work with landlords in the private sector to maintain the supply of good quality private sector accommodation for homeless households.
- Ensure that the support needs of all households are assessed and that, where needed support is provided, to enable households to maintain accommodation in the private sector.
- Develop alternative initiatives such as Croylease.
- Maximise additional resources to convert temporary accommodation such as market rent homes into settled accommodation.
- Ensure B&B and temporary accommodation used by the council meet the appropriate quality standard through property checks and withdrawal from poor quality properties

## ***Supported accommodation***

Croydon has a good range of supported accommodation. A central assessment team, the support needs assessment and placement service (SNAP) was established in June 2008 and will ensure that this accommodation is targeted at those who need it most. Making the best use of supported accommodation is dependent upon our ability to move people on to more settled housing once they are ready for independent living. In common with other London boroughs, the shortage of affordable housing has led to the silting up of supported housing. Reducing silt-up in supported housing and increasing the proportion of people moved on in a planned way are key priorities for the council. The local area agreement, which sets out the council's top priorities, includes a specific target based on one of the government's national indicators, NI141.

## Key actions

- Re-housing an agreed target number of people each year into social housing
- Improving the supply of one bedroom move-on accommodation through the continued development of new one bedroom flats
- Providing resettlement support to people moved on to help them manage their tenancies
- Continuing to fund rent in advance/ deposit schemes to pursue opportunities for increasing the supply of private rented sector accommodation (we will be carrying out a review of the operation and level of funding)
- Explore the use of shared housing with support to enable young people to move-on from hostel accommodation
- Monitoring providers' performance in preparing residents for move-on and accessing independent accommodation
- Monitoring supported housing providers' performance in preparing residents for move-on to ensure people are ready for more settled accommodation as quickly as possible
- Developing a training programme to equip staff in supported housing schemes with skills to increase the rate of planned move-on
- Develop an accredited training programme for service users that demonstrates to potential landlords that they have the ability to hold a tenancy.

### ***Housing options and the credibility of the Housing Register***

Croydon's housing options service was launched in autumn 2005. All people threatened with homelessness are now interviewed by an options adviser who will provide a range of support to prevent homelessness or advise on a range of options including access to the private sector, and low cost home ownership.

A simplified housing register runs alongside the housing options service enabling advisers to give realistic information on people's housing prospects. Applicants with a high level of need including those families housed insecurely

with family and friends have a reasonable chance of being housed. Increasing the number of families re-housed through the housing register is essential in creating a housing register that is a credible route to re-housing. The reduction in net homeless demand and temporary accommodation has enabled us to increase the number of allocations to families in other forms of housing need from 14 in 2003/04 to 124 in 2007/08.

Croydon is well represented in the development of Capital Moves, a pan-London mobility scheme for council and RSL tenants. The scheme will enable tenants wishing to move to “bid” for social rented housing in other boroughs using their priority on the housing register as currency. We intend to use the information technology to facilitate local bidding for all (in addition to the percentage of stock agreed for intra-borough bidding). Applicants will receive feedback on how their bids were prioritised against others to give them a better idea of their chances of being re-housed through the register and whether they should consider alternative options. We are negotiating separately with the main regional providers of choice based lettings (CBL) (systems to enable social housing tenants to “bid” for social housing vacancies) as a contingency, should agreement on Capital Moves not be achieved.

As part of the Capital Moves scheme, an accessible housing register is being implemented to enable homes suitable for disabled people to be targeted towards those households requiring them.

The advisers will also consider the health, education and support needs of applicants and provide information, signpost, and refer to appropriate services. Actions are set out in Chapter 5 “Tackling the wider causes of homelessness”.

Focus groups conducted during the review suggested that there is still a high degree of uncertainty about how the allocations scheme works amongst many applicants. We need to review our information how the housing register and identify different ways of getting this information across to potentially homeless households.

### **Key actions**

- Review information for customers on re-housing prospects and alternative housing options, and develop a promotion campaign to circulate it through outreach to community groups, joint training with key stakeholders and participation in community events
- Introduce bidding for all social housing by 2010

## ***Key outcomes***

- Develop 1166 affordable homes through the national affordable housing programme in 2008-11
- 82 larger family-sized homes released as a result of under-occupation incentives
- No 16 or 17 year old to be placed in bed and breakfast (except in an emergency and then not for more than 6 weeks) by March 2010
- No family with dependent children to stay in bed and breakfast (except in an emergency) and then for no longer than 6 weeks.
- A maximum of 1575 households in temporary accommodation by March 2010
- All bed and breakfast hotels inspected annually by environmental health officers
- All B&B used for placing homeless households to be graded C1 under the pan London bed and breakfast information exchange (BABIE) scheme or better
- 175 single people moved on from supported accommodation to private rented or social housing per annum

## **Chapter Four – Support**

Ensuring that support is available to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness is an essential element of our strategy to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness. The review mapped support services in the statutory and voluntary sector and concluded that many of the gaps identified in the homelessness strategy published in 2003 have been closed in the intervening years. The review concluded that, despite much work having been undertaken in setting up referral arrangements to improve customers' movement between housing and support agencies, pathways between housing and support remain unclear to many professionals and service users. Our future strategy will place emphasis on building closer links between housing advisers and support agencies, through improved shared information resources, joint training, and extending, monitoring and reviewing referral protocols. The strategy will benefit from the merger of the housing department and adult social services into the joint department for adults services and housing (DASH) bringing a greater emphasis to ensuring that housing and support services are delivered holistically.

### ***Supporting People in their homes***

The review found that 10% of all homeless households re-housed by the council were vulnerable due to old age, disability or mental health problems. A further 3% were vulnerable as a result of having been in care or victims of violence. Whilst only 1% of those re-housed in 2007/08 were vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds, housing options advisers and social workers interviewed 220 16 and 17 year olds who approached HAP<25 stating that they were threatened with homelessness during the same period. Without support, many of these households are less likely to sustain their accommodation.

The need for support is not confined to groups recognised as vulnerable under the homelessness legislation but to a far wider number of homeless households who apply to or who are re-housed by the council. Lone parents who have experienced family violence and lone parents establishing their own home for the first time may all need support in setting up their home, claiming welfare benefits, obtaining furniture and making links with local services.

The availability of support has been extended since 2003. A number of support services for homeless people and people at risk of homelessness have been established and are funded through the Supporting People programme:

- Accommodation based support services for care leavers and young people at risk
- A support service for people with mental health problems in their homes
- A generic tenancy sustainment service for families in temporary accommodation and in the private sector at risk of losing their homes
- A support service for women who have experienced family violence
- Outreach resettlement surgeries for people in temporary accommodation.

Specific posts were established to: assess the support needs of young people, ex-offenders and single vulnerable people; to refer them to support services; and co-ordinate information-sharing between social landlords. These posts have now been assimilated into the SNAP team.

The SNAP service will help to bridge the gap between housing and support services identified in the review but will only act as a route into Supporting People-funded services. There are a wide range of other services that may provide support to homeless people; from substance misuse support to childrens' centres. We will enhance the capacity of the housing options service to assess support needs, refer and signpost to appropriate agencies through training and induction and reviewing the information resources available to staff.

We will be working with partners to increase their capacity to recognise households at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage and to refer to the housing options service and to increase housing options advisers' knowledge of statutory and voluntary support services and their referral routes. A key element of our strategy is to build on our existing referral and information sharing protocols between the housing options and homelessness services, and all other agencies, including private landlords working with homeless people in the borough.

These protocols will be supported by a programme of joint training, staff shadowing and information briefings between agencies supporting homeless people and housing options and homelessness services.

The review found that, on the one hand private sector accommodation linked to support can provide a successful route to independent living for vulnerable adults with low to medium support needs. This has been demonstrated through the drug and alcohol team (DAAT) placement and support service for substance misusers undergoing rehabilitation.

The SNAP service will enable us to collect better intelligence about the support needs of homeless households. This information will feed into the Supporting People commissioning plan which involves the key Croydon council departments: adult services and housing (DASH), children, young people and learners (CYPL), primary care trust (PCT) and the London probation service and ensure that strategic links are made between the homelessness and Supporting People strategies.

Increased multi-agency working to address the support needs of homeless households will support our measures to safeguard adults. We have identified actions to be taken forward through the strategy to ensure that processes to safeguard vulnerable adults are embedded in homelessness services. These include participation in case conferences and attendance at the relevant steering groups.

## Key actions

- Monitor and review existing referral protocols and implement a rolling training programme for new staff
- SNAP service to monitor support needs and take up of support services to feed into commissioning framework and review process
- Housing representatives to be included in safeguarding adults conferences where a housing need has been identified. Housing representatives to be included in safeguarding adults best practice and case review sub-groups

### ***Developing new supported housing:***

Mapping the needs of people requiring support identified a gap in the provision of accommodation based support services, e.g. hostels. The review identified a good range of supported housing for rough sleepers, teenage parents, young people at risk and single homeless people. However, there will be a reduction in this provision over the next five years, in particular because of the disposal of a 100-bedspace hostel. This will reduce the number of bedspaces held by Croydon council's largest hostel provider from 330 in 2008 to 215 in 2010. The following additional supported accommodation is required:

- Emergency and "time out" accommodation for 16 & 17 year olds who cannot return home
- High support accommodation for young people with complex needs
- A 24-hour mental health hostel for people with high support needs
- Private sector accommodation with floating support which will replace some of the bedspaces that will be lost

The development of supported accommodation requires the allocation of investment resources and of revenue funding. Revenue funding for supported accommodation schemes has been met through the Supporting People grants budget, governed by the Supporting People commissioning framework. The Supporting People grant for 2008-11 is fixed at the same rate as 2007-08, for each of the next 3 years. The Supporting People commissioning body agreed that the development of a number of new services was a high priority. To achieve this, we have developed joint-funding proposals making use of several sources of funding.

High quality, cost-effective schemes are guaranteed through a scheme review programme and quality assessment framework. A review of young people and single homeless peoples' services is scheduled for 2008/09 to ensure that services are delivering their aims and the council's strategic aims.

We will deliver the following key actions through our strategy:

**Key actions:**

- Identify alternatives to supported accommodation such as increased use of rent deposit schemes and support for people ready for independent living
- Develop new supported housing schemes in conjunction with commissioning partners
- Work closely with our regional partners to prioritise supported accommodation and identify opportunities for cross-borough funding
- Monitor and review the quality and strategic relevance of single-homeless and young peoples' supported housing services and, where necessary, redirect funding to better quality schemes
- Prioritise the following in the Supporting People commissioning plan:
  - Time out and emergency accommodation for 16-17 year olds
  - High support accommodation for young people with complex needs
  - A 24 high support hostel for people with mental health needs
  - Extension of provision for helping people to access private rented accommodation together with support
- Monitor and review SNAP outcomes and review the operation of the service to ensure the most effective system

***Advice and assistance to homeless households not in priority need***

Addressing the support needs of intentionally homeless households is a key factor in preventing repeat homelessness. Accommodation based support can enable intentionally homeless applicants to establish independent living and break the chain of homelessness. The children, young people and learners (CYPL) department services will establish links with SNAP to ensure that, where appropriate floating support is provided.

The council does not have a duty to find accommodation for people who are not in priority need (as defined by the homelessness legislation) or who are intentionally homeless. Nevertheless, there is a duty to provide advice and assistance. A key action in the strategy is to improve the advice and

assistance available to households who are homeless but not in priority need ensuring that these households are referred or signposted to appropriate support services and receive written information to enable them to access services. We will also ensure that households who are not eligible for housing assistance are able to access appropriate support and advice by developing an information resource for applicant with no recourse to public funds.

### **Key actions**

- Childrens' assessment service to establish referral arrangements with SNAP for intentionally homeless families
- Review and improve written material given to homeless applicants
- Develop and circulate a leaflet for people with no recourse to public funds bringing together information on sources of support
- SNAP team to provide a daily duty service within housing options.

### ***Support outcomes***

- Complete "time out" and emergency provision for 16/17 year olds in 2008/09
- Increase the proportion of supported housing residents to move on to more independent forms of accommodation (NI 141) from a baseline of 72.2% in 2007/08 to:
  - 76% 2008/09
  - 78% 2009/10
  - 80% 2010/11

## Chapter Five - Tackling the wider causes of homelessness

Meeting the wider health and support needs of homeless people is a key priority within this strategy. Homeless people face social exclusion through barriers to accessing health, education, training and employment services. Addressing homelessness has a positive impact on wider social issues such as tackling crime and disorder; ex-offenders are less likely to re-offend and people with substance misuse problems are more likely to maintain treatment programmes if they have access to settled accommodation. Sustaining homelessness prevention and tackling future homelessness is dependent upon ensuring that homeless people are able to access services to address these wider issues. All homeless people are affected; however addressing these wider causes is particularly important for the more excluded groups such as rough sleepers and those who have become institutionalised through long stays in hostel accommodation.

The review highlighted three main areas to address in tackling the wider causes of homelessness;

- Although much progress has been made in establishing links with support services in the statutory and voluntary sector, housing options advisers and staff in other agencies are not aware of the full range of support services available. Enhancing the capacity of staff to assess wider health and support needs, and their knowledge of the services available, through training and better information resources is a key priority.
- Communication between housing and support services is central to ensuring that the risk of homelessness is identified at as early a stage as possible and appropriate referrals made. Sharing information and joint training on agencies' roles and responsibilities is essential if these agencies are to work effectively and to foster realistic expectations. Staff turnover is high in some support services and, without regular training and shared information resources knowledge can be lost. A priority of this strategy is to keep joint-working protocols under review and to provide joint training for professionals. Training for front-line staff in other services will enable housing services to contribute towards the delivery of broader strategic priorities such as health improvement..
- One of the key actions in our homelessness strategy published in 2003 was for housing options advisers to provide information for homeless people on services offering education, training and employment advice. Our housing advice project for under 25's (HAP<25) has been particularly successful in this area with a full time Connexions adviser working within the service supporting young people to return to or maintain full-time education. Many of the barriers to finding training and work can be overcome by appropriate advice and support. We need to work with support providers to assess the training and employment needs of homeless people so that they can be signposted

or referred to appropriate services. A priority of the strategy is to develop the housing options service to deliver this.

The following services have been put into place since the last strategy was published in 2003:

- All homeless households accommodated in B&B to receive a guide to services containing information on health, education and support services
- A temporary accommodation resettlement officer conducts surgeries at B&B and offers support to tenants in other forms of temporary accommodation to access health services, education, furniture and benefits
- Health visitors from the homeless health team provide outreach to bed and breakfast hotels
- The council has developed links with the teenage pregnancy service and attends regular liaison meetings
- Hospital referral protocols with Mayday and IAMHS have been put in place
- A health outreach service has been set up at the Croydon Resource Centre for homeless people
- We have extended floating support services to support homeless people and those at risk of homelessness
- The vulnerable adults team has been set up within to assess the support needs of vulnerable adults who fall outside the remit of statutory services
- Europe's first family justice centre was opened in Croydon in 2005. Housing options advisers provide surgeries and work alongside other support services to support people fleeing family violence
- A housing advice worker assesses the support needs of ex-offenders, refers them to supported accommodation and provides housing advice.

### ***Health issues:***

Hospital discharge protocols have been set up between the council, Mayday and IAMHS. The council and Mayday are participating in a pan-London hospital discharge protocol during 2008. Outcomes from the pilot will be evaluated. A key action for the strategy is to ensure that these protocols are fully implemented, a programme of joint training is put into place for officers operating the protocol, and that a review and monitoring system is put into place.

The review identified a number of areas where earlier identification of substance misuse problems and referral to appropriate support could prevent homelessness. Social housing tenancies may be placed at risk through rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, periods in rehabilitation or where vulnerable tenant may have their property taken over by drug dealers. The review identified the need to ensure that both council and RSL tenancy officers

receive substance misuse awareness training in order to identify potential support needs and refer to appropriate agencies. Referral protocols will be developed, implemented and reviewed. The review also identified the need to work with private landlords to inform them of the support services available and enable them to find alternatives to seeking possession where a private tenancy was placed at risk as a result of substance misuse.

### **Key actions**

- Carry out joint training with Mayday and IAMHS which delivers mental health services for the borough
- Ensure monitoring and review systems are in place for hospital discharge protocols
- Review referral protocols between the council, RSLs and agencies supporting substance misusers
- Inform private landlords of the support services available to substance misusers
- Update NOTIFY, a database shared between London council's housing and children's' services and health authorities when a family with children, or a pregnant woman is placed in temporary accommodation
- Ensure that families placed in bed and breakfast hotels are registered with a GP within 2 weeks of moving in

### ***Ex-offenders:***

A Supporting People-funded Housing Advice Worker (HAWk) works within the SNAP team, providing a service to ex-offenders on probation licence within the borough. The HAWk assesses support needs, refers onto supported accommodation and provides advice and assistance to secure accommodation and prevent homelessness. We will ensure that ex-offenders on remand or with short-term sentences are able to access advice and assistance at an early stage by developing and maintaining referral protocols with both Highdown prison and Bronsfield womens' prison.

### **Key actions:**

- Develop and maintain referral protocols with Highdown and Bronsfield womens' prison

### ***Education, employment and training:***

In his large-scale review of social housing, *Ends and means: the future role of social housing in England*, Sir John Hills highlighted the role of housing authorities in tackling worklessness amongst social housing tenants, where employment rates are significantly lower than amongst other tenures. Homelessness services have a role to play in addressing worklessness by providing information, support and guidance to homeless households.

We have been successful in our bid for additional funding from the Communities and Local Government department (CLG) to provide an Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazer. The theme of our bid, "Broadening Horizons" was tackling worklessness. We will be recruiting a project co-ordinator and two information, advice and guidance (IAG) advisers. The project officer will build the capacity of the housing options workers by training front-line staff to promote access to education, employment and training as part of their daily activities, and develop procedures and protocols to facilitate signposting, joint working and referrals. The IAG advisers will undertake needs assessments, prepare training and employment action plans, and support homeless and potentially homeless people into training and employment.

Worklessness is high amongst single homeless people within supported accommodation (over 50%). We will increase the numbers of people in short term supported housing moving into employment by ensuring that employment and training needs are incorporated into support sessions and that service users are referred to training and employment services.

We will be developing a promotion campaign to increase understanding of housing options and the realities of homelessness within the wider community. This campaign will be aimed at both those at risk of homelessness and households in temporary accommodation. We will use this campaign to publicise employment and training services more widely.

We will work with our partners Jobcentre Plus and CALAT to establish referral protocols to enable homeless people to access support and advice on accessing training and employment. Where resources will allow, we will develop and pilot employment outreach services.

## **Key actions**

- Include services for training and education in published information for homeless people
- Establish a referral protocol with JobCentre Plus and CALAT
- Refer homeless applicants to the welfare benefits service for benefits maximisation and in-work benefit calculations
- Joint training with Mayday and IAMHS held in 2008/09
- Referral protocol with Westminster Drug Project operational 2008/09

## **Key outcomes**

- All families with dependent children registered with a GP within two weeks of moving into B&B
- Housing options promotion campaign developed 2008/09
- Referral protocols with Jobcentre Plus and CALAT established 2008
- Increase in employment amongst single homeless people in supported accommodation and council tenants

## **Chapter Six - Youth Homelessness**

Croydon has a relatively young population structure: 21% of the population are under 15, compared to 19% in London and nationally (2001 census). Croydon also has a large number of people looked after by the local authority with an accommodation need with around 200 of those leaving council care reaching 18 in any one year. Teenage conception rates remain high in comparison with other London boroughs. Population forecasts show a decreasing number of people aged 0-31 within the borough over the next ten years.

Our multi-agency youth advice service, HAP<25, was established in 2002 as a one-stop shop for 16 and 17 year olds. In 2003, the service relocated to larger premises and opened its doors to 16-21 year olds as well. In 2004, the service became fully operational offering a multi-agency service to all single 16-25 year olds in the borough. The service provides housing advice, family mediation, homelessness prevention, individual advocacy, drugs and alcohol counselling, and support to around 2,000 insecurely housed and homeless people every year. It is run in partnership with, Connexions and a local housing charity, Croydon association for young single homeless (CAYSH).

Around 2000 young people were seen by the service in 2007/08 A number of positive outcomes have been achieved. 282 young people were helped to secure supported accommodation, and it has only been necessary to accept a full homelessness duty towards five young people aged 16 or 17.

The service has been recognised through a number of awards and Croydon was recognised as a regional centre for youth homelessness in 2007/08 by the national youth homelessness scheme (a range of initiatives launched by Communities and Local Government in 2006 to support local authorities in reaching their target to end use of bed and breakfast for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010). We engaged in a range of activities to share good practice and will be hosting the third national youth homelessness scheme conference (NYHS) in 2008.

Although the council has been successful in reducing youth homelessness and supporting young people, the review has identified tackling youth homelessness as an ongoing priority. Whilst the presenting cause of youth homelessness is generally exclusion by parents or, relationship breakdown, the underlying causes of homelessness reflect issues that are unique to this group; transition from education to adulthood or employment, and family relationships strained by mental health and substance misuse. Tackling homelessness requires a coordinated multi agency response.

### ***Early prevention and advice***

Many young people hear about the HAP<25 service through word of mouth and many 16 and 17 year olds approach HAP<25 in a crisis situation. Issues leading to homelessness may present in the early teens and can build up over time. Without appropriate support, the young person and their family rarely

plan for the young person to move into independent accommodation and instead approach housing services when the situation reaches crisis.

Many young people are not aware of the realities of homelessness and their parents are not necessarily able to access relevant information to advise them. It is important that young people and their parents receive information about the housing market and the realities of homelessness whilst there is still time for them to plan for their independence.

A key priority is to encourage young people and their parents to consider young peoples' housing options before reaching a crisis. This will be achieved through outreach to schools and pupil referral units, engagement with the targeted youth support programme, and an awareness building campaign directed at the wider community. Service users consulted during the homelessness review asked how they would like to get involved: people especially showed an interest in "speaking to young people about the realities of homelessness". We will therefore include people with experience of homelessness in our outreach

### ***Tackling the major causes of homelessness:***

#### **Exclusions by parents, relatives and friends**

53% of applicants making a homelessness application as a result of parental exclusion in 2007/08 were aged 16 or 17. A full homelessness duty was accepted towards five of these young people. Homelessness was prevented in the majority of cases. The housing advisers at HAP<25 contact parents and mediate between them and their sons or daughters, arranging appropriate support services to enable the young person to return home. This may include re-engagement with education, helping find employment or training, or mediation. A key action in the earlier strategy, undertaking home visits has been restricted by resources. We will resume home visits for all young people threatened with exclusion. We will be piloting a range of early intervention and support models to prevent homelessness and to support the whole family following reconciliation.

#### **Loss of assured shorthold tenancy**

For many 18 to 25 year olds, the tenancy they occupy will be the first one they have held. They will therefore have little experience or understanding of managing their own home, their rights and responsibilities as tenants. It is of importance that they are able to access timely advice about security of tenure at HAP<25 and access more specialist advice via the housing advice and tenancy relations service where the advice required is more complex or they are suffering harassment from their landlord.

To date, the main focus of the service has been on the provision of advice about housing options, mediation and negotiation to prevent homelessness. It is important to develop the capacity of the service to include advice on maintaining tenancies within the private sector.

## **Family Violence**

Our review found that there is a level of under-reporting of family violence amongst young women. This is addressed in chapter 7 “Taking the strategy forward”.

Where a young person approaches the service experiencing family violence it is important that, as well as addressing the immediate housing crisis, the young person is able to access appropriate support services. The HAP<25 service will review and monitor referral protocols with the family justice centre to ensure that young people are able to access these services.

## **Key actions**

- Carry out a programme of outreach sessions to schools and pupil referral units, initially in the most deprived areas of the borough
- Develop a communications programme to reach the parents of teenagers at risk of homelessness
- Visit the homes for all 16 and 17 year olds threatened with exclusion by their parents
- Pilot and evaluate a range of local early intervention and support models to prevent youth homelessness
- Enhance the capacity of the HAP<25 service to provide advice about sustaining tenancies in the private sector
- Review and monitor referral protocols with the Family Justice Centre.

## **Accommodation**

The hostel placement coordinator based at HAP<25 has been highly successful in assessing and placing young people in appropriate supported accommodation. A small number of young people with high or multiple needs are spending longer than is desirable in B&B as no suitable supported accommodation is available to them.

The needs of homeless young people have been prioritised in the Supporting People commissioning plan for 2008-11. Planned provision is outlined in chapter 4, “Support, developing supported accommodation”. The two main gaps in supported accommodation highlighted in the review were:

- The lack of availability of “time out” and emergency accommodation for assessing the needs 16 & 17 year olds. We will develop this supported

accommodation.

- Accommodation for people with complex needs or challenging behaviours. Lack of suitable specialist housing has resulted in a small number of young people remaining in bed and breakfast hotels while waiting for accommodation and overstays in costly supported accommodation funded through mental health services and the leaving care and independence service. A 24-hour staffed hostel for 16-25 year olds with high support needs, with shared accommodation for 6 people and 5 or 6 linked self-contained flats, is being developed to address this.

Much has been achieved to ensure that 18 to 21 year olds leaving care are able to move on in a planned way. The housing service and leaving care service have agreed a joint protocol setting out accommodation and support pathways for these young people. The main issue for this group is one of supply with a large number of young people leaving council care every year. We will maximise the availability of private sector accommodation for this group and ensure that adequate resources are in place to do this.

It is important that access to and opportunities for move on from supported accommodation are coordinated to ensure that those with the greatest need access this accommodation and move on in a timely and planned way. Key actions to ensure move-on from supported accommodation are discussed in Chapter 3, "Accommodation".

The review identified a need to provide more support to families after a 16 or 17 year old has been reconciled with the family. This support needs to include enabling the young person and their family to plan for their independent living. We will be working with Croydon Savers credit union to develop for a savings scheme to enable young people to save for a deposit and will pilot a match funding scheme.

### **Key actions**

- Develop time out and emergency accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds
- Procure 150 bedspaces within the private rented sector for 18 year olds leaving local authority care
- Pilot a savings scheme for 16 year olds who have returned to the family home to enable them to plan for their future housing needs

## **Support**

Young people need support to enable them to live independently. 16 and 17 year olds who cannot return to the family home will be enabled to move towards independence through accommodation-based support. Those aged 18 to 25 may be equipped with these skills via floating support. It is important that young people access the support they require to sustain their tenancies. A key priority in this strategy is that referral and liaison arrangements are in place to ensure that the support needs of young people are assessed, addressed, and are sustained through effective monitoring and review.

Where young people have multiple needs for example care leavers who are to be released from prison, planning for their accommodation and support needs in a timely fashion to prevent homelessness may involve a number of agencies. The SNAP team will develop and implement “placement access panels” for young people threatened with homelessness.

A gap highlighted during the review is support for young people and their families to sustain their relationship and plan for the young person’s independence following a return to the family home. This point is addressed in “Taking the strategy forward”.

Teenage pregnancy conception rates are high within Croydon. Needs analysis has shown that there is sufficient supported accommodation for teenage mothers within Croydon but they may not be able to access it because of the stage of pregnancy, age of their baby or their level of need. These teenage parents are often placed in council accommodation and, whilst offered floating support, do not always take it up. Mother and baby accommodation is used solely to meet the council’s duty to accommodate homeless households and its use as time out accommodation to allow a “cooling off” period for the young woman and her parents has not been investigated. The strategy needs to address both the support needs of teenage parents moving into independent accommodation and the role of supported accommodation in preventing homelessness.

### **Key actions**

- Develop and implement placement access panels
- Develop high support accommodation for care leavers with complex needs
- 100% mothers and pregnant women under 18 to be offered supported accommodation

## ***Tackling the wider causes of homelessness***

A key priority for this strategy is to maintain and extend the HAP<25 advice service for 16 to 25 year olds and to ensure that the service is integrated with relevant within the department of children, young people and learners, particularly targeted youth support and the parenting strategy.

Failure to engage in education, employment and training is a major underlying cause of youth homelessness. A connexions adviser works with 16 and 17 year olds but the review highlighted a gap in the service for 18-24 year olds. We will improve links between HAP<25 and CALAT.

A number of strategic links have been made to ensure that the health needs of young people approaching the HAP<25 service are addressed. Surgeries and referral protocols to children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), the homeless health team and counselling services have been put in place. The review found that DAAT-funded substance misuse services were underused by young people. We will establish a clear referral protocol between HAP<25 and Westminster Drug Project, a council funded agency providing outreach and support for people addressing their substance misuse problems. Supporting People-funded services will give advice on health matters and refer to specialist health services, from healthy eating advice to substance misuse treatment programmes. We will continue to assess the health and support needs of young people approaching the HAP<25 service and refer on to appropriate agencies.

Accommodation-based support projects have experienced an increase in the number of people involved in gang activities with some young people wishing to move away from gang associations being at risk of violence and putting others at risk. A pilot protocol to enable inter-borough moves within supported accommodation is being developed. We will monitor and share outcomes from this agreement.

### **Key actions**

- Assess the health and support needs of young people approaching the HAP<25 service and refer to appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies
- Develop a referral protocol between HAP<25 and CALAT
- Review the referral protocol between HAP<25 and Westminster Drug Project
- Taking part in developing the inter-borough “gang violence in supported accommodation” reciprocal agreement

## ***Taking the strategy forward***

Anecdotal evidence from HAP<25 and feedback from the Relate mediation service shows that parents and young people are willing to engage with support services to prevent and repair relationship breakdown. We think that, key to preventing homelessness is ensuring that families can access support when issues arise, often in the early teens, and that support can continue after a 16 or 17 year old has returned to the family home in order to maintain the family relationship. Research on whole family support will be undertaken between July and September 2008 to reach recommendations for a pilot support service.

Housing advisers at HAP<25 report an increased number of young people experiencing family violence; where the violence affects other members of the family home this becomes a driving factor behind some parental exclusions. Housing advisers report that young women do not generally perceive the violence as family violence and it remains under-reported. We will research the reasons why young women fail to report family violence and how we can tackle the situation.

The review highlighted a gap in support services for LGBT people generally and, in particular, the needs of young people threatened with homelessness as a result of homophobia within their families. As well as ensuring that HAP<25 staff and options advisers interviewing young people at HAP<25 receive training in awareness of LGBT issues; the service will investigate support services for this client group and develop links with them.

There is anecdotal evidence that an increasing number of young people are threatened with homelessness as a result of links with gang violence. Young men may be excluded from the family home due to the risks that they present to younger siblings. Younger women, whilst often not centrally involved in gang violence, may be excluded as a result of their partner's.

We will monitor this trend, engage with borough-wide initiatives to tackle gang violence and ensure that information is shared.

The homelessness strategy implementation group (HSIG) is the main vehicle for implementing and reviewing the homelessness strategy<sup>2</sup>. This excludes a number of key agencies which could contribute to ongoing implementation and development of our youth homelessness strategy. A key priority of this strategy is to ensure that youth homelessness is championed more widely at a strategic level.

The underpinning theme of our strategy to prevent youth homelessness is early intervention to address the housing need before it becomes a crisis. This involves ensuring that young people are able to access advice and support before they are 16. To achieve this, HAP<25 needs to develop links

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2 for group membership

with services aimed at young people and families, for example; targeted youth support programme and parenting service to achieve this. A key element of this strategy is to widen links with the department of children, young people and learners to ensure that strategic and operational links are maximised. Future population trends should be taken into account in planning services.

We have been invited by Communities and Local Government to host the third NYHS conference in November 2008. The event will focus on early intervention.

### **Key actions**

- Research under-reporting of domestic violence amongst young women
- Monitor the impact of gang association on homelessness and participate in borough-wide initiatives to tackle gang violence
- Ensure that youth homelessness is championed more widely at a strategic level
- Integrate the HAP<25 service with targeted youth support and parenting services
- Conduct home visits where 16 and 17 year olds threatened with exclusion from the parental home and mediate to reduce the number of homeless applications due to exclusion from the parental home
- Conduct research on the support needs that could have prevented a crisis being reached at 16 and ongoing support needs where a family has been reconciled, by September 2008
- Establish targets for the number of young people enabled to return to the family home
- Deliver a minimum of four outreach sessions per year to schools
- Engage in community events to educate young people and their parents on the realities of homelessness
- Enable 10 young people to access the private rented sector through a pilot savings scheme
- Develop a short stay time-out and assessment hostel for young people in 2008/09
- Develop a high support 24 hour hostel for young people with complex needs
- Host the 3<sup>rd</sup> NYHS conference in November 2008

## ***Key outcomes***

- HAP<25 to prevent homelessness in 25% cases through assessing need, liaison with other agencies and mediation to maintain family relationship and home accommodation
- All 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to receive a joint assessment between a housing adviser and a social worker

## **Chapter Seven – Taking the Strategy Forward**

The action plan in appendix 1 sets out a comprehensive work plan for the council and partner agencies which have signed up to work with us. This builds on the approach adopted in last strategy; multi-agency and partnership working is the key to tackling homelessness.

The strategy has set out a number of outcomes and the success of the homelessness strategy will be judged against how far it contributes these. A number of actions will contribute towards wider local area agreement priorities. We have identified systems for monitoring the outcome of the strategy and ensuring that it is kept under review. The strategy should be seen as a “live” document and review structures have been established.

### ***Outcomes***

We have, as far as possible, set clear outcomes, for example our target for the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation. However homelessness is affected by a range of factors such as the state of the economy, the housing market and unemployment levels. The success of prevention initiatives, particularly those dependent upon the private sector housing market, are dependent upon the wider economy. We will also benchmark our performance against comparable London boroughs to ensure we are achieving the best within any particular socio-economic context.

The introduction of new government monitoring for homelessness prevention (set by Communities and Local Government) from April 2008 provides us with a benchmark against which to set the success of our prevention activities and we will develop targets against these.

### ***Delivering the strategy***

We will ensure that the strategy is integrated into the service plan which sets the annual work plan for the year and is used to set work priorities for teams and officers. This process ties in with the budget setting process.

The success of the strategy depends upon effective cross-departmental and multi-agency working and we will ensure that priorities are incorporated into other strategies and plans where relevant. This will be achieved through working with the homelessness strategy implementation group and through other forums.

The review identified the need for multi-agency training to ensure the success of referral protocols and clear pathways between housing services for homeless people.

There is a continued need for a project officer to ensure that new initiatives are established, to co-ordinate and develop multi-agency working, develop

new working procedures, and to monitor and review the implementation of the action plan.

### ***Resourcing the strategy:***

There are several sources of funding which are used for services to prevent homelessness, provide accommodation for homeless people and to provide support for homeless people.

Capital funding made available through social housing grant (channelled through the South West London Housing Partnership) and the Housing Corporation's approved development grant. The South West London Housing Partnership has made the case for meeting the accommodation needs of homeless people and, in 2008/11 an initial amount of £31,000,000 will be invested to produce 585 homes for rent, increasing through the Continuous Market Engagement process.

Revenue funding through the council's general fund, income raised from council taxes is used for temporary accommodation initiatives and for in-house and voluntary sector housing advice services.

Funding made available by CLG through the homelessness grant. This amounts to £1,650,000 over the three years 2008 to 2011. This funding is directed towards prevention activities such as the Sanctuary scheme, family mediation and home visiting as well as a rent deposit scheme to enable move-on from supported accommodation.

The Supporting People budget funds the majority of supported housing and floating support services. Unmet support needs identified in the homelessness strategy are fed into the Supporting People commissioning process. The Supporting People grant for 2008 to 2011 is fixed at the same rate as 2007/08, for each of the next 3 years. The Supporting People commissioning body has agreed the principle of "cost sharing" as a means of stretching the Supporting People grant available to meet a range of high priority needs including those for homeless people. This strategy will have a key role to play in prioritising the support needs of homeless households when Supporting People grant is replaced with the area-based grant in April 2009.

Safer communities funding through the drug and alcohol action team funds an emergency accommodation and private sector rent deposit scheme for substance misusers who do not have priority need under homelessness legislation and who are addressing their substance misuse.

We will seek to identify other sources of funding and opportunities to share resources with other statutory service providers.

The review identified a number of pressures on the resources available to tackle homelessness:

- Reductions in the thresholds, and caps on the amount of rent charged on temporary accommodation will increase the cost of providing temporary accommodation. The impact on resources is uncertain, as the level of reduction for 2009/10 is, as yet unknown and there are plans for a complete revision of funding for temporary accommodation in 2010.
- Our temporary accommodation strategy is largely reliant upon the availability of private sector accommodation. Over recent years, the buoyant buy-to-let market has contributed to our successes in preventing homelessness and reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation. The weakened housing market, increasing interest rates and the reduction in credit has had an impact on this market; decreased availability resulting in higher costs for procuring temporary accommodation.
- We recognise that international economic instability means that the local economy faces an uncertain future with increases in unemployment likely. This, in turn is likely to result in an increase in homeless applications resulting from more households falling into arrears with their rent or mortgage. Increased demand for services to prevent homelessness and accommodate homeless people will, again place more pressures on resources.

These pressures may be offset by falling house prices relieving some demand for private rented accommodation, making it more accessible to low income households. Additionally, the supply of private sector accommodation may be boosted by unsold properties being made available to rent.

### ***Monitoring and reviewing the strategy***

HSIG will monitor and review progress on implementation of the strategy. The group's membership is listed in appendix 2. The group will meet on a quarterly basis to review progress against targets and implementation of individual initiatives within the strategy. The strategy will be reviewed annually against key outcomes. It is intended that the strategy and action plan will be a "live" document and will be reviewed, and the action plan be amended, as required. This review will feed into a commissioning process with HSIG considering recommendations and endorsing decisions on the process of identifying need, the prioritisation of need, the formulation and development of ideas for initiatives to address unmet need or meet need in a more effective way, the development of commissioning intentions, the design of services to be commissioned, and the mode of commissioning to be used.

We will develop a strategic process for considering and reviewing measures to address youth homelessness, ensuring that relevant strategic partners from the children, young people and learners department and the voluntary sector are engaged.

We will benchmark our performance against other London boroughs and share good practice. We participate in the London homelessness working party, the Mayor's housing forum homelessness and housing need sub-group, and south west London regional homelessness group, and will continue to maximise opportunities to share good practice such as the regional champions programme and regional centre for excellence in youth homelessness programme.

### ***Customer satisfaction and service user involvement***

One of the key issues emerging from the service user consultation commissioned during the homelessness review is that we need to consult with and inform service users more effectively if we are to continue to sustain our successes in homelessness prevention and change perceptions of homelessness and understanding of housing options within the borough. We will ensure that service users access a consistent and good quality service and that the process is transparent. A continuous training and induction programme will be developed and implemented across the housing options, advice and homeless person's services to ensure that the service customers receive is consistent and of good quality. The training will equip staff with the tools to prevent homelessness and support homeless people as well as to deliver a good customer service and manage casework effectively. The training will be developed within the council's customer service framework.

We will therefore be undertaking regular surveys of service users to assess whether the strategy is, indeed, improving the quality of service in a way which is valued by homeless people and improving satisfaction levels. We will also continue to undertake equalities monitoring to ensure service improvements are shared by all households, with reference to particular groups such as people from black and ethnic minority communities, vulnerable people, and single parent families.

We will identify other means to involve service users in service development such as focus groups and consultation on specific initiatives. We will conduct research on the needs of homeless households to inform our future services.

Two areas have been identified:

- The support needs of families with teenage children who are at risk of exclusion
- Under-reporting of family violence amongst young women.

## **Key actions**

- Develop a continuous training and induction programme across the housing options, advice and homeless persons service
- Survey service users annually to assess satisfaction with the housing options, advice and homeless persons service
- Monitor service take-up and outcomes by equality target group
- Conduct comparison of prevention outcomes compared with those of other authorities
- Monitor customers understanding of homelessness services and set further improvement targets

## **Key targets**

- Conduct customer satisfaction surveys across the housing options, advice and homeless persons services and benchmark performance within year 1
- Improve customer satisfaction performance benchmarked in Year 1 by 10% in years 2-5
- 90% of the action plan completed or taken forward each year

## ***Development of homelessness strategy:***

HSIG maintained its role in overseeing the implementation of the homelessness strategy following publication of the strategy in 2003. The group has overseen the current review and development of the strategy. The group brings together staff from the Council and other statutory and voluntary agencies to agree priorities for the strategy and content of the action plan. The group will continue to have a central role in ensuring delivery of the long-term outcomes and ongoing review of the strategy.

A number of sub-groups comprising representatives of appropriate statutory and voluntary providers have met to consider specific issues such as mental health and family violence. Existing forums were also consulted.

The review involved consultation through questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, and interviews feeding into a stakeholder's day held in May 2008.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of this strategy and who will contribute to its delivery.