

Briefing

Prevention of homelessness in practice

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Shelter

Prevention of homelessness in practice

With the 2012 target looming Shelter believes it is vital that homelessness prevention work forms a core part of homelessness services. Prevention work needs to address the threat of homelessness before the point of crisis is reached. Effective prevention work should recognise the potential risk factors of homelessness, engage with people at risk of homelessness, use early intervention to avoid crisis, assess a person's needs fully to make a suitable housing offer, and provide the necessary support to allow a person to retain their new tenancy.

Shelter suggests that prevention work can be split into 3 distinct areas. The list below provides some practical examples for each area, building on existing practice.

Long-term prevention work

Identifying at risk groups and targeting early action and services to support them before they are threatened with homelessness.

- Education – raising awareness of homelessness in schools, leaving home advice and information
- Awareness raising amongst the general public of available advice and assistance, and rights for people experiencing homelessness
- Identification of at risk groups including people leaving prison, care leavers, young runaways, and people leaving the armed forces
- Provision of housing advice and mediation services

Short-term prevention work

Ensuring that those threatened with homelessness and at imminent risk of losing their home are given advice and assistance before the point of crisis.

- Better housing benefit administration
- Reduction in avoidable evictions, particularly those for rent arrears
- Improving access to legal representation, including in-court advice for people threatened with losing their home
- Housing crisis advice

Preventing repeat homelessness

Ensuring people are given a suitable tenancy that meets all of their needs, including those not directly linked to housing. Shelter is currently looking into the feasibility of a legal right to support for homeless people, but in the meantime there are a number of examples of current practice that can help prevent repeat homelessness.

- Publication of a tenancy sustainment strategy
- Full assessment of person's housing and support needs
- Preparation of individual support plans
- If support is to be withdrawn, it should be done in a phased way to allow the person affected to build up their own capacity to maintain a tenancy

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