

***LOCAL AUTHORITY
PROGRESS AND PRACTICE***

Initial findings August 2002

Acknowledgements

Shelter wishes to thank the staff of the local authorities participating in this research project for giving their time in completing the first survey and for agreeing to participate in the research project over the 12 month period.

We are grateful to the local authorities for agreeing to Shelter publicising their involvement in this research work. Shelter has agreed to keep individual responses confidential, unless permission is otherwise given.

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Contents

Summary	4
Recommendations	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Report structure	8
3 Local authority profiles	9
4 Reviews and strategies	11
4.1 Progress with reviews and strategies	11
4.2 Main benefits and difficulties of the review and strategy process	12
4.3 Previous reviews or strategies	14
4.4 Consultation plans	15
4.5 Services to prevent homelessness occurring and/or reoccurring	16
4.6 Existing homelessness fora	18
4.7 Homelessness review and strategy groups	18
5 Allocation of additional government funding	22
6 Joint working arrangements with social services	24
7 Homelessness provisions	26
7.1 Estimated increase in homeless applicants	26
7.2 Provision of suitable accommodation and support	29
7.3 Provision of advice and assistance	31
8 Other developments	33
Appendix 1	34
Footnotes	35

Summary

In requiring local housing authorities to conduct homelessness reviews and strategies, the Homelessness Act 2002 provides a new focus on the causes of homelessness and how they can be prevented. The Act, which came into effect on 31 July 2002, also makes changes to the way local authorities provide services to homeless people and extends the range of homeless applicants afforded statutory protection.

This is the first of three six-monthly reports of a research project conducted by Shelter, which seeks to monitor the progress and practice of a sample of 28 local housing authorities during the first year of the new legislation. This initial phase of the research was conducted during August and September 2002.

The first stage of the research has found that:

- A majority of authorities welcome the opportunity of conducting a homelessness review and strategy, though lack of staff time and other resource issues were identified as the main difficulties in doing it well.
- The majority (18) of the 28 authorities had made 'some' or 'considerable' progress with their review, nine authorities felt they were 'just starting out' and one felt it had already made sufficient progress to meet the statutory requirements.
- A wide range of agencies are to be involved in the review and strategy process in the majority of the authorities' districts.
- Half of the 28 authorities in the sample have secured additional funds from the Government's Homelessness Directorate and have a range of innovative plans for employing these.
- In 21 of the authorities, improvements were identified as being necessary to their joint working arrangements with social services. These authorities were able to specify what improvements were needed and how they might be achieved.
- There was a considerable difference in the way authorities view the likely impact of the new priority need categories on the number of possible homelessness applications.
- The Act requires an applicant's housing needs to be assessed before advice and assistance is provided. Whilst 21 authorities were satisfied that this is taking place, six were planning specific improvements and one authority intended to use the review process to assess the service it was providing.

Further surveys will develop issues identified from these initial findings and explore other areas, including changes to allocations practices and use of temporary accommodation.

Recommendations

It is clear from this initial research that authorities view the requirement to conduct a homelessness review and to produce a strategy as a positive opportunity. However, the process is being conducted within a tight timescale and, in many areas with limited staff time and expertise being available. Authorities should see this first year's work as an important starting point for developing a better understanding of homelessness locally and for identifying the need for local services and the most appropriate ways of providing them.

There is a responsibility on government and on local authorities themselves to ensure that sufficient resources and guidance are available to ensure that local authorities can make the best possible job of conducting homelessness reviews and strategies this year and learn from and build on this work in the coming years.

The new Act also requires closer working between local housing authorities and social services in a number of respects. It is clear that this remains a difficulty in many areas, and is a matter that needs addressing if service delivery to vulnerable homeless people is to be improved.

In addition to these general comments, we would highlight the following recommendations from the research:

- Local authorities need to be aware of the links between homelessness and a wide range of other policies and activities. For example, many local authorities appear not to be considering the impact of their housing benefit service in the review of homelessness in their area.
- Homelessness strategies should include a process for regularly updating key information and adapting policies and activities accordingly.
- Local authorities that have transferred their stock may need more support to carry out their homelessness reviews and strategies. These authorities often have few housing staff available to undertake the necessary work.
- More detailed guidance should be provided to local authorities on 'how to' carry out reviews and strategies, and more evidence is needed about 'what works' in this respect.
- The Government should give clear guidance to social services on how it expects them to work with local housing authorities in pursuance of the aims of this Act.
- Good practice in the provision of housing aid and advice should be made available, to ensure services are provided consistently.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002

The Homelessness Act 2002 will make a significant impact on how local authorities are expected to manage their homelessness provision. The main changes are:

- New duties on local authorities to carry out reviews and publish strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness.
- A new duty to provide long term accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need and other reforms to strengthen the homelessness safety net.
- The extension of priority need categories for housing to new groups of vulnerable homeless people.
- Reforms to the framework for allocating social housing.

The homelessness provisions and priority need regulations of the Act came into force on 31 July 2002. The provisions relating to allocations will come into effect on 31 January 2003.

1.2 Shelter's Homelessness Act Implementation Project

Shelter aims to work collaboratively with as many local authorities in England as possible, to help them with a complex process of developing their reviews and producing their strategies. The organisation has committed considerable resources to achieving this aim and has produced and made available a range of materials, information and training on the Act. This includes a dedicated website, www.HomelessnessAct.org.uk, which is updated regularly and is free to register with.

1.3 Homelessness Act Implementation research

Shelter is conducting research to monitor the implementation of the new legislation and other relevant changes in housing and homelessness practice over the 12 months from July 2002. One aspect of this is the research covered by this report.

Shelter asked 30 English local authorities to participate in a 12 month research project, evaluating and monitoring their progress and practice in implementing the Homelessness Act 2002. The project incorporates a broad geographic spread having selected rural, coastal and urban authorities, small district authorities as well as larger city councils. In many of the areas, Shelter's Housing Aid Centres and Projects were asked to recommend an authority that would be willing to participate in the project. Those selected include authorities that have welcomed the opportunities presented by the new Act as well as those likely to have more difficulty in implementing it because of existing local pressures or lack of resources. A total of 28 authorities agreed to take part; they are listed at Appendix 1.

The research will consist of three six-monthly surveys, conducted with local authority staff involved in the homelessness review and strategy or other relevant operational processes. The first survey was conducted during August and early September 2002. The majority of the interviews were conducted by telephone, with some being completed via postal questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire can be obtained from the website www.HomelessnessAct.org.uk.

This survey sought to establish a baseline picture of the sample group's position on the following issues;

- Their plans for spending any funding allocated by the Government for reducing bed and breakfast use or implementing new approaches to tackle homelessness.
- The authorities' assessment of their progress in conducting their homelessness review and strategy.
- Their plans and intended processes for conducting the review and strategy.
- Their relationships with social services, as relevant to this process.
- Their assessment of the impact of the new priority need categories.
- Any new provision made for homeless households; and
- Their assessment of their delivery of advice and assistance.

Two further surveys are planned to take place in the period to July 2003. These surveys will develop the findings from this first survey and consider additional areas, including new allocations practices.

The findings of the first survey are presented in this report. Publication of the findings of the subsequent surveys will take place over the coming year.

2. Report structure

Shelter aims to use this research project to cover a full range of homelessness activities and developments being undertaken by local authorities. The majority of this first report focuses on homelessness reviews and strategies, as this is a new development for local authorities. However, the Homelessness Act 2002 has made significant changes to other operational issues, which have also been covered. The report is divided into the following sections:

- A profile of the local authorities in the sample group, including causes they gave for homelessness applications in their area.
- Details of the authorities' progress with homelessness reviews and strategies, including their plans for consultation, their assessment of existing services and their plans for the inclusion of other organisations and agencies in the review and strategy process.
- Information on how those authorities allocated additional government funding to reduce the use of bed and breakfast, or establish schemes to tackle homelessness, plan to spend the money.
- An assessment of the authorities' joint working arrangements with social services, detailing improvements that need to be made and how the authorities plan to achieve them.
- An assessment of the number of authorities expecting an increase in homelessness applications following the changes to the priority need categories. This includes reasons given by authorities for making, or not making, any estimates. The section also looks at whether authorities have secured new accommodation and support for homeless people to whom they accept a duty and the authorities' own assessment of their current provision of advice and assistance.
- The extent to which authorities are involved in other developments, including applications for Beacon Council status and local Public Sector Agreements.

3. Local authority profiles

3.1 Sample group

The research involves a sample group of 28 local authorities, all of which completed this first survey. The sample includes:

- a total of 13 urban authorities
- eight rural authorities
- two coastal authorities and
- five authorities describing themselves as 'other', being a mixture of rural and urban areas, rural and coastal areas and rural, urban and coastal areas.

Five of the participating authorities are London boroughs and five are unitary authorities with the rest being two tier.

In nine local authorities, stock transfer has taken place and one other authority is in the process of balloting its tenants. Six of the transfer authorities are in rural areas. Of the nine stock transfer areas, three authorities currently have their homelessness functions fully contracted out, two have contracted out homelessness investigations but have retained decision making responsibilities and four have kept all of their homelessness functions in house.

Numbers of decisions on homelessness applications¹ in the year April 2001–April 2002 vary considerably among the sample group. The group includes:

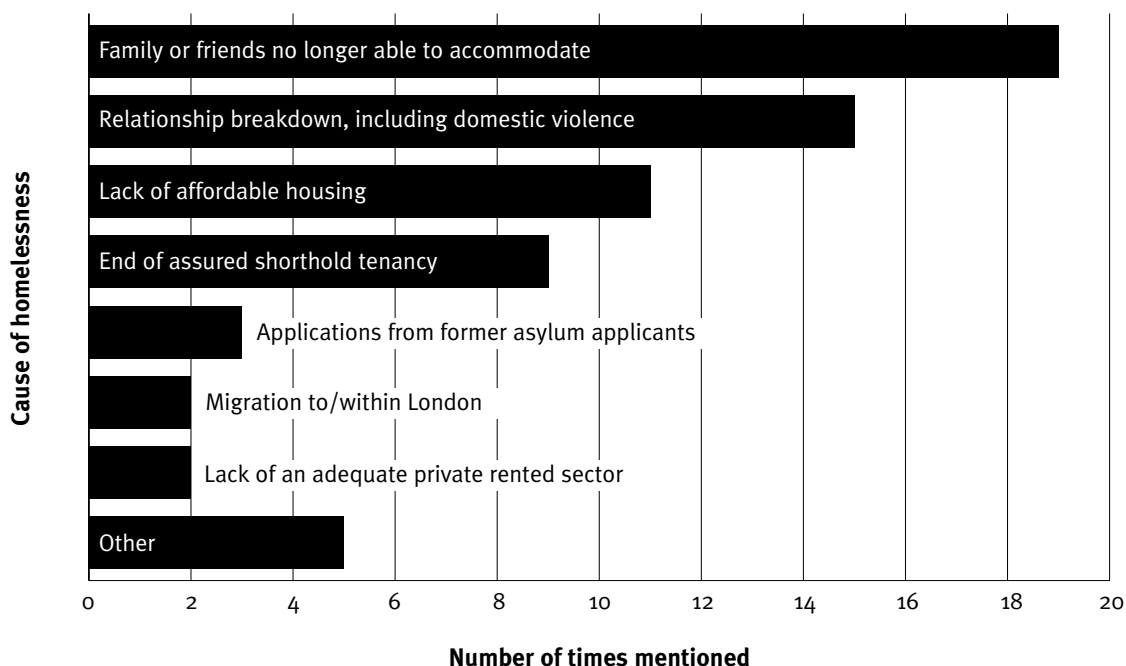
- one authority making less than 99 homelessness decisions
- a total of 13 authorities making 100–499 homelessness decisions
- four authorities making 500–999 homelessness decisions
- five authorities making 1000–1999 homelessness decisions and
- four authorities making decisions on more than 2000 homelessness applications in the year.

Data on the number of decisions is not available for one of the authorities in the sample group.

3.2 Main causes of homelessness

Authorities were asked to list the main causes of homelessness in their district and gave open answers, which have been grouped together under the codes shown in chart 3.2.1, below. Most authorities mentioned more than one cause.

Chart 3.2.1 **Main causes of homelessness mentioned by authorities.**



Base: 28 authorities

‘Other’ reasons for homelessness applications were given as:

- *‘large numbers of vulnerable people in the area’*
- *the ‘need for supported accommodation for people with special needs’*
- *‘housing needs’ (unspecified)*
- *‘overcrowding and lack of hope in being housed by the normal routes’*
- *‘violence from outside the home’.*

In the quarterly statistics local authorities return to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ‘family or friends no longer able to accommodate’ is also the most commonly given reason for homelessness applications. Those returns include information collected where homelessness results specifically from rent or mortgage arrears, but not ‘lack of affordable housing’ more generally. When asked what caused homeless people to apply for assistance in their district in this research, 11 authorities cited ‘lack of affordable housing’ as a specific reason.

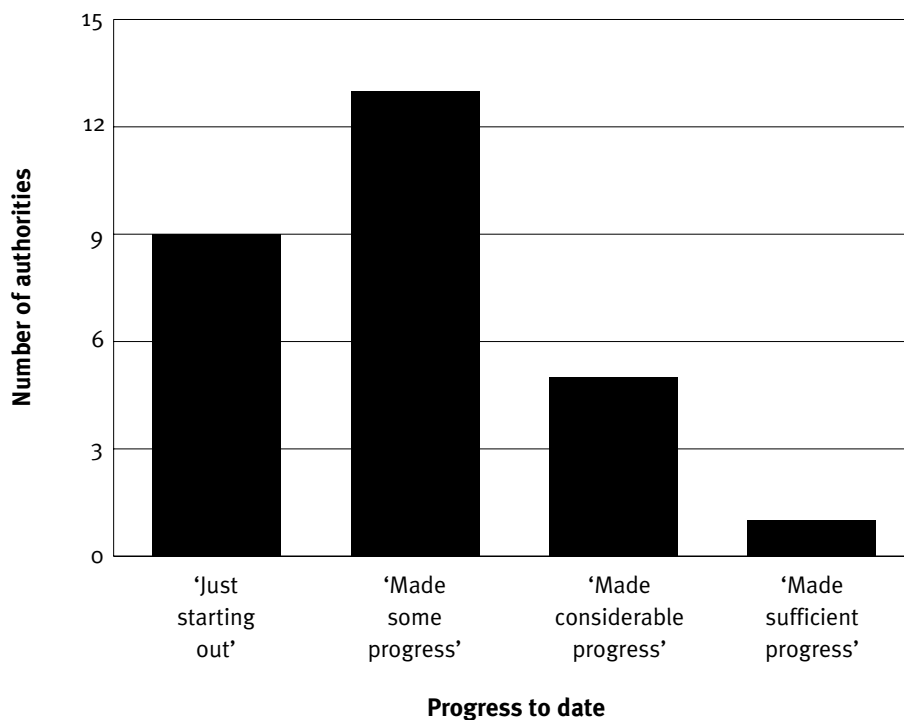
The authorities in the sample group were asked the questions in the following sections. Responses are from 28 authorities, unless specified otherwise.

4. Reviews and strategies

4.1 Progress with reviews and strategies

The Homelessness Act requires authorities to conduct a review of homelessness in their district and to publish a strategy addressing this. This work must be completed by 31 July 2003 and a new strategy published every five years thereafter. Authorities were asked to assess their progress in conducting homelessness reviews to date on the scale below, which was left open to their own interpretation. Their replies are shown in chart 4.1.1 below. This question will be repeated in each of the subsequent research surveys to monitor the authorities' progress.

Chart 4.1.1 **Authorities' current progress with the review process.**



Base: 28 authorities

The findings are encouraging, showing that two thirds of the authorities had made at least some progress with their review by September 2002. Four of the nine authorities that felt they were 'just starting out' felt their main difficulty was lack of staff time. One stock transfer authority felt there had not yet been time to plan the homelessness review process and that they were *'floundering'*; a lot of time had been taken up with their Best Value Review and allocations policy and they wanted to be able to *'just get on with the job'* of housing management.

The activities completed by those feeling they had made 'some' or 'considerable' progress ranged from having a clear action plan, timescale and a strategy group to having conducted most of the mapping, which just needed pulling together.

Two of the authorities in the sample have conducted a review and produced a strategy as a result of previous work. One of them considered this sufficient to meet the statutory requirements of the Act. The other had conducted the review prior to the new legislation and has additional points to cover. This authority stated it was important to view the review and strategy process as ongoing as it had found that *'information gathered is only relevant at the time the review is undertaken'* and that work done last year already needed revising.

One of the authorities is conducting a county-wide review and strategy with other districts. It is in a very rural area where most of the authorities have undergone stock transfer and sees this as a way of sharing resources and cutting down the number of meetings that county-wide agencies, such as social services, need attend. Two further authorities are producing their own review and strategy but also working with neighbouring authorities to produce a strategy, which will cover cross boundary issues.

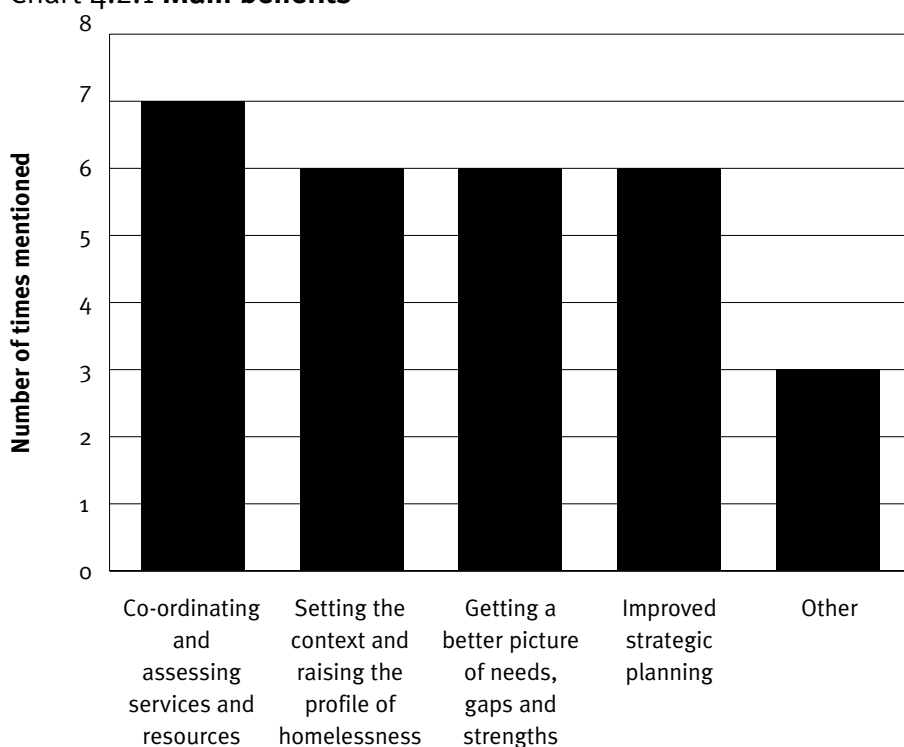
4.2 Main benefits and difficulties of the review and strategy process

Participants were asked to specify what they saw as the main benefits and main difficulties for their authority in conducting the homelessness review and producing a strategy. Overall, authorities seemed to welcome the opportunities presented by the statutory requirement to conduct this work. One of those that appeared likely to have considerable difficulty resourcing the work still wanted the strategy to *'be worthwhile and mean something'*. Authorities were asked open questions and their responses have been coded under the headings in charts 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

4.2.1 Main benefits

In total, 27 authorities mentioned points they considered to be the main benefits to their authority in conducting the homelessness review and strategy, which are shown in chart 4.2.1 below.

Chart 4.2.1 Main benefits

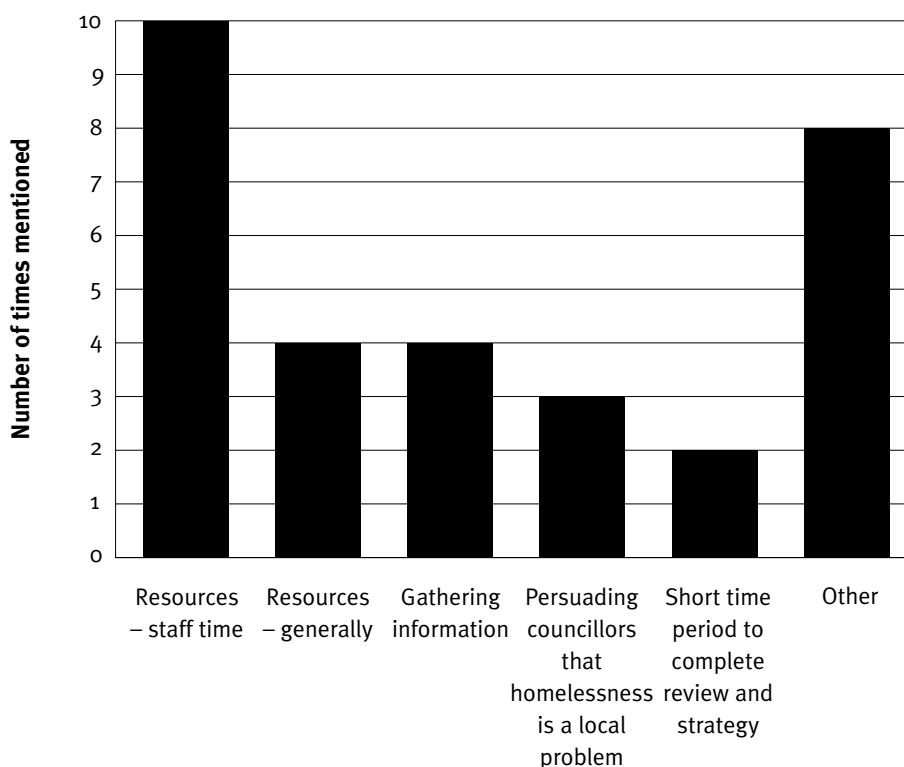


'Other' benefits were given as *'service improvement'* and *'compliance with the new legislation'*. One authority said benefits were *'to be assessed'*.

4.2.2 Main difficulties

A total of 27 authorities specified what they considered to be the main difficulties for their authority in conducting the homelessness review and strategy, as shown in chart 4.2.2 below.

Chart 4.2.2 **Main difficulties**



Base: 27 authorities

Insufficient staff time and resources are clearly the major concern. Six of the nine stock transfer authorities gave *'staff time'* as a main difficulty. In one of these, one officer was solely responsible for conducting the review, alongside existing work.

Lack of the required skills was also of concern. Another rural authority said it was *'not sure where to find someone with the necessary skills locally to produce a strategy'* on a temporary contract. A large urban authority mentioned the lack of support available to enable them to conduct such new work:

Compared to Supporting People, where designed forms were supplied and had been piloted, little has been made available to housing authorities.

They added that *'a lot of skill is needed to design good questionnaires; this is not always available'*. The authority felt that the guidance provided by the government told authorities *'what to do, but not how to do it'*.

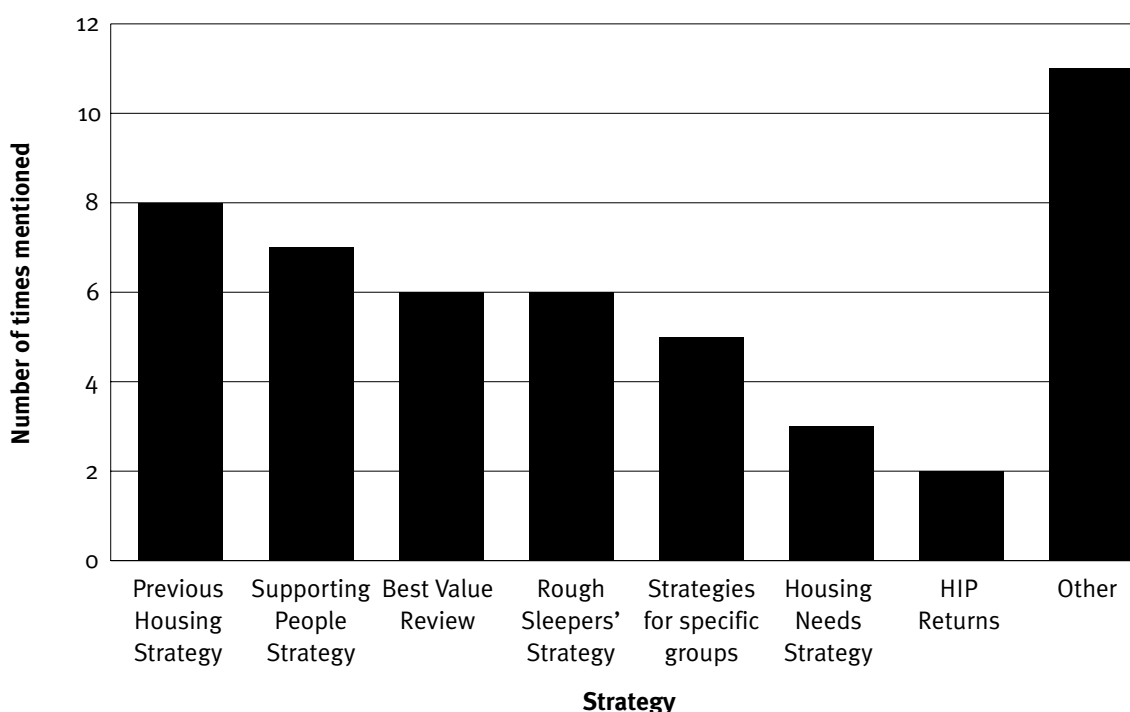
Getting local political backing for the work was an issue in some areas. All three of the authorities that stated that their main difficulty lay in *'persuading councillors that homelessness is a local problem'* had undergone stock transfer.

4.3 Previous reviews and strategies

All authorities have been required to undertake a considerable number of other reviews and strategies in addition to the new statutory requirements of the Homelessness Act. The research sought to establish whether authorities felt they could derive benefit by drawing on work already conducted, or whether they saw the homelessness review and strategy as an isolated, additional obligation.

Authorities were asked whether any previous reviews and strategies had been carried out in their district that were likely to be helpful with the homelessness review and strategy. All the authorities replied, with 23 saying that previous work would be helpful. These authorities were then asked to specify up to three local reviews or strategies they felt would be the most useful, which are shown in chart 4.3.1, below.

Chart 4.3.1 **Previous reviews and strategies considered most helpful**



Base: 23 authorities

Strategies for specific groups included Single Homeless Strategies, a Young People's Homeless Strategy, a Homeless Childrens' Strategy and an Interim Accommodation Strategy. 'Other' reviews or strategies mentioned were:

- review of temporary accommodation provision
- social inclusion plan
- stock condition survey
- tenancy support scrutiny report
- district audit
- previous local research
- 'Health checks' from Shelter's Quality Team
- action plan for the Homelessness Directorate bid
- annual report on homelessness and housing advice
- existing homelessness strategy
- homelessness research for London boroughs
- review of homelessness and allocations data and
- monitoring of homeless cases.

A range of strategies or other work was identified as being useful to draw on as a starting point for the homelessness review. One authority found the timing of its Best Value Review (BVR) had a negative impact on its ability to work on the homelessness review. However, comments made by those mentioning BVRs as useful included that *‘the consultation carried out would be a starting point for the homelessness review’* and that it had been *‘very well timed and would be useful to the Scrutiny Committee’*.

4.4 Consultation plans

The Act states that ‘before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy the authority shall consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons, as they consider appropriate’. Authorities were asked whether they planned to consult specific groups of homeless people, and if so, the methods they intended to use. All 28 authorities answered this question, giving the following replies.

Table 4.4.1 **Number of authorities with plans to consult specific groups**

	Number of authorities	
	Planning to consult	With no specific plans to consult
Applicants currently in temporary accommodation	24	4
Previously homeless people	24	4
Young people	21	7
Women who have experienced domestic violence	20	8
Specific black or minority ethnic groups	16	11
Other	17	10

Base: 28 authorities (not all authorities answered all parts of the question)

Where ‘other’ groups to be consulted were mentioned, they included:

- care leavers
- gay men and lesbians (through local agencies)
- rough sleepers
- people with mental health problems
- other vulnerable people
- youth offending team
- service providers
- temporary accommodation providers
- councillors and
- MPs.

It does therefore seem that the majority of authorities are planning to consult fairly widely, although one authority had no specific plans to consult any of the groups at the time of the survey.

A number of the 11 authorities who had no specific plans to consult black or minority ethnic groups said this was because they made up a small percentage of the local population and hoped they would be picked up in consultation with other groups. However, one of the authorities with a small black or minority ethnic population had asked a University to draft a consultation plan to ensure their specific needs were identified. Those who did plan to consult mentioned they were taking advice from the local multi-cultural forum on most appropriate methods or asking community groups to send out questionnaires.

Two of the authorities were planning specific consultation with *‘travellers or their representatives’*.

None of the authorities specifically mentioned planning to consult with refugees or asylum applicants, even though three authorities had mentioned applications from former asylum applicants as one of the main causes of homelessness in their area.

4.4.1 Consultation methods

Authorities were planning to consult by means of surveys, interviews and focus groups, by using agencies to consult their client groups and by running conferences and events. Some specific methods planned or used are set out below.

Examples of consultation methods planned

- training ex-homeless people to conduct face-to-face interviews and focus groups with people who are currently homeless
- running a 'select committee' for councillors at which ex-homeless people and local agencies will make presentations
- working with Groundswell to run local 'Speakouts'
- using women's refuges or a domestic violence forum to consult with women fleeing domestic violence
- using youth agencies to run focus groups to consult young people.

A number of authorities had yet to decide on specific methods for consulting some or all the groups.

4.5 Services to prevent homelessness occurring and/or reoccurring

One of the requirements of the homelessness review is for authorities to audit the activities and resources available in their district, to prevent homelessness and provide support for people who need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

Authorities were asked whether specific services already existed in their area to prevent homelessness occurring and/or reoccurring (described in the question as 'tenancy sustainment services') for certain groups of homeless people. All the authorities replied, with the majority identifying some services existing for each of the groups. Slightly more services were identified for preventing homelessness occurring than reoccurring. The fewest services were identified to help families with children sustain tenancies, with four authorities stating that none existed in their district. One authority felt that *'single people get support through resettlement, but this is not available for families'*. Only one authority answered that no services already existed for any of the groups.

Table 4.5.1 **Services to prevent homelessness occurring and/or reoccurring**

Client group	Type of service	Number of authorities	
		With services	With no services
Households which include children	Homelessness prevention services	26	1
	Tenancy sustainment services	22	4
16 and 17 year olds	Homelessness prevention services	26	1
	Tenancy sustainment services	24	2
Care leavers and other young people	Homelessness prevention services	26	1
	Tenancy sustainment services	24	2
Homeless people who may be 'vulnerable'	Homelessness prevention services	25	2
	Tenancy sustainment services	27	1

Base: 28 authorities (not all authorities answered all parts of the question)

Authorities were then asked which agencies provided services in their district, and what those services were. The following tables record the agencies that provide services and the nature of those services in the authorities' district generally. It is recognised that there is overlap between households in the specific groups above and the types of services they may need.

Authorities gave open answers to the questions about service providers and types of service present, which have been coded under the headings shown in tables 4.5.2 and 4.5.3.

Table 4.5.2 Agencies identified as providing services locally

Service provider	Number of times mentioned
Local authority	22
Social services	15
Housing providers	15
Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx)	12
Shelter	10
Other advice/advocacy organisations	8
Young people's agencies	7
Variety of voluntary organisations	3
Connexions	2
Wide range of agencies – unspecified	2
Others	10

Base: 28 authorities

'Other' agencies included:

- Alcohol Recovery Team
- HIV Team
- Substance Misuse Team
- Cyrenians
- Day centre
- Hostels Liaison Group
- Drug and Alcohol Team
- Homeless Health Team
- Local lodgings and support project
- Local Mental Health agency
- Relate
- Probation
- Youth Offending Team.

Table 4.5.3 Specific types of services present

Type of service	Number of times mentioned
Advice and advocacy	24
'Floating' and/or specific support	21
Placements and/or support to care leavers	10
Debt counselling	10
Family mediation	8
Protocols with social services	4
Liaison with private landlords	2
Other	11

Base: 28 authorities

'Other' services included:

- a client referral project between agencies
- comprehensive range of services (unspecified)
- education and outreach project
- sustainment schemes funded by Transitional Housing Benefit (THB)
- emergency accommodation and move-on scheme
- mental health worker
- move-on accommodation for young people
- outreach service to hospitals/prisons prior to discharge
- private sector prosecutions by Tenancy Relations Officer
- resettlement, training and employment.

4.6 Existing homelessness fora

The research wished to uncover the extent to which groups already existed that might help the homelessness review and strategy. Authorities were asked whether a homelessness forum existed in their area, and if so, which local agencies it included. A homelessness forum already existed in 14 of the authorities' areas, and five operated, or were part of, another structure. There were no groups operating in nine areas.

Table 4.6.1 **Agencies/groups included in the homelessness forum**

Agencies included	Number of times mentioned
Named voluntary organisations (excluding Shelter)	14
Statutory organisations (excluding Social Services)	10
Social Services	9
Housing providers	8
Neighbouring authorities	7
Shelter	5
Councillors	5
All voluntary and statutory organisations (unspecified)	5
Service users	3
Other agencies	3

Base: 14 authorities with a homelessness forum

The five authorities with 'other structures' included:

- several multi-agency task groups
- three separate multi-agency fora covering specific issues
- a forum consisting of all district authorities in the county
- a county-wide forum consisting of homelessness officers.

4.7 Homelessness review and strategy groups

Authorities were asked whether a review and strategy group had been set up, and if not, whether they planned to establish one. Half of the authorities had established a review and strategy group and half had not. Of the 14 authorities without an established group, 11 were asked if they planned to set one up. Ten of

these did plan to establish a group and one planned a different structure, whereby it had assigned a project team to conduct the review, which would report to the *'task oriented homelessness forum'*.

Authorities were then asked to give details about the range of agencies that are or will be included, and the extent to which they will be involved. A total of 25 authorities replied.

4.7.1 Statutory agencies involved in the strategy group or consultation

Table 4.7.1 **Extent to which statutory agencies will be formally involved**

Agency	Number of authorities planning to involve statutory agencies		
	In the strategy group and consultation	In consultation only	No plans for formal involvement
Social services	24	1	0
RSLs	17	8	0
Supporting People Team	17	8	0
Health Authority (includes Primary Care Trusts)	14	11	0
Probation Service	10	15	0
Homelessness Forum Base: 19 authorities	9	10	0
Education authority	6	16	3
Other statutory agencies Base: 19 authorities	6	5	8
Prison Service	0	15	10

Base: 25 authorities except where specified

'Other statutory agencies' to be involved in strategy and consultation were:

- Police
- ODPM
- Drug and Alcohol team
- Youth Offending team
- Community Mental Health
- Employment/Job Centre
- Connexions
- Other district councils.

The majority of authorities plan to consult widely and have representation from other housing providers or statutory agencies on their strategy group.

A number of authorities mentioned that they aimed to keep the strategy group small, to ensure it was possible to gain consensus, but would consult widely. One authority started off with a large strategy group but noted that attendance *'fell off after the first meeting'* and was looking to narrow it down. Several authorities were running a series of sub-groups, with specific attendance, for example, to focus on young homeless people or rough sleepers.

Ten authorities had no specific plans to consult with the Prison Service. Reasons given included there being no prison in the local area, or that ex-offenders' needs would be dealt with through the Probation Service, which all authorities did plan to involve. However, this would seem to overlook the fact that the majority of prisoners serving sentences of less than a year will not necessarily have any contact with the Probation Service as they will not be supervised on their release.

4.7.2 Voluntary agencies involved in the strategy group or consultation

All of the 25 authorities that responded to this part of the question planned to involve other voluntary organisations in the strategy group or consultation process in some way.

Table 4.7.2 **Extent to which other voluntary agencies will be involved**

Agency	Number of authorities planning to involve voluntary agencies	
	In the strategy group and consultation	In consultation only
Shelter	8	0
Accommodation providers	7	0
Womens' Aid	4	0
CABx	2	3
Others	10	7

Base: 25 authorities

4.7.3 Other local authority departments involved in the strategy group or consultation

A total of 23 authorities replied to this part of the question. Of these, 22 stated other departments would be involved in the strategy group or consultation process and one authority stated it had no plans to involve them.

Table 4.7.3 **Extent to which other departments within the authority will be involved**

Agency	Number of authorities planning to involve voluntary agencies	
	In the strategy group and consultation	In consultation only
Housing Benefit	9	4
Community Safety team	6	0
Regeneration Team	3	0
Planning	2	4
Others	10	9

Base: 23 authorities

'Other' departments involved in the strategy group and consultation included:

- After Care Team
- Housing Options Team
- Mental Health Team
- Youth Service
- Drug and Alcohol Team
- Chief Executive's Team
- Community Team
- Council Officers
- E-government
- Environmental Health
- Estate Management
- Homeless Hostel staff
- Housing Needs
- Area Management
- Enabling Team
- Strategic Policy Team
- Empty Homes Officer
- Housing Strategy team
- Area Housing Officers
- Private Sector Housing Team
- Social Inclusion Unit.

One authority stated that it was essential that there were close links between the Homelessness Strategy and Community Strategy, which was being written by the Chief Executive's Team. The latter had been invited to part of the strategy group for this reason. One of the authorities involving other departments specified that they had no formal plans to involve housing benefit staff in the strategy group or consultation process as the service had been outsourced and was not considered likely to have much ability to influence opinion.

5. Allocation of additional government funding

The government's Homelessness Directorate has allocated £10 million to be divided between all local authorities to help them implement new priority need duties. In addition, it has allocated around £25 million to the 44 authorities with the highest levels of bed and breakfast use and £3 million to authorities that submitted funding bids for new schemes to tackle homelessness. The survey sought to establish how many of the sample authorities have been allocated funds from the latter two sources and how they were planning to spend them.

Half of the 28 authorities in the sample have been allocated these specific funds. This includes all five London boroughs and nine authorities outside London. Of those allocated additional money, six have received funds to reduce bed and breakfast use, five have received funding to set up schemes to tackle homelessness and three have received both sources of funding.

5.1 Use of allocated funds

Seven of the nine authorities receiving funds either to reduce bed and breakfast use or to set up new schemes to tackle homelessness mentioned that they will be used to develop family mediation schemes. This reflects the fact that 'family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate' was the most commonly mentioned cause of homelessness applications. Seven other schemes will specifically involve employing new staff. Two of the authorities allocated money were concerned that the funding, which was announced at the end of July 2002, only runs until March 2003, making it difficult to plan for the future or recruit and retain necessary staff.

5.1.1 Schemes to reduce bed and breakfast use

Four of the nine authorities receiving funds to reduce bed and breakfast use intend to employ new staff and three authorities will use their funds on private rented sector schemes. Two of the authorities' schemes will seek to optimise use of local housing stock. These involve a downsizing scheme to release family housing, a cash incentive scheme for tenants under-occupying RSL properties and a scheme to lease empty properties from elderly people in long term care.

Examples of schemes employing new/ additional staff

- accommodation and temporary accommodation officers
- move on officers *'to ensure voids are filled'*
- visiting officers to provide visits to all applicants threatened with homelessness
- additional staff to speed up homeless assessments
- specific social workers to fast track Children Act and Community Care assessments for applicants found to be intentionally homeless.

Examples of private sector schemes

- setting up a landlords' forum and private renting charter
- *'topping up private sector rents'*
- *'equipment to fast track housing benefit claims'*
- employing 'prevention and promotion' officers and development officers to *'sustain existing private tenancies'* and work with private landlords on lettings practices.

5.1.2 Schemes to tackle homelessness

The majority of the authorities securing funds for schemes to tackle homelessness will use them to employ new or additional staff. Other plans include a nightstop service, a YMCA support scheme and a lodgings support scheme. Two of these schemes resulted from joint bids made with neighbouring authorities.

Examples of schemes employing new/additional staff

- caseworkers and homelessness lettings officers
- hostel outreach workers
- housing benefit officer to fast track private tenants' claims
- hospital discharge officer
- Bengali domestic violence worker
- supported lodgings officer for 16 and 17 year olds.

6. Joint working arrangements with social services

The ability to work in partnership with social services is critical to delivering a more strategic approach to homelessness. This is reflected in the legislation on reviews and strategies. Section 1(2) of the Act states ‘the social services authority for the district of the authority ... shall give such assistance in connection with (the homelessness review and strategy) as the authority may reasonably require’. Section 3 (2) states ‘a homelessness strategy may include specific objectives to be pursued, and specific action planned to be taken, in the course of the exercise of ... the functions of the social services authority for the district’.

6.1 Improvements needed to joint working arrangements

Authorities were asked whether they felt they needed to improve on their existing joint working arrangements with social services locally, to ensure they were given such assistance as they ‘may reasonably require’ in carrying out the review and drawing up the strategy. Of the 27 authorities that answered, 21 said improvements were needed and six said they were not. Where improvements were needed, authorities were asked open questions about what these were, and how they would be achieved. Their replies have been coded under the headings shown in tables 6.1.1 and 6.1.2. One authority, which said it had a good working relationship with social services, hoped the review ‘*would identify any gaps in these arrangements*’.

Table 6.1.1 **Main improvement needed**

	Number of times mentioned
Improve mutual understanding of each other’s work	6
Formalise working arrangements	4
Improve communication	4
Improve engagement with the relevant staff in social services	3
Improve social services’ understanding of their role in supporting homeless people	3
Improve the way social services plan and prioritise	3
Other	3

Base: 21 authorities

‘Other’ improvements included:

- ‘*continuing to build on an improved relationship*’
- ‘*increased information sharing and joint working*’
- joint commissioning.

One authority noted that:

The needs of different client groups compete with one another as social services teams are very disparate.

Another felt that:

Past problems stemmed from the fact that social services comprises many disparate teams, who have little connection with each other.

It was also stated that there was 'very poor forward planning', for example with social services being 'unable to forecast the needs of care leavers'.

Table 6.1.2 Means of making improvements

	Number of times mentioned
By arranging meetings with managers/senior staff	7
By requesting social services representation on the strategy group	6
Joint protocols	4
Other	7

Base: 21 authorities

'Other' means of improving working arrangements included:

- awareness sessions to improve understanding of each others' work
- ensuring involvement with relevant groups
- having named contact officers
- involving social services in the recruitment of relevant staff
- through new local liaison meetings and joint monitoring
- *'using the legal requirement of the Act to get social service's ownership of their role in the process'.*

One authority felt that relations with social services had improved *'around 16 and 17 year olds particularly as legislation had made responsibilities clearer'*. However, the authority's BVR had identified a lack of understanding around the roles of different teams, which was to be addressed *'by visits and awareness sessions'* between the two departments.

Accountable attendance at meetings was also seen as a significant means of securing improvement. One authority mentioned that the Supporting People Locality Forum had *'focused meetings county-wide'*. They were now *'seeing the same people attending meetings, increasing continuity and accountability'*. This was helping to *'concentrate attention on how housing was important to all groups of social services' clients'*. It was felt by some respondents that previously, a lot of social services' time had been spent *'in meetings by staff that can't comment or feedback to other teams'*. Another authority also stated that having one representative from social services delegated to attend the strategy group had *'improved relations significantly as this person was accountable and committed'*.

Clearly improved working with social services is an important matter, with authorities identifying that improvements are needed but also seeing some more positive changes occurring. Future surveys will assess the extent to which improvements have been secured.

7. Homelessness provisions

The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 extended the statutory definition of 'priority need' to several new groups. These include 16 and 17 year olds, whom authorities had strongly been advised to 'normally consider' as 'vulnerable' by a revision to the Code of Guidance, issued in April 2000. The research sought to establish to what extent, if any authorities saw the new categories as being likely to increase the number of homeless applicants in their district.

7.1 Estimated increase in homeless applicants

Authorities were asked whether, following the introduction of the new priority need categories, they had made any estimate of an overall percentage increase in applications expected in the next 12 months. They were then asked whether they were able to break down their estimate by specific group. Their responses are shown in tables 7.1.1 and 7.1.1.1 The sample group includes authorities making a considerable range of homelessness decisions in a year. To give perspective to their estimates, figures from the ODPM have been included in the first column of table 7.1.1 showing the number of decisions made.

Table 7.1.1 **Number of additional applications estimated overall**

Number of homeless decisions ² made April 2001–2002	Number of authorities estimating		
	0–10% increase	11–20% increase	21%+ increase
1–99	0	1	0
100–499	1	2	1
500–999	1	0	0
1000–1999	3	0	0
2000+	1	0	0
Total	6	3	1

Base: 10 authorities

The figures for homelessness decisions cover all applications made to the authority where a decision is recorded and are therefore comparable with the figures for any estimated expected increase in applications.

The majority (15) of 25 authorities that replied to this question had either made no estimate of any increase, or were not prepared to commit to any figure. This included three of the five London boroughs. Where authorities had made an estimate, the greatest range was amongst those making 100–499 homeless decisions a year, with the one authority anticipating an increase of over 21 per cent giving an estimate of '30–50 per cent'. Amongst the authorities with higher levels of decisions, any expected percentage increase was smaller, although two of the authorities making 1000–1999 homelessness decisions gave estimates of a 5–10 per cent increase. The estimated increase given by the one authority making over 2000 homelessness decisions was '1–2 per cent' over the next year.

7.1.1 Estimated increase by priority need category

Table 7.1.1.1 **Number of additional applications estimated by group**

	Number of authorities providing estimate	No increase expected	<1%–10%	11%–20%	21%–50%
16 and 17 year olds ³	8	3	3	2	0
18 – 20 year old care leavers	7	5	2	0	0
Vulnerable – ‘institutional background’ ⁴	6	3	3 ⁵	0	0
Vulnerable – fleeing violence	7	4	1	1	1 ⁶

Base: 26 authorities

A total of 26 authorities answered this question but the majority were not able to provide any estimate on an increase for any of the groups, for example, 18 authorities had no estimate for any increase in applications from 16-17 year olds. Expected rises were slightly higher for 16-17 year olds, with five authorities in total expecting some increase in applications. The biggest expected variation in increase was with those estimating any increase in applications from people fleeing violence, where seven gave any increase as zero and one authority saw it as being ‘*potentially very high*’.

7.1.2 Information used to inform estimates

All authorities were asked on what basis they had made an estimate or determined this was not possible, or unnecessary. A wide range of reasons were given, as shown in table 7.1.2.1, reflecting a range of homelessness practice in different authorities and different levels of demand. For example, one authority felt:

A ten percent increase in applications would not be a problem for the authority because of oversupply.

Another authority had not made an assessment, feeling ‘*the changes are likely to have a low impact*’.

Table 7.1.2.1 **Information on which estimates are based**

	Number of times mentioned
Already accepted 16 and 17 year olds, not expecting any significant increase	11
Already accepted other vulnerable groups, not expecting any significant increase	8
Expecting/ experiencing an increase in applications from 16 and 17 year olds	5
Expecting/ experiencing an increase in applications from people fleeing violence	2
No local care home/ few care leavers, not expecting significant increase	2
Lack of information available on care leavers	2
Using other information	7

Base: 26 authorities

It may be expected that any additional applications from 16-17 year olds resulting directly from the Priority Need Order would be small where authorities had been implementing the existing Code of Guidance. However, five authorities were expecting or had experienced an increase since 31 July 2002. One of the authorities, which stated it did not expect an increase as it already accepted applications from 16-17 year olds, mentioned that it was ‘*aware there was an issue of accessibility of service to this group*’.

Another authority, which said it was expecting an increase in groups other than 16-17 year olds, said it was also ‘*aware of substantial numbers who don’t apply, but is not able to quantify likely numbers*’. Two further authorities stated they had predicted no specific increase but one of them had ‘*seen a 15% increase in applications generally in the last year*’ and the other had ‘*seen substantial increase in applications from single people in last 12 months*’. This authority does ‘*not believe this is linked to the new categories and (it) is being investigated*’.

A total of seven authorities were monitoring current applications to help with future estimates and five said they were assessing trends in applications from previous periods. Subsequent research will review this issue in the light of data on actual applications made since 31 July 2002.

Examples of monitoring being conducted

- a three month county-wide survey and analysis of quarterly returns of statutory homelessness figures
- commissioning of specific research on which to base an estimate
- information from liaison meetings and last two quarters' applications.

7.2 Provision of suitable accommodation and support

The new Act conveys additional duties on authorities regarding priority need categories. It was therefore important to seek to establish whether any new provision had been made to secure suitable accommodation and support for the following groups of applicants to whom their authority accepts a statutory duty. In total, 27 authorities gave replies. Provision has only been included in the findings where it was already in operation or definitely under development. Other authorities mentioned future plans for provision that have not been included at this point.

Seven authorities securing new provision for 16–17 year olds also stated that they had previously been accepting applications from this group and were not expecting further significant increases. Three areas expecting or experiencing increases in applications from this group since July 2002 had not secured any new provision.

Authorities gave details of local schemes, which have been compiled as table 7.2.1. Most authorities that had schemes gave details of more than one.

Table 7.2.1 **New/additional provision of accommodation and support**

	Number of authorities with specific schemes for each group			
	16–17 year olds ⁷	18–20 year old care leavers	Vulnerable – ‘institutionalised background’ ⁸	Vulnerable – fleeing violence
Total of authorities securing new provision	12	11	11	10
New support schemes	8	7	4	5
New ‘emergency’ accommodation	3	1	0	2
New ‘move on’ accommodation projects	2	2	1	1
New accommodation for teenage mothers	2	1	0	0
Other new or increased provision of accommodation	7	7	9	2

Base: 27 authorities

This chart shows that there are some schemes providing new or additional emergency or hostel accommodation for each of the groups. In six of the authorities with new accommodation schemes for vulnerable people with an ‘institutionalised background’, these schemes are for ex-offenders. A range of support schemes are being, or have been developed for all groups and a small number of move on projects have been secured.

Examples of schemes to accommodate and support women fleeing violence

Two of the rural areas unable to support a refuge because of their sparse populations have developed different methods of supporting women fleeing domestic violence. These include:

- a domestic violence outreach project
- a number of safe houses spread through the district.

Examples of schemes to secure accommodation and support for ex-offenders

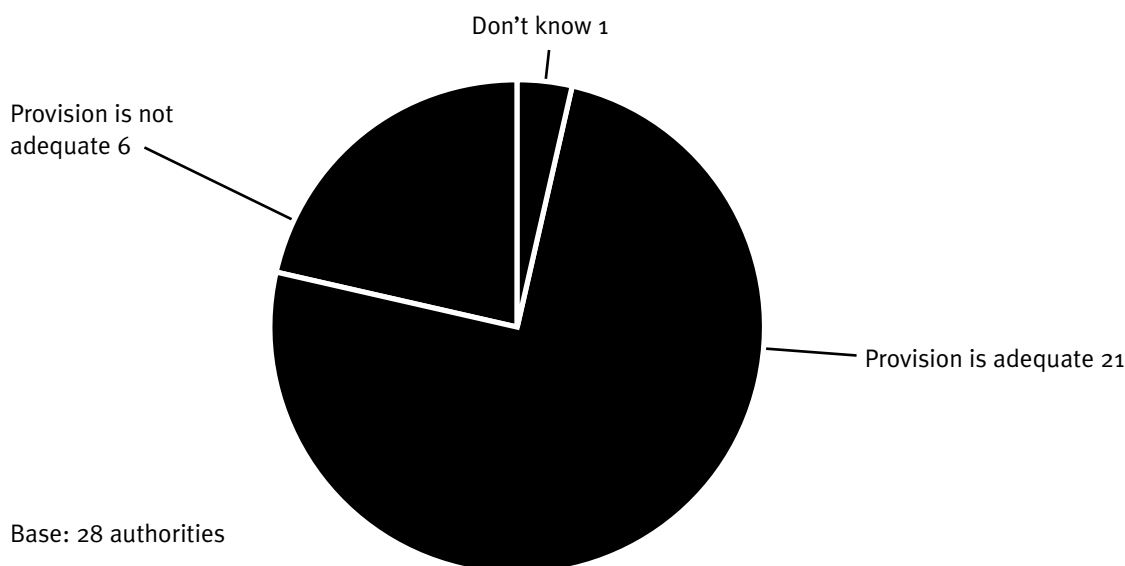
- leasing property for probation clients and *'people coming out of rehab'*
- a project to co-ordinate services for short-term prisoners
- a service offering allocations to longer term prisoners before release
- a service to develop advice and assistance to prisoners before discharge
- a scheme to fast track certain ex-offenders to move on accommodation, treatment and support services.

7.3 Provision of advice and assistance

One area where the homelessness ‘safety net’ has been significantly strengthened is the duty to provide advice and assistance. The Housing Act 1996 is amended by schedule 1 (9)–(12) of the Homelessness Act 2002 to require that ‘an ‘applicant’s housing needs shall be assessed before advice and assistance’ is provided. Such advice and assistance must then ‘include information about the likely availability in the authority’s district of types of accommodation appropriate to the applicant’s housing needs (including, in particular, the location and sources of such types of accommodation)’.

Authorities were asked whether they were satisfied that their provision of advice and assistance currently meets the new requirement to be based on an assessment of the applicant’s housing need. Paragraph 2.5 of the Code of Guidance advises that ‘authorities should ensure that information provided is appropriate to the individual’s circumstances, accurate and up to date’. The research therefore sought to clarify whether specific aspects of their advice service were considered sufficient by the authorities or whether there were plans to improve certain elements.

Chart 7.3.1 **Assessment of advice and assistance provided by the authority**



As shown above, three quarters of the authorities claimed that their advice and assistance was sufficient to meet the requirements of the Act. One of these was satisfied but wanted to look at how to provide a service over and above the minimum required. Three of the authorities that answered that they were satisfied with their service indicated they did not provide, or were not certain of the provision of one of the elements shown in table 7.3.1.1. Subsequent surveys will explore this area in more detail.

Three of the nine stock transfer authorities were not satisfied, or were not sure that the provision of advice and assistance met the new statutory requirement. One of these authorities hoped to ‘*use the review to ensure the advice given by the transfer association was adequate*’.

7.3.1 Planned improvements to advice and assistance

The six authorities that answered that they were not satisfied with their provision of advice and assistance were asked whether they planned specific changes to ensure they carried out the following functions:

Table 7.3.1.1 Planned improvements to advice and assistance

Are changes needed to ensure:	Number of authorities answering		
	Yes	No	Not specified
All applicants are interviewed to assess their housing status and needs	4	2	0
All applicants are provided with a notice of the decision on their application and information about their right to request a review	3	2	1
Advice is provided on accessing appropriate housing options available in the area	4	2	1
Information about local housing options is collected, updated and reviewed	3	2	1
The authority works proactively to increase local housing options	3	2	1

Base: 6 authorities

Generally, those authorities that said they were not currently satisfied with their provision of advice and assistance were concerned that their service was not consistently available to everyone who needed it. One of the authorities stated that they were certain that good advice was provided, but they needed to *'ensure it was available to everyone'*. Another authority felt their advice was *'good enough where people received a comprehensive assessment, but this only happened when a homeless application was taken'*. Further research will seek to establish whether changes identified as necessary are carried out, and how these improvements are made.

8. Other developments

8.1 Beacon Council status for tackling homelessness

Six of the authorities have applied for Beacon Council status in tackling homelessness. Others mentioned that they would have been interested in doing so but did not have the time to put together a bid.

8.2 Local Public Sector Agreements relating to homelessness

During 2000/01 the government piloted local Public Sector Agreements (PSAs) with 20 local authorities that each agreed to deliver improvements in 12 key areas of activity. In return for this they were given greater freedom and financial incentives. Each authority agreed to exceed the performance required by their Best Value Review obligations in the 12 areas of activity.

In February 2001, it was announced that local PSAs would be extended to another 130 authorities over the following two years. When setting their local PSAs, authorities have to follow national guidelines and must have at least one target on education, social services, transport and a measure of improved cost-effectiveness. Authorities are then free to negotiate their additional PSA targets with the government.

Three of the 28 authorities in the sample said they had developed a local PSA relating to homelessness. These were:

- improving resettlement support to homeless households to reduce the number of households making repeat applications
- targets for decision making on applications
- temporary accommodation and grant/ prevention work.

The majority of authorities were unsure what PSAs were and when outlined, made comments indicating they felt sufficiently '*stretched*' by the present challenges, without setting additional challenges.

Appendix 1

List of participating authorities

Birmingham City Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Canterbury City Council
Chester-le-Street District Council
Colchester Borough Council
Eden District Council
Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Herefordshire Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Leicester City Council
London Borough of Camden
London Borough of Hillingdon
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Merton
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mendip District Council
Mid Sussex Borough Council
Milton Keynes Council
Nottingham City Council
Restormel Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
Sheffield City Council
South Beds District Council
South Gloucestershire Council
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Vale of White Horse District Council
West Devon Borough Council

Footnotes

- 1 Includes all applications accepted as not homeless; homeless but not priority need; homeless, priority need but intentionally homeless; and homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless. Source – ODPM quarterly statutory homelessness statistical releases.
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 16 and 17 year olds, not ‘relevant’ children or owed a duty under s.20 of the Children Act 1989, (s.3, The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation)(England) Order 2002).
- 4 People who may be vulnerable as a result of having been in care or fostered, in the forces or having served a custodial sentence, (s.5, The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation)(England) Order 2002).
- 5 This includes one authority that felt the increase from ‘forces’ or ‘custodial’ applicants fell into this range, but that the increase from ‘institutionalised’ applicants was ‘unquantifiable – could be large’.
- 6 Stated as a ‘potentially very large increase from neighbour violence’.
- 7 16 and 17 year olds, not ‘relevant’ children or owed a duty under s.20 of the Children Act 1989, (s.3, The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation)(England) Order 2002).
- 8 People who may be vulnerable as a result of having been in care or fostered, in the forces or having served a custodial sentence, (s.5, The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation)(England) Order 2002).

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