



**Royal Borough of Kingston
upon Thames**

Homelessness Review 2003 to 2008

and

Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2011

Housing Services
www.kingston.gov.uk



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SUMMARY

Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 every local authority is required to review homelessness in its area and publish a strategy on how to address the needs of all those who are likely to find themselves homeless.

This report is divided into two parts.

Part One reviews the past five years and identifies current demands, needs, gaps in service provision as well as outlining connections to existing strategies and targets.

Part Two outlines the tasks that will be undertaken to improve existing services and deliver new opportunities for all homeless people.

Kingston Council has focused its strategy around three key themes:

- The prevention of homelessness.
- The provision of accommodation and services to homeless households.
- Supporting vulnerable people in maintaining their tenancy and avoiding a 'revolving door' of homelessness.

Partnerships

To achieve the tasks set out, we will continue our work with partner agencies and build upon their expertise and knowledge in developing services and accommodation that address the specific needs of homeless people.

How we are going to tackle the issues?

We are going to prevent homelessness by:

- Working with others to provide timely, appropriate and effective housing advice and housing options.
- Promoting the use of the Breathing Space and Home Finder schemes.
- Introducing a visiting team to assist in preventing homelessness from the main causes of homelessness.
- Working with others to identify at an early stage those who may be at risk of homelessness.
- Continuing to develop effective discharge procedures for homeless people receiving treatment at Kingston Hospital.
- Reviewing protocols with mental health services and the Prevention and Safeguarding Services to ensure that good practice and prevention options are embedded within these services.

We are going to make provision for homeless households by:

- Maximising new development opportunities in Kingston.
- Making sure that the proportion of lettings to homeless households compares favourably with lettings to other Housing Register applicants.
- Making sure that the Tenant Finder Scheme remains responsive to those who wish to remain in the private rented sector.
- Making sure that our temporary accommodation portfolio reflects homelessness demand.
- Working with others to identify opportunities within the local private sector market.

We are going to support homeless households by:

- Maximising the resources available through Supporting People and other sources to deliver services that are needed.
- Continuing to provide a Resettlement and Support Service to statutorily homeless households and develop services for non-statutory homeless households.
- Expanding the floating support schemes so that they are available to all tenures.
- Continuing to work with the Primary Care Trust to ensure access to healthcare for homeless households in temporary accommodation.
- Exploring opportunities for addressing worklessness and unemployment amongst homeless households.

Monitoring

The progress of the strategy will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum as well as sub-groups, internal forums, boards and meetings.

The plan will also be reviewed during the period to reflect any changes in resources, legislative requirements or good practice.

I. Introduction

The duty to undertake a review of homelessness services and publish a strategy for the next few years arises from the Homelessness Act 2002.

The review and strategy covers all homeless households, not just those to whom the Council has a legal responsibility to accommodate and recognises the work being undertaken already to help deal with homelessness across the board.

The review has highlighted areas where need exists or gaps in service provision remain. The strategy provides realistic targets that can be met within its three-year life span from the resources that currently exist within Kingston.

The strategy also looks to others to participate in developing new ways of working, building on existing good practice or to provide resources to enable services to be delivered to all homeless households in Kingston.

Kingston Council has focused its strategy around three key themes:

- Prevention
- Provision
- Support

Borough Demographics

In 2003, Kingston had a population of 150,400. Whilst projections have varied on population growth, some projections suggest a rise to 162,800 by 2010.

In April 2007, there were 63,288 units of accommodation within the borough, 75% were owner-occupied and 14% privately rented, the remaining 11% being social housing.

House prices are amongst the highest in the country and high levels of income are needed to gain access to the owner-occupied sector.

“House prices are amongst the highest in the country..”



Focusing on homelessness

Whilst annual incomes in the last Housing Needs survey found an average income of £28,000, the average income of homeowners with a mortgage was around £42,000.

Despite the relative affluence of the borough, Kingston does have pockets of deprivation, where incomes are low and outcomes in fields such as health, are relatively poor.

Kingston has a local Black and Minority Ethnic community comprising 15.5% of the population; however homelessness and housing advice services report around a third of applicants are from BME communities.

Homelessness Demand

Over the last five years the number of homeless households approaching the Homelessness Assessment Team has dropped by 25% to a figure of 944 in 2007/08.

Over the same period, there has been a 50% reduction in the number of homeless households being owed a statutory duty, with 207 households being accepted in 2007/08.

During the same period, Housing Advice Services have broadly maintained the same levels of contact with their services, with 1346 approaches to the Council's in-house advice service alone during 2007/08.

The main reasons for loss of accommodation in Kingston are in line with the national pattern, namely parents/relatives/friends no longer being willing to accommodate; loss of assured shorthold tenancy and homelessness caused by domestic violence.

For those finding themselves homeless but outside the scope of statutory assistance, there remains significant demand with clients in this group presenting to both Kingston Council and advice agencies based in the borough.

By using figures from advice agencies, it is possible to establish the following key themes.



Focusing on homelessness

- Homeless households have difficulties in obtaining rent in advance and deposit money.
- Homelessness is likely to be caused by either family, relatives or friends not being willing to continue to accommodate.
- Homelessness in the private sector is largely caused by the landlord serving notice under the section 21 provisions.
- A notable number of homeless household's loss of private sector accommodation was as a result of rent arrears involving a rent service restriction.

Despite projections that show some reduction in the levels of statutory homelessness, demand for social housing from other groups remains strong.

There, for example, remains a strong demand from those typically associated with social exclusion, such as drug and alcohol misusers and ex-offenders to access short term as well as long term housing.

Further work is needed to clarify the nature of those needs and to see what options are available to extend existing schemes to support these groups.

“There, for example, remains a strong demand from those typically associated with social exclusion.”



Focusing on homelessness

2. Delivering the last homelessness strategy

The process of reviewing the last five years work has shown that much has already been achieved in delivering services to the homeless that better suits their needs. However, more needs to be done within the limited resources available.

What has changed in homelessness over the last five years?

- Regulations to stop families being placed into Bed and Breakfast accommodation for longer than six weeks.
- A Government initiative to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010.
- A stronger focus on prevention initiatives to deal with the causes of homelessness.
- Closer working links with partner agencies, in particular those who deal with children and family welfare.
- A reduction in the number of households being accepted as statutorily homeless at a national, regional and local level.
- The advent of the Supporting People programme.
- The development of floating support schemes to maintain households in accommodation and to assist with the transition to independent accommodation.
- The introduction of a Choice Based Lettings scheme that allows homeless households choice in permanent social housing.
- The expected increase in statutory homelessness because of the expansion of the priority need categories in 2002 has not materialised in Kingston.
- The provision of Bed and Breakfast Unit and Homelessness Directorate money to fund pilots and projects to reduce homelessness.



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Assessment of success

In the last strategy, Kingston Council and its partners set an ambitious programme of 109 actions to deliver within the life of the document.

Broadly speaking, most of those actions were delivered and the headline items of achievement over the past five years include:

- Met and maintained the Government target to eliminate the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation for families.
- Kept repeat homelessness down through a range of prevention initiatives and early warning systems.
- Reduced homelessness applications and acceptances through a combination of prevention work and improved decision making.
- Developed improved access to primary health care for homeless households.
- Introduced a Sanctuary Scheme for those not wishing to leave their accommodation having suffered domestic violence.
- Implemented a pilot mediation scheme to target those households where mediation may prevent homelessness or delay homelessness.
- Assisted Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness by giving them access to the Council's nominations to the YMCA for non-statutory single homeless people.
- Worked with Housing Benefit to assist those external agencies dealing with homelessness prevention to benefit from fast-track assessment arrangements.
- Worked with Housing Benefit to maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payments as part of a wider prevention package.



Focusing on homelessness

- Introduced a jointly chaired Young Persons Accommodation Panel in an effort to make best use of existing accommodation resources for young people.
- Worked closely with the Rent Officer Service to establish appropriate rent levels and a positive impact on the broader private rented sector.
- Supported the creation of a local law centre to minimise the impact on households having to travel outside the borough for legal advice.

Barriers to success

Where actions were not achieved, this was due mainly to being unable to secure new money or identify resources that could be deployed to assist in non-statutory casework and support. As a result, the following actions were not achieved:

- Using Community Training and Enabling Grants to increase the opportunities for homeless households to participate in consultation and implementation initiatives.
- Securing additional funds for advice services, including money advice and debt counselling.

“...much has already been achieved in delivering services to the homeless that better suits their needs. However, more needs to be done within the limited resources available.”



Focusing on homelessness

3. Current provision to homeless households in Kingston

Kingston Council Services

Housing Resources and Housing Management

- At the 31 March 2008, there were 617 units in the Private Leasing Scheme (595 in 2006/07).
- There were 210 households accommodated in the Tenant Finder Service (218 in 2006/07) on 31 March 2008.
- Qualifying Offers are being offered under the Home Finder banner and managed by the Tenant Finder Service.
- There are 62 units of accommodation within the Council's own hostel stock, with each hostel having a dedicated hostel manager*.
- There is a Resettlement and Support Service* offering support to those moving into temporary and permanent housing from the following groups:
 - People with mental health problems.
 - People with drug and alcohol problems.
 - People with physical health problems and disabilities.
 - People with learning difficulties.
 - Young People.
 - People fleeing domestic violence.
- Resettlement have also recently concluded a pilot project working with travellers to give support in improving access to benefits and welfare
- An Early Intervention Officer is based within the Prevention and Safeguarding Service to act as a link between departments where families face the prospect of homelessness.
- An older people's floating support service also exists to help prevent homelessness*.



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- The Breathing Space scheme operates to relieve overcrowding in Council housing and release those units to homeless households.
- A Housing Advice Service, which provides advice on prevention options, links to the Tenant Finder Service and tenancy relations.
- Kingston is part of a four borough out of hour telephone service to homeless people needing accommodation in a crisis.

Housing Benefit

- Works closely with the Housing Advice Service to resolve Housing Benefit problems.
- Operates Discretionary Housing Payment system to maximise prevention and support the work of the Housing Advice Service, where possible.
- Has an arrangement with agencies such as Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness to fast-track assessments to minimise loss of income through voids.
- Funds two advisors in the Pension Service to improve referrals and access to those not receiving pension credits.

Prevention and Safeguarding Services

- Manages Beverley House*, a scheme primarily giving support to those formerly in care and young homeless people moving towards independence.
- Manages shared houses and flat-shares*, which are typically used as move-on accommodation for those who have been supported at Beverley House or by One Housing.
- Assists in securing private lettings for those leaving services.
- Has the use of eight nominations to the Housing Register per year.



Focusing on homelessness

Supporting People

The Supporting People policy covers both statutory and non-statutory homelessness support needs.

Amongst other services for vulnerable people are some particularly aimed at preventing or addressing homelessness, those services in this chapter marked with an asterisk are wholly or partly funded and monitored by Supporting People.

It should be noted that the Supporting People budget has been frozen for a period of three years and that there is a need to review, restructure and re-contract all services by March 2010.

This will require participation and promotion of key parties to ensure that services for homeless households are maintained. The provision for the key Supporting People client groups is as follows.

Older People

- 90 Floating Support spaces

People with mental health needs

- 35 Floating Support spaces
- Resettlement Team

People with learning disabilities

- 35 Floating Support spaces

People with physical or sensory disabilities

- Resettlement Team

Single homeless people with support needs

- Resettlement Team
- Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA
- Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness



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People with drug and/or alcohol problems

- 10 units for people with substance misuse and mental health problems.
- 10 units for people with alcohol misuse and mental health problems.
- Newly commissioned Rent Deposit/Tenancy Support service for people with drug/alcohol problems or offenders from September 2008.

Ex-Offenders

- Access to the Surbiton YMCA for Probation.
- Probation based Housing Advice Worker (HAWK) shared with Richmond.
- Rent Deposit scheme and Tenancy Support service (as above).

Young people at risk or leaving care

- Resettlement Team
- Beverley House and flat-shares
- Community Housing Group

Women at risk of domestic violence

- 15 units of refuge and move on accommodation
- Floating Support service for up to 15 women
- Resettlement Team

Homeless families in need of support

- Support at Kingston Council hostels
- Floating Support via Resettlement Team



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Teenage parents

- Five units in designated self contained accommodation with a further service providing Floating Support for eight units

Further information about this work and related plans can be found in the Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010.

Non-Kingston Council services

*Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA**

- Support to statutory and non-statutory homeless in the main building.
- Provides move-on accommodation for residents.
- Support Team to work with residents.
- Offers opportunities for education, training, leisure and counselling

Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness

- There are currently 10 ACCESS project properties, housing 46 non-statutory homeless people*.
- An eleventh house is due to open in the summer of 2008.
- Has access to single person nominations not used by Housing Services at the YMCA.
- Grant funded by Kingston Council to provide housing advice to single homeless households, although other funding allows advice to be given to a wider group.

*Hestia Housing and Support**

- Manage Newlyn House, which provides accommodation and support for those with mental health problems.
- Operate a floating support scheme for those with mental health and multiple needs.



Focusing on homelessness

- Operate the local Women's Aid Refuge, which includes an Asian Women's refuge and an outreach service to enable women to remain in their own homes.

Kaleidoscope Housing Association*

- Manage Cairn House, which provides accommodation and support for those who have higher levels of mental health or dual diagnosis needs.

One Housing*

- Provide supported accommodation for young people.
- Provides accommodation for ex-offenders.

Richmond Churches Housing Trust

- Manage five places at Fassett Road, a scheme for young mothers aged between 16 and 22 years of age*.

Grenfell Housing Association*

- Provides four placements for young people aged 18 to 24 in a dispersed foyer scheme.

Health Services

- Provision of an emergency outreach service that deals primarily with those in crisis with their mental health, which includes people 'sofa-surfing' or those likely to be threatened with homelessness.

One-Stop Shop

- Provides advice, assistance and signposting for those fleeing domestic violence. This project is supported by members of the Domestic Violence Forum, including the local Police and voluntary agencies.



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Citizen's Advice Bureau

- Operates the lay advocacy service at Kingston County Court.
- Grant funded through Kingston Council and provides housing advice and money advice services.
- Introduced a mortgage clinic from April 2008.

“ . . . those services in this chapter marked with an * are wholly or partly funded and monitored by Supporting People.”



Focusing on homelessness

4. Current housing market conditions

Overview

In Kingston, a combination of high house prices and private rents has made it difficult for those on modest incomes to secure housing.

At the time of writing the last review and strategy in 2003, Kingston Council had around 5200 units of housing stock. As at 31 March 2008, the stock had reduced to around 4800 units.

The reduction in stock is mainly attributable to the Right to Buy scheme, however the number of tenants opting for this scheme has significantly dropped since the levels of discount were reduced.

Facilitating the provision of new build affordable housing remains a challenge as large development opportunities are infrequent within the borough. The Council's target is that 40% of new homes built in the Borough should be affordable.

The last Housing Market Assessment suggests that around 150 new units of new social rented and intermediate housing is needed each year just to keep pace with demand.

Given the demand pressure for affordable housing demand, we are now focusing on delivering housing solutions by utilising opportunities in the private rented sector as well as taking a creative approach to making best use of our own housing stock, such as the Breathing Space scheme.

The success of using the very competitive private sector market in Kingston will depend on continued communication with landlords.

Whilst the recent introduction of Local Housing Allowance allows households greater choice and mobility in the private sector, and is more generous than the existing Housing Benefit arrangements, work is still needed to explain the changes and allay any fears that exist around direct payment arrangements.

Other threats to the success of accessing the local market include the current concerns over credit and the perceived movement of private landlords from the market place. It is worth noting that



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Kingston also has a large student population looking for rented accommodation and of the 1800 Houses in Multiple Occupation, between 400 and 500 are occupied by students.

Current stock profile (all tenure)

In April 2007, there were 63,288 units of accommodation within the borough, 75% were owner-occupied and 14% privately rented.

Within the borough of Kingston, the social housing sector accounts for around 11% of the housing stock.

There are approximately 7200 homes for rent from the Council or Registered Social Landlords and access through the housing register is extremely limited, by virtue of only around 350 lettings per year.

Average prices for renting in Kingston

Property type	Weekly rent	Monthly rent
1 bed	£178	£771
2 bed	£254	£1101
3 bed	£311	£1348
4 bed	£404	£1751

House prices for buying in Kingston 2003 to 2008

House prices in Kingston have risen by 40% over the last five years.

Property type	Price as at March 03	Price as at March 08
Detached	£461,521	£648,446
Semi-detached	£262,625	£369,005
Terraced	£211,730	£297,495
Flat/maisonette	£180,364	£253,423

Source: www.landregistry.gov.uk



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Housing Register demand

As at 31 March 2008, there were 6037 households on Kingston's Housing Register, excluding those who were seeking transfers.

The number of households on the register has increased by 46% since 31 March 2003.

In 2006, Choice Based Lettings was introduced with the aim of providing applicants choice in where they live and transparency as to the available housing stock.

Statutorily homeless households are initially placed into Band C and remain there for a period of two years, after which they move to Band B.

Once registered, households are entitled to bid on any available property, subject to bidding restrictions placed on the property.

In some exceptional circumstances, homeless households may find themselves in Band A.

At 31 March 2008, 11 statutorily homeless households were in Band A; 416 in Band B and 357 in Band C.

Other homeless households who are not owed a duty under the statutory scheme will usually appear in the First Time Applicant category and at 31 March 2008, 3677 households appeared within that category. Most of these are placed into Band C.

An additional 1510 households on the Kingston Housing Register are based out of the borough.

On bedroom size the following demand is recorded:

1 bedroom	51% of housing register (inc. transfer) applicants
2 bedroom	27% of housing register (inc. transfer) applicants
3 bedroom	15% of housing register (inc. transfer) applicants
4 bedroom	5% of housing register (inc. transfer) applicants
5 bedroom	1% of housing register (inc. transfer) applicants



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In terms of ethnicity, representation on the housing register by White British applicants accounted for 57% of the register or 3964 applicants.

The next significantly represented groups were:

Asian Other	632 applicants (9% of the total registered)
Black African	351 applicants (5% of the total registered)
White Other European	237 applicants (3% of the total registered)
Mixed Other	185 applicants (3% of the total registered)
Black Caribbean	145 applicants (2% of the total registered)

Remaining applicants recorded either “other ethnicity” or did not respond to this question.

Overcrowding in Social Rented stock

In an attempt to resolve some overcrowding within the Council’s housing stock, Kingston Council has developed the ‘Breathing Space’ scheme. The scheme forms part of the Department of Communities and Local Government’s Pathfinder project on overcrowding and we have benefited from an injection of money for the pilot scheme.

The scheme allows overcrowded households to move voluntarily into a suitably sized private leased property for a period of no more than four and a half years whilst awaiting a larger permanent home.

This releases a permanent unit of accommodation for a homeless household to move into, thereby making better use of our own stock.

The initial targets set for the number of households taking up the scheme are likely to be surpassed earlier than anticipated. However work is underway to provide enough suitably sized permanent homes within the four and a half year period.



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Mobility Schemes

During the period under review, Kingston Council participated in the LAWN scheme, which was designed to allow households to move to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Initially, there was good take up of the service and we achieved a total of 35 moves. The service ceased in 2006 due to a reduction in the number of offers of accommodation.

Choice Based Lettings allows us to advertise homes available to Kingston nominees in the South West London sub-region and as at June 2008, over 20 Kingston nominees have been nominated to partner authorities, including 11 homeless households in temporary accommodation.

Social Housing Supply

Over the past two years, 156 new units of affordable housing have been completed.

Development opportunities on a large scale are relatively rare in Kingston due to the cost and scarcity of larger sites capable of being developed for affordable housing to which policy H9 of the Unitary Development Plan applies.

In 2007/08 when 102 units were completed, this equated to 30% of all the units completed within the borough. This figure however rises to 51% on suitable sites where the Council policy H9 applied, which seeks 50% affordable housing on such sites.

Over the next two years it is anticipated that 104 units of affordable housing will be developed.

The Council is considering whether there is scope in procuring, with a Registered Social Landlord, “off the shelf” properties with the hope of raising the number of affordable units whilst benefiting from the current slow down in new build and sales in the private sector.



Focusing on homelessness

5. Analysis of homelessness data (statutory)

Homelessness Acceptances

Over the last five full years (2003/04 to 2007/08) the level of homelessness applications to Kingston Council has dropped by 25%.

During the same period, the number of households accepted as being owed a statutory duty fell by 50%, from 418 in 2003/04 to 207 in 2007/08.

There has only been one instance of a homeless person being 're-accepted' as homeless in the last four years.

During the period under review, the main causes of homelessness have remained constant:-

- Parents/Relatives/Friends no longer willing to accommodate.
- Homelessness caused by a violent relationship breakdown.
- Homelessness caused by loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy.

As a proportion of homeless acceptances, these three categories account for 75% of all acceptances, with the first category accounting for 51% of all acceptances.

Despite a reduction in the number of households who have been accepted as homeless due to domestic violence, over the past three years 79% of those accepted came from outside the borough.

Last year 20 households were accepted as being owed a housing duty from their out of borough accommodation compared to only three households already accommodated in the Kingston area.

Additionally five households were moved under Management Transfer arrangements and six elected to remain at home and benefit from sanctuary measures.

Acceptances due to the loss of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy have remained broadly static throughout the period under review; however as a percentage of acceptances they have increased



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from 7% in 2003/04 to 16% in 2007/08. This represents those cases where prevention measures could not be engaged in time or where the individual makes a homelessness application. In 2007/08, this equated to 34 cases.

Homelessness household composition

As at 31 March 2008, there were 775 households in temporary accommodation and 784 statutorily homeless households on Kingston's Housing Register.

Over the period under review the household composition of those accepted as statutorily homeless has been mainly of a two bedroom need, (692 households), where someone is either pregnant or has one child. This equates to 47% of all acceptances.

Families accepted as homeless account for 64% of all acceptances during the review period, with the biggest percentage rises seen by households with three or more children (5% to 11%) or those who are pregnant (15% to 27%). Other groups have remained largely static in percentage terms.

The incidences of 16 and 17 year olds accepted as statutorily homeless are low.

This is in part due to prevention work that has enabled young people to return home but also to the prevalence of decisions which did not involve a duty to accommodate.

This is an area where further work with the Young Persons Service has been identified as an action point for the next year.

A small but significant number of people with mental health problems also find themselves accepted as statutorily homeless. Early warning systems, coupled with revisions to the Mental Health and Housing protocol and training for staff have assisted in reducing acceptances from 59 in 2003/04 to 18 in 2007/08.

Of decisions made during the last three years, having excluded those whose ethnicity was not declared, 37% of applicants were from BME communities.



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Of those accepted, 36% were from BME communities, which compares to a BME population of 15.5% within Kingston as a whole.

Further work needs to be carried out to identify the common themes and establish why there is such a disproportionate level of BME representation within those homeless in Kingston.

Supporting People Data

The client record data records those who enter already existing services rather than providing a measure of what is needed.

The past five years of client record data shows that the primary client groups for those accessing Supporting People sponsored services are:

- Single homeless people with support needs.
- Women at risk of domestic violence.
- Homeless families with support.

Those accessing services are likely to be jobseekers, long term sick or not seeking work and in the main they are aged between 18 and 45. About 57% are from White British ethnicity and 56% are women.

Around 22% of clients had been living with family before engaging with services, with those staying with friends and privately renting also being a sizeable proportion of clients enjoying supporting people services.

Data on Homelessness Prevention

During the course of the review, a Best Value Performance indicator (BVPI) was established. This indicator covered all advice services that the Council fund and was made up of eight Housing Advice Performance Indicators.



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This suite of performance indicators has now been included on the P1E returns as an additional section from April 2008, with revised definitions.

The chart below outlines the number of cases where homelessness was prevented, using this suite of indicators, by organisation.

	2006/7	2007/8
Kingston Council Housing Advice Service	81	86
Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau	102	87
Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness	94	106
Kingston Friends Mediation Service	34	14
Total	311	293

Source: RBK Housing Advice Service

Whilst prevention was defined by the indicator, the Housing Advice service had over 1300 enquiries during 2007/08, where there was a casework element.

The Housing Advice Service figures suggest that 56% of their work involved White British clients and that 54% became homeless as a result of loss of accommodation due to such matters as sale of property or a change in household.

The figures also suggest that 17% lost their accommodation due to an arrears issue and that a further 23% were homeless as a result of being asked to leave by a parent, relative or friend. The remaining 6% were cases where the client had experienced domestic violence.

Of the casework outcomes, nearly a quarter secured accommodation via the Tenant Finder Service and around 10% made homelessness applications.

Anecdotal evidence from voluntary agencies given during this review and over the past year suggests that this number could have risen to around six, still within the thresholds set by the Department of Communities and Local Government.



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The Kingston Street Pastor service also offers support to those who they may come across sleeping rough. Kingston does not have any night shelters; the nearest is in Richmond and access is limited by referral from a specialist team.

As a consequence consideration will be given to completing a rough sleeping count during the lifetime of this document and exploring the possibility of accessing SPEAR out-reach workers for those identified as rough sleeping.

Identified Trends and Future Demand

In order to make progress to halve the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010, it is clear that additional measures are needed to reduce those applications from households no longer being accommodated by family, relatives or friends.

Accordingly, changes to the Choice Based Lettings scheme in conjunction with a visiting team focused on dealing with this client group will be introduced during 2008/09.

In addition, it is proposed to make direct offers of permanent homes to homeless applicants in temporary accommodation who do not participate in Choice Based Lettings after a period of time; and to permit homeless applicants with a child up to 12 months old to bid for one bedroom accommodation in order that they can move into permanent accommodation more quickly.

It is hoped that the offer of alternatives at the very point of homelessness occurring will give the prospective applicant an effective alternative to making an application to the Council.

The levels of homelessness from those fleeing violent relationship breakdown has stabilised over the last few years and it is worth noting that Kingston has consistently been an 'importer' borough in the sense that more applications are accepted from households outside of the local area than from within the Borough.



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This is, in part, due to the alternatives, including support, which can be offered to those already resident within Kingston and the belief that Kingston is a safe alternative for those fleeing violence.

The levels of homelessness from those losing their Assured Shorthold Tenancies are currently being assessed further in order to determine the drivers for this modest increase in numbers.

At the time of writing, it is feared that this number may grow due to:

- The impact of current credit concerns on consumer and lender confidence.
- Landlords, especially those in the buy-to-let sector, losing short and medium term confidence in the housing market.

With regard to youth homelessness, Prevention and Safeguarding Services have indicated that the numbers in the care system have increased and may continue to do so over the life of this document.

Therefore further development is required to ensure that a range of appropriate housing options are offered to the young person prior to their discharge from care services.

This approach is anticipated to include private rented options as part of the package of leaving care, although the suitability of accommodation will need to be carefully balanced with the needs and abilities of the young person.

Additionally, we will need to continue identifying appropriate housing solutions for those 16 and 17 year olds who find themselves homeless so that we can continue to meet the commitment not to provide Bed and Breakfast accommodation to this age group.

Consideration will also be given to the small number (four during 2007/08) of 16 and 17 year olds who are only entitled to receive advice and assistance as a result of receiving an intentionally homeless decision. These individuals, often with difficult personal histories, will require a collaborative and creative approach in



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resolving their housing and welfare needs, within the existing legal frameworks. Whilst the numbers are anticipated to remain low in comparison with applications from this age group, there is a need to revisit existing practice to ensure that the latest good practice is applied.

With regard to the Intervention and Youth Offending services, further work on developing prevention strategies will need to be undertaken and incorporate the role of the new in-house visiting team.

For this client group, revision to existing practices is scheduled for 2008/09 in order to promote prevention work; reduce reliance on homelessness applications; make better use of quota nominations and to provide a clear exit strategy for those who find that remaining at home is not a viable long-term option.

“Over the period under review the household composition of those accepted as statutorily homeless has been mainly of a two bedroom need...”



Focusing on homelessness

6. Analysis of homelessness data (non-statutory)

Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness

KCAH are one of the main housing advice providers within Kingston. Over the past two years, the number of cases that they have dealt with has remained around the 560 mark.

Many of their clients will have also sought advice from other agencies, including Kingston Council, so their data outlines the general trends amongst those who find themselves homeless, but outside of the statutory scheme.

For the past two years (2006/07 and 2007/08), KCAH have seen those seeking housing and welfare benefit advice mainly come from the 25-59 age group, although 20% come from the 18-21 age group. Two-thirds claim to be homeless on the day of visiting for advice.

Around a third of those dealt with have no support needs, although it is noted that 12% are ex-offenders; 11% have depressive symptoms and 10% have difficulties with language. Only 8% are recorded as having a drug problem and 6% problems with alcohol.

KCAH records indicate that the three main causes of homelessness they deal with are:

- Relationship Breakdown.
- Rent Arrears.
- End of Tenancy.

However, they also record that 27% of those seen are living with friends or family and that 13% are of no fixed abode and 12% are in Assured Shorthold Tenancies.

This suggests that those seen for advice broadly have the same profile of the reasons given for loss of accommodation as those who are accepted as statutorily homeless.

Additionally, 64% of those seen for advice are on a form of welfare benefit, falling to 40% of the total when looking at Jobseeker Allowance claimants.



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Around 55% of those seen are white British, although only 64% of those dealt with originate from the Kingston area, the remainder coming in the main from neighbouring boroughs.

The main outcomes of a visit to KCAH were: a high proportion ceased to give further instruction to the organisation; 23% were referred and accepted for a nightshelter hostel and 20% were given advice and information and only in 6% of cases could KCAH not give advice on a presenting issue.

Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau

In response to client requests, Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau has made telephone contact their main point of interaction with clients. This has resulted in a substantial increase in enquiries since being introduced in March 2008 using existing resources. Support is also offered at a range of locations including Kingston University, the Community Shop in Norbiton and the One Stop Shop.

Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau report that 99% of clients are satisfied or very satisfied with the service they receive and make extensive use of over 45 different agencies and individuals to help resolve presenting problems.

Around 24% of the work is associated directly with welfare benefits, with around a further 14% being housing issues alone. 34% of the work undertaken involves debt.

Concerns exist around the advent of Community Legal Advice Centres and our local Advice strategy group, made up from local advice providers including Kingston Council are looking at the issues and impacts that a CLAC may have.

Court Desk

Kingston Citizens Advice Bureau operates a lay advocacy service at Kingston County Court.

It is reported that the number of cases seen at the County Court has dropped despite the apparent rise in possession actions.



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This is attributed, in part, to the belief amongst borrowers that there is finality about Court action and that there is no point in seeking a defence or exploring alternative options.

Kingston Council Housing Advice Service

The service provides advice to tenants within the Kingston Council area.

Their performance data can be found under the Prevention section in Chapter 5.

Where possible, advice and assistance will be given. However referrals for those who are considered not to fall within the statutory scheme are usually referred on to other agencies for specialist advice.

For example, those suitable for the ACCESS project would be referred to Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness.

“Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness is one of the main housing advice providers within Kingston”



Focusing on homelessness

7. Unmet needs and gaps in service provision

During the course of the review, some unmet need and gaps in service were identified. The review also raised some new ideas on improving existing services.

Young Persons and Children

Despite success in maintaining young people at home when faced with homelessness, during this review opportunities have been identified to assist with the integration of housing options advice into pathway plans for those young people who may face homelessness or are unable to remain at home.

We will build upon existing practice and work with Prevention and Safeguarding Services and providers to explore new ways of working, taking note of good practice elsewhere.

Families

Concern has been raised about the levels of debt some families can find themselves in, particularly rent arrears. The Early Intervention Officer reports that three quarters of families that the EIO works with are already known to the Prevention and Safeguarding Services. The numbers involved are quite small in the overall picture, yet they do cause a disproportionate amount of resource to be concentrated on resolving their issues.

Issues have been raised about the flexibility of the housing nominations process and there is a need to reinforce a consultative approach in dealing with families facing homelessness. The use of the Professionals Meeting network was considered a major part in securing timely advice in obtaining guidance about homelessness prevention and the need to link the CAF structure into housing work identified as a gap. Joint assessment work was also considered as future option, building on the work carried out by the Early Intervention Officer.



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Drug and Alcohol misusers

Traditionally outside of the statutory scheme for housing, this group is a significant part of the non-statutory group of households who experience homelessness.

Recent work by the DAAT and Supporting People has led to the creation of a rent deposit scheme and support service. At the time of writing, a provider has been identified but the scheme is still very much in its infancy.

Problems exist in identifying a coherent approach to offering housing options to those who are completing rehabilitation and detoxification and concern has been expressed at the potential of losing such valuable work due to a lack of housing. During the life of the strategy, we will work closer with the DAAT, including Kaleidoscope, to create a protocol that promotes timely notification of homelessness, promotes suitable prevention options and gives a coherent structure to referrals for those Kingston residents who want to make changes to their lifestyle.

Ex-Offenders

Prolific and Priority Offenders pathways are sometimes inhibited by the fact that they are often not brought within the statutory scheme. Advice has been sought from the Government Office for London about how the requirements of the PPO scheme fit with the statutory demands of the Housing Act.

A process of looking at schemes elsewhere within the Metropolitan Police district is being undertaken to see whether there is any good practice that can be used or developed within a Kingston setting.

The Probation Service has a housing advice worker sponsored by Supporting People. However they report that there is difficulty in those under probation securing accommodation. They have difficulty securing a social housing let or do not have the funds for rent deposit and rent in advance. Again, we will support the development of the rent deposit scheme set up by the DAAT and



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Supporting People to provide an alternative route into private sector housing for ex-offenders.

Access to health services and health promotion

Concern had previously been expressed about the lack of appropriate use of health services by those who find themselves homeless. Good work from the Primary Care Trust has assisted in reminding GPs about homelessness and the need to provide primary care to homeless people. However there still remains concern about the true picture of the health of homeless people in Kingston.

During the remaining part of 2008/09, we will establish a survey amongst homeless households to gauge the health needs within Kingston and act upon any recommendations that follow as part of the Health and Homelessness sub-group work plan.

Further consideration is being given to the possibility of similar research amongst those applying for housing assistance so that a complete picture of health needs can be established.

Move-on options for those leaving the ACCESS project

In the year ending 31 March 2008, 32 tenants moved on from the ACCESS project and two thirds moved onto either a privately rented property, council property or housing association property.

KCAH advise that they are now focusing on securing more 'move-on' options as a practical alternative to securing further houses, but are finding it difficult, especially as most clients do not have, or have not saved enough money for a private sector rent deposit.

It is suggested that a rent deposit scheme in a bond or guarantee form may be a way forward to enable greater move on and we will look to see what opportunities are available to develop this approach.



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Early warning systems

In order to maximise the opportunities for prevention work to take place, it is clear that effective protocols and information sharing need to be in place.

Registered Social Landlords

The Housing Corporation is already requesting that RSL's consider prevention of homelessness as part of their functions. In Kingston, we have historically encouraged RSL's to provide information about potential evictions in a timely manner.

We will ensure the practice of early notification continues and is continually promoted. In addition, we will continue to promote the use of Professional Meetings for those households who are considered vulnerable and under threat of losing their home in an effort to help maintain their homes through on-going support or one off actions.

Rehabilitation and Detoxification

Another area that requires strengthening is for those who have undertaken a period of rehabilitation and detoxification.

It has been identified that more can be done to ensure that the appropriate housing solution can be found for someone leaving treatment.

It is envisaged that during the life of the strategy, protocols and shared training between housing and key workers can take place to ensure that professionals share key information to inform upon the housing options available.

Hospital admissions and delayed discharges

Further work also needs to be undertaken to prevent the loss of accommodation by those who are admitted into hospital or taken into custody.



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It is anticipated that such work will be undertaken as part of the setting up of discharge procedures from the local hospital, building upon similar work undertaken with the local mental health hospital.

Worklessness and Unemployment

This is not currently an area where services are developed, other than to assist those wanting to return back to work being signposted to other agencies.

However there have been recent discussions with Home Connections about their pilot project on homelessness and unemployment called Housing Employment Connections.

Kingston has an observational role within the pilot scheme and may choose to become further involved at a later date.

“The review also raised some new ideas on improving existing services.”



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8. Summary of links with other strategies and plans

This strategy links with other national, regional, sub-regional and local policy and priorities. Those policies are listed below.

Additional to these are the Local Area Agreements (LAAs), whose primary aim is to deliver better outcomes for local people. At the time of writing, the new suite of LAA's for the next year is in consultation.

National

Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives

- Promotion of prevention of homelessness.
- Tackling wider causes of homelessness.
- Sustain reductions in rough sleeping.

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities

- Guidance to Local Authorities on dealing with homeless households or those at risk of homelessness.
- Promotes the role of Social Services in dealing with homelessness.

Tackling Homelessness: The Housing Corporation Strategy

- Encourage RSL's to work with local authorities to promote tenancy sustainment and prevent homelessness.
- Encourage RSL's to think of homelessness as an operational and strategic priority in their plans.

The National Youth Homelessness Scheme

- Promotes the use of supported lodgings.
- Gives a commitment to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.



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Supporting People

- Framework to offer vulnerable people an opportunity to improve the quality of their life and independence by way of accommodation and support provision.

National Offender Management

- National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan.

Every Child Matters

- Framework that promotes the need for co-operation between the Prevention and Safeguarding Services and Housing to ensure and promote the safety and well being of children and family life.

Regional

The Mayor's London Plan

- Increase housing supply, with better design and integration into already existing services.
- Promote choice and mobility to Londoners by offering greater choice in housing options. The Capital Moves project will enable Kingston residents to bid for re-let homes in other London boroughs and on strategic development sites.

South West London Sub-regional Housing Plan

- Maximise development opportunities within the sub-region.
- South West London Private Sector Strategy.
- Maximise access and raise standards in the private sector.

South West London Sub-regional BME Strategy

- Meet the needs of BME households and tackle any barriers to accessing housing within the sub-region.

Local

- Housing Strategy.



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- Overcrowding Strategy.
- Supporting People Five Year Strategy.
- Best Value Performance Plan.
- The Crime, Disorder and Anti Social Behaviour Reduction Strategy.
- The Health and Social Care Improvement Plan.
- Community Plan.
- Kingston: Destination 2011.
- Kingston Homelessness Forum.

“At the time of writing, the new suite of Local Area Agreements for the next year is in consultation.”



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9. Summary of links to relevant targets

2010 Target

The Government has challenged local authorities to halve the numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

Kingston's target is 373 households in temporary accommodation by 2010 and at 31 March 2008, the number was 775.

A project board has been set up and we are undertaking new initiatives in an attempt to meet the target.

We are making use of Qualifying Offers, prevention opportunities through the Tenant Finder Service, advice and support to prevent homelessness and the maximisation of social housing lets, however experience has shown that large developments of permanent housing have traditionally had the largest impact on reducing numbers in temporary accommodation.

Bed and Breakfast Targets

The Government issued regulations in 2004 to prevent the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for families for a period not exceeding six weeks.

We met the challenge never to use Bed and Breakfast for families a year early and have continued to maintain this by judicious use of self-contained annexe and hostel accommodation, as well as weekly monitoring.

By 2010, the Government are requiring local authorities not to use Bed and Breakfast for 16 and 17 year olds.

We currently have no 16 or 17 year olds in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and continue to manage and monitor placements through the Young Persons Accommodation Panel, with placements being routed via the YMCA, Beverley House or One Housing.



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LAA Targets

The following are relevant national indicators for the Local Area Agreement in Kingston for the period 2008/09 to 2010/11.

- NI 141 Percentage of vulnerable people achieving independent living.
- NI 154 Net additional homes provided.
- NI 155 Gross number of affordable homes delivered.

Local Targets

Whilst many of the required returns have now been dispensed with, we continue to monitor our progress at a local level with locally set targets.

Such targets we continue to report on include:

- Average re-let time and number of voids in the private leasing scheme.
- Average re-let time and number of voids in the permanent housing stock.
- Number of households in Bed and Breakfast.
- Percentage of homelessness decisions made within 33 working days.
- Percentage of acceptances that are repeat acceptances.
- Acceptances as a result of domestic violence.
- Acceptances as a result of domestic violence from within the borough.
- Management Transfers and Sanctuary placements.
- Number of under-occupying moves.
- Number of Tenant Finder Service properties.
- Number of Breathing Space moves.



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- Number of Home Finder (Qualifying Offers) moves.

BVPI Targets

The following Best Value Performance Indicators have ceased with effect from 1 April 2008.

BVPI 183a	Average length of stay in bed and breakfast
BVPI 183b	Average length of stay in hostels
BVPI 202	Number of rough sleepers
BVPI 203	Percentage change in the number of families placed in TA
BVPI 225	Actions against domestic violence (refuge places in hostels)

National Indicators

The new indicator framework replaced the BVPI system in an effort to simplify the level of returns to central Government. The following are relevant National Indicators not included within any LAA framework.

NI 156	Number of households living in temporary accommodation
NI 46	Young Offenders access to suitable accommodation
NI 143	Offenders under probation supervision living in settled and suitable accommodation at the end of their order or licence
NI 147	Care leavers in suitable accommodation



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10. Review summary

From the research and interviews conducted for this review, it is clear that there has been solid progress in the services offered for those who find themselves homeless in Kingston against a backdrop of limited resources.

Within the framework of the three key themes of prevention, provision and support, services to clients who are or may be owed a statutory duty are comprehensive, although there remains more to do.

The Council has tried a number of methods to prevent homeless and whilst some have worked successfully, such as the pilot mediation scheme, prioritisation has been made in order to maximise returns from the resources available.

We will continue to maximise the use of Homeless Directorate funding and seek new ways of securing funding against a backdrop of limited resources.

The Council will also look at the ways in which we work in order to identify efficiency savings that could further support our homelessness work.

We are enjoying success with the Breathing Space Scheme for overcrowded council tenants which is releasing homes for homeless households and the Home Finder Scheme which allows homeless households in temporary accommodation move onto settled accommodation. Yet there remain over 700 households in temporary accommodation.

There remain some people outside of the statutory framework who have traditionally found it difficult to access accommodation and continue to do so.

Whilst advice services are available, limitations in available resources, time, money and lettings limit the assistance that can be given to those outside the statutory framework.

This situation is particularly acute in Kingston when considered against the smallest local authority owned stock in London, a small number of available lettings to those on the Housing Register, a



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competitive and relatively healthy private renting stock and high house prices.

Building upon the use of units at the YMCA for those considered not statutorily homeless, later this year a Supporting People sponsored rent deposit scheme will be set up aiming at giving ex-offenders and substance misusers the opportunity of being able to secure a private letting.

Prevention

Over the next three years, we will:

- Continue to work in partnership with other agencies to promote the prevention of homelessness.
- Introduce a visiting team to assist in preventing homelessness, primarily from those who are homeless through being excluded by family, relatives and friends.
- Work towards improving early warning protocols with RSL's and mortgage companies to prevent homelessness.
- Develop effective discharge procedures for homeless people receiving treatment at Kingston Hospital.
- Continue to review the protocols between mental health services, Prevention and Safeguarding Services to ensure good practice and prevention options are embedded within the service.

Provision

Over the next three years, we will:

- Continue to maximise the new development opportunities in Kingston.
- Ensure that the proportion of lettings to homeless households compares favourably with other Housing Register applicants.
- Ensure that the Tenant Finder Scheme remains responsive to those who wish to remain in the private rented sector.



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- Promote the use of Qualifying Offers to those who wish to remain in their temporary accommodation or move elsewhere in the private sector.
- Ensure that our private leasing portfolio reflects the size of household requiring temporary accommodation.
- Work with the provider of the rent deposit scheme for ex-offenders to ensure its success within the local private sector market.

Support

Over the next three years, we will:

- Continue to provide a Resettlement and Support Service to statutory households and look to expand these services to non-statutory households.
- Look to expand the floating support schemes so that they become truly cross-tenure and help to prevent homelessness.
- Continue to work with the Primary Care Trust to ensure access to healthcare for homeless households in temporary accommodation.
- Explore further the opportunities offered in addressing worklessness and unemployment.



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