

Homelessness Strategy



Housing Department
Updated June, 2005

Warwick District Council

Homelessness Strategy

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Executive Summary

The Homelessness Act 2002, places a statutory duty on local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy for publication by 31st July, 2003. The Strategy must contain a full review of current provisions, endeavour to identify future needs and formulate a strategy to meet those needs. The Strategy must have a full review within a period of 5 years with an annual review of service provision taking place. In addition, the Strategy must contain a detailed action plan to show how the Strategy will be delivered.

The Homelessness Review indicates that a great deal of work has been undertaken in an effort to meet the needs of homeless people in this district. There is a broad range of service provision, offering differing levels of support and accommodation, albeit in relatively small numbers. Some projects are recently operational and, with the addition of the new priority needs categories it will be necessary to review the provision and evaluate current and future needs on an on-going basis. The Homelessness Strategy has been developed by a multi-agency sub-group of the existing Accommodation Group. The Accommodation Group comprises representatives from the Supporting People Team, Social Services, Supported Housing Providers, Health and the Local Authority and meets quarterly to consider levels of demand, type of need arising, future developments and any work arising from these issues.

The review indicates that there is adequate provision in most areas although there are some differences in the priorities identified by the varying strategies. The Supporting People Strategy suggests shortfalls in assistance for people with HIV/Aids, Floating Support for people with mental health problems and support for homeless families. There is little unmet need for people with HIV/Aids and the other priorities identified are being addressed. Further, the Housing Strategy prioritises people with mental health problems, ex-offenders and people with physical disabilities and work is currently being done to meet these priorities. What does emerge from the Homelessness Strategy is the requirement to consider putting additional resources into being pro-active in preventative and outreach work.

It is clear that a thorough review of current provision has been undertaken with quality and accessibility highlighted. Procedures are in place to prevent services being blocked inappropriately, with agreements on levels of service in place to monitor and evaluate the provision.

Additional schemes are being devised to fulfil the duties of the Homelessness Act 2002 and further research will be undertaken to assess the impact of the new legislation. Approval has been given for a Choice Based Lettings Policy to be implemented during 2004-2005 and, again, this will require monitoring to ensure that homeless people gain the priority and choice this offers.

This Strategy demonstrates that all special needs groups have been considered and the structures are in place to recognise and measure new demands.

A relatively small district is disadvantaged by the economies of scale but does have the benefit of being able to create very strong networks to work in partnership to meet the needs of the community.

Introduction

Where, why and by whom?

Warwick District Council

Homelessness Strategy

Area Profile

Warwick District Council is within the West Midlands region and is one of the five district Councils that form Warwickshire. There are four main towns; Warwick, Kenilworth, Leamington Spa and Whitnash with more than forty villages and a total population of 123,900. Based on the 2001 Census, the Office for National Statistics indicates that there are 53,000 households in Warwick. This figure remains unchanged from the year 2000 with an increase of only 2,000 from 1996.

There are 55,093 homes in the district of which 81.5% are owner occupied, 10.7% privately rented, 5.5% affordable housing and 2.3% other forms of housing or empty. The housing market continues to be buoyant, with the Centre for Urban & Regional Studies, Affordability and Housing Need in the West Midlands Region, July 2003 indicating that Warwick District has the highest average house prices in the whole of the West Midlands Region.

Demand across all tenures is consistently high and there are specific problems in relation to land values and availability with the close proximity of Coventry University exacerbating the problems within the private rented sector. Compared to Warwickshire as a whole, Warwick District Council has a higher proportion of people living alone, 10.6% compared to 9.3%, a larger proportion of older people, 19.3% compared to 18% and a higher proportion of ethnic minority residents, 5.6% compared to 3%.

The perception has always been that Warwick District Council area does not have a homelessness problem. The average household income is over £20,000 per annum, which nationally is second only to the Borough of Maidenhead and Windsor, but this district also has recognised areas of deprivation, where the income is less than £7,000 per annum. Homelessness statistics show a steady average of 1000 applications per year which is higher than the other four districts which may be explained by recording methods. All approaches regarding housing advice and homelessness are recorded in order to endeavour to find an accurate assessment of the needs in the district. This method also ensures that the service provides continuity for users with an accurate history of their housing situation.

Land Registry data shows house prices have increased by over 30% since 1998, with the average three bedroomed house now costing £103,000. This is also reflected in rent levels with an average rental of £700.00 per month.

The Corporate Strategy identifies the key issues for Warwick to meet the housing need as:

- To deal effectively with the decision on the future options for managing the Council's housing stock.
- To increase the number of affordable homes in the district.
- To improve the quality of housing.

and this is reflected within the Housing Strategy.

A full Housing Needs Survey was undertaken by Fordham Research in 1998, with a review completed in December 2001. The survey revealed that existing households make up some 70% of households in housing need and most concealed households were single adults. The majority of households in need contained children and were currently living in rented accommodation. If all future housing need is to be met it is estimated that an additional 7,072 affordable homes would be required by 2011.

A full Housing Needs Survey was planned for 2004, in conjunction with Stratford-on-Avon District Council. It has now been agreed that this work will not be commissioned until 2005. The Regional Housing Board are undertaking research into the housing market areas across the region and the scope of the district survey will be dependent on the result of the regional work.

A study of the housing needs of the black and minority ethnic communities, including gipsies and travellers, across the five districts of Warwickshire is currently underway with the results expected at the end of the year.

Purpose and Aims of the Strategy

The Homelessness Act 2002, places a duty on all local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy by July 2003. There must be a full review of all current and likely future levels of homelessness in the district, and a detailed survey of current and planned provision to meet the identified needs. The review should also include methods of homelessness prevention together with methods of providing support to prevent people becoming homeless again. A Strategy must then be formulated to ensure that sufficient, appropriate accommodation will be available for people becoming homeless in the district.

The Homelessness Act 2002, also places a duty on Social Services to assist with the formulation and implementation of the Strategy and consideration must also be given to how the objectives can be achieved through joint working with other organisations.

The Homeless Strategy is intended to be a live, working document which will endeavour to show:-

- What we do now.
- What else we need to do.
- How we will do it.

The principle aim of the strategy will be:-

To help people to find the right accommodation for their needs at the right time of their lives.

In view of the changes made by the Homelessness Act 2002 and The Homelessness Order 2002 for amendment to priority categories, it is extremely difficult to accurately assess future demand although this has been attempted. The legislation stipulates that the Homelessness Strategy should be renewed in five years but it is intended that a review should take place annually with a full review occurring in 2008.

Legal & Procedural Framework

Warwick District Council has always taken a broad view of the legal obligations in respect to homelessness and works in accordance with the Housing Act 1996, together with the Homelessness Act 2002 and Code of Guidance.

An ambitious and extensive development programme was devised by the Council following the Green Paper: Quality and Choice, Decent Homes for All, published in late 2000, which indicated that the rights of many homeless people were to be enhanced. The development programme aimed to provide sufficient, appropriate accommodation to fulfil the needs of the homeless people in the district to enable the Council to meet their statutory obligations when the new legislation came into force. Existing provision was scrutinised and a development programme devised with the aim of specialist, supported, housing providers either extending their current services, or developing new services to meet future needs. The projects initiated by this programme included floating support schemes for ex-offenders, extending provision for care-leavers and the creation of a new direct-access hostel for people who are roofless. The programme is now completed with all projects being operational.

“Supporting People” is a central government initiative which came into effect on 1st April, 2003 and aims to ensure that quality housing related support services are provided for people who need help to live in the community. Support services have historically been funded through Government Grants, Housing Benefit and Charities and Trusts. The funding was complex and was not thought to ensure that support services were directed to where they were most needed. Further, there were limited controls of the quality and provision of the support. In consequence of this, the government set out to create county based teams to assess the needs of the area and centralise the distribution of funding which is undertaken by a multi-agency district panel. The Supporting People Teams also have a responsibility to monitor and evaluate both the accommodation and support offered. The opportunities provided by this initiative have been utilised, in conjunction with the development programme, to fund the additional service provision. However, there are serious concerns regarding the level of future funding and the lack of revenue funding for any new proposals. The Supporting People work is currently being inspected by the Audit Commission and it has been made clear that there will be no new money invested. The only method of improving or increasing services will be to distribute the current funding. This presents a very difficult challenge in an area with limited existing resources and a generally high standard of services.

A Best Value Review of the homelessness and housing advice service has been undertaken and an Improvement Plan compiled. Many of the actions in the Improvement Plan show the need for additional resources, some of which cannot be met by “Supporting People”. Alternative methods are continually being sought and it is hoped that the implementation of e:government, in addition to a Business Process Redesign Programme, will release some staff resources.

The Homelessness Act 2002, also refers to the allocation of accommodation and imposes a duty on Councils to give people choice. Warwick District Council have devised a new allocation policy which will do this. Rather than offering properties to the next person on the list, all vacancies will be advertised and people can then apply for the property they would like. Offers would then be made to the person with the highest points.

Where there is a statutory duty to rehouse, people will be given a priority but this will be for a limited period of time. If they have not obtained a property during the period of priority, suitable accommodation will be offered to them. This system will be introduced as soon as a new computer programme is installed and tested which is expected to be end of 2005. The Choice Based Lettings Policy will be operational throughout this district.

Developing the Strategy

The review of current and future needs and resources has been compiled from existing data which includes the authorities Homelessness Statistics, Housing Needs Survey, Housing Strategy and Census information. There has been continuous consultation throughout the development of both the review and strategy with contributions from all the relevant statutory and voluntary bodies working in the district. The draft document was then subject to consultation with elected members, user forums and, again statutory and voluntary bodies, including B.M.E. groups. Shelter have been instrumental in the writing and have given advice and assistance throughout.

The main body of work has been undertaken by a sub-group of the Accommodation Group, which is a long established group that meets quarterly. The group has representatives from all the agencies which provide supported housing for people with special needs, together with members of the Supporting People Team and Drug Action Project. The sub-group has been joined by representatives from Shelter, Social Services and the Primary Care Trust.

It has always been recognised that the surrounding issues, and solutions, to the problem of homelessness are complex and cannot be resolved by one organisation. Consequently, partnership working is key to the Homeless Strategy in this district and can be demonstrated by the development of the strategy where each organisation contributed the section appertaining to their own specialist function.

A full review of services was completed together with an Action Plan which has now been completed successfully with only one item outstanding. It has not been possible to progress additional high support facilities for young people due to the inability to obtain revenue funding. This is now being considered further by Orbit Housing Association and the Young Housing Project.

There is a statutory requirement that a full review of this strategy takes place every 5 years, however, this authority will undertake annual reviews as there is a culture of continuing improvement in this authority. This first, annual review has been conducted by members of the Accommodation Group, many of whom were instrumental in writing the original document.

Supporting People (SP) & Homelessness

Links with the WDC Homeless Strategy

There have always been varying methods of funding for projects offering accommodation and support which included Government Grants, Housing Benefit, Charities, Trusts and latterly Lottery Funding. The projects frequently worked independently and there were no means of ensuring that the funding was directed to the groups in most need. Neither were there procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision.

From April 2003, all the funding has been directed to Supporting People and a countywide Strategy has been developed to ensure that the funds are given to the appropriate groups and the provision will be regularly monitored. This is the first time that a comprehensive countywide approach has been taken for the planned provision of appropriate accommodation, to meet the identified needs of the area, and direct funding to where it is required.

The Supporting People Strategy has been utilised to recognise the gaps in service in this district with the unmet needs forming part of this Homelessness Strategy. There are concerns regarding the security of future funding in view of the Government's intention to find savings to reduce overall costs.

Homelessness & Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation is an essential part of helping to maintain the independence of vulnerable members of our society, whether it is sheltered housing for the elderly with warden services or shared accommodation for the homeless. It is also crucial in the battle to prevent future homelessness and repeated homelessness by equipping people with the skills they need to maintain their tenancies and independence.

A good example of this would be the provision of supported accommodation and floating support services to young people, or to offenders as well as those at risk of offending. There are also support services available to older people with support needs, not least the Care & Repairs agencies (also known as Home Improvement Agencies), which enable older people to remain in their own homes by providing aids and adaptations, which can speed up discharge from hospital or prevent the need for a move to residential care.

Strategic Role of Supporting People

By introducing a more co-ordinated service planning structure, SP will build on the work already being done by agencies trying to meet the needs of homeless people and prevent future homelessness. This will include input from a wide range of organisations such as Health, Probation, Social Services and Housing.

The key principle in the development of the Shadow (SP) Strategy for Warwickshire (2003 – 2004) is that it does not work in isolation; the priorities identified for future service developments have been established through working closely with partner agencies. In future, all housing related support services developed after 1st April 2003 will have to meet the priorities as outlined in the SP Strategy document, leading to a more effective allocation of resources, rather than relying on local initiative as it has been in the past.

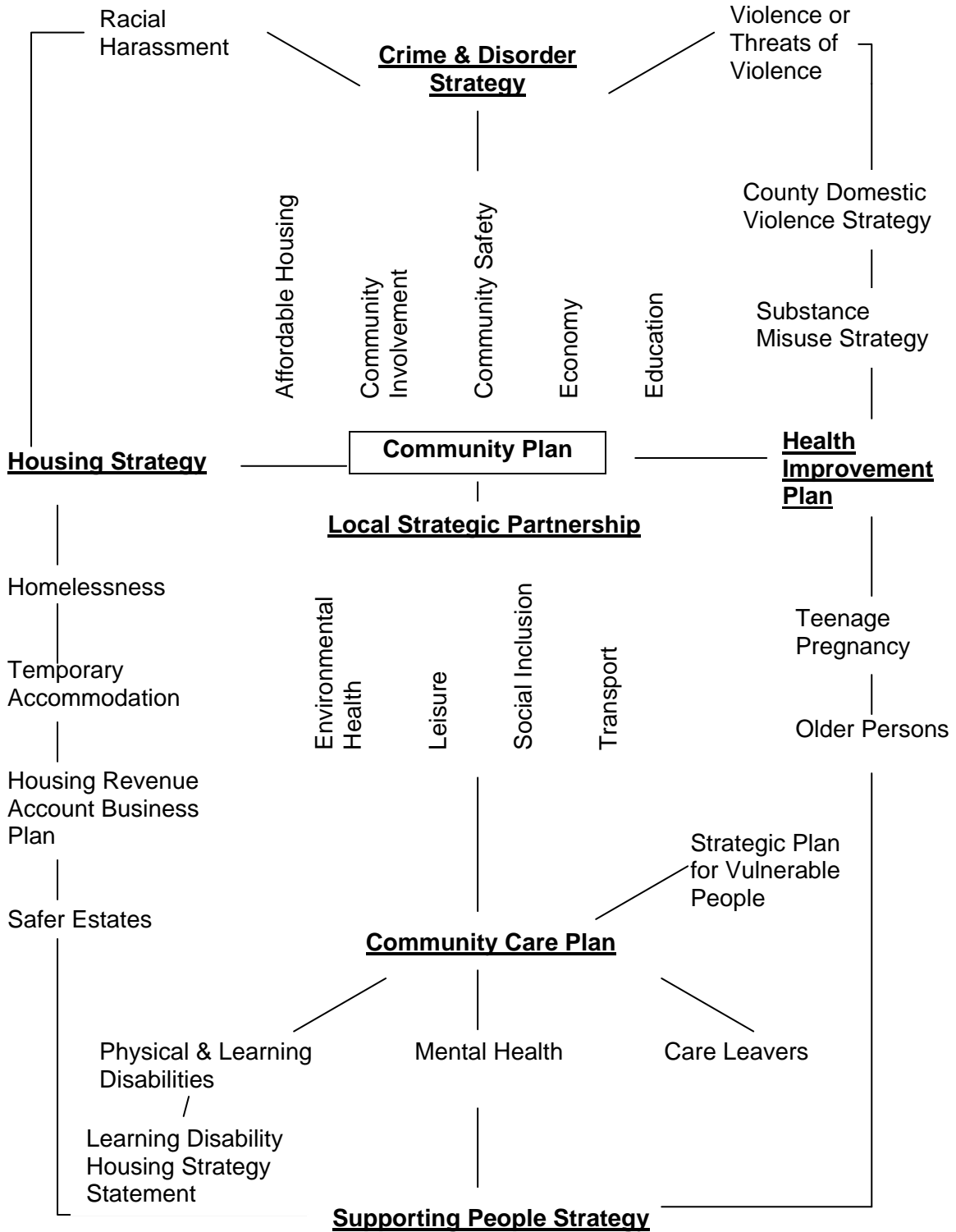
Although the SP Strategy details the housing and support needs of a variety of different needs groups, like care leavers, teenage parents and single vulnerable people, the development of floating support services to homeless families living in temporary accommodation and/or those recently re-housed was highlighted as a priority within the county. Warwick District responded to this with the appointment of a Support and Resettlement worker.

The SP Team will now be commencing work on the 5 year Strategy document (2004 – 2009), to be completed by March 2005. As part of this they will be conducting a countywide supported housing needs survey, which, when coupled with the information already available, will be an important resource in the development of future Homelessness Strategy Statements.

The Strategic Network

This diagram illustrates the range of strategies into which the Homelessness Strategy links. Wherever possible, this strategy has endeavoured to compliment and support the work of others. Two elements require further explanation and, as can be seen from the diagram, the Supporting People element encompasses the whole range of the network. In addition, the Council are developing a Local Strategic Partnership. This group includes key statutory and voluntary agencies and has the task of driving forward the primary aims of the new Community Plan. Central Government considers that Local Strategic Partnerships are the most effective means of pursuing community strategies which accurately reflect the needs of local people.

The Strategic Network



Part 1 **What we do now**

Review of Current Services

The Local Authority Perspective

The Housing Advice Team

The Housing Advice Team has a manager, 3½ generic posts dealing with housing advice, homelessness and the management of the Housing Register. In addition, there is a full-time post of Housing Advice Liaison Officer whose duties include nominations to Housing Associations, management of the Special Needs Register and management and monitoring of the move-on facility for supported housing providers. This allows a central point of contact for all relevant agencies. There are 2 part-time posts managing temporary accommodation, administration and finance, and one full time post of undertaking the support and resettlement of homeless people. An appointment system operates for interviews, to prevent people having to queue, and all interviews are carried out in private rooms to ensure confidentiality. In cases of emergency, applicants will be interviewed on the same day, if this is possible.

The Case Officer manages the application from first approach to determination and allocation of accommodation suitable for the applicants needs. 91% of applications are completed within the target time of 33 days. All applicants requiring advice or assistance are interviewed and the details recorded on a computerised system. This allows accurate records to be held and prevents confusion but does also give a higher statistical result than many other districts who perhaps only record priority categories.

Advice is given on all forms of housing tenure including private sector and low cost home ownership schemes. Referrals are made for specialist advice for example debt management with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Staff have an annual appraisal and Personal Development Plan to identify training needs. Both external and internal training is given with in-house information briefings on changes in legislation and any new initiatives or projects. An example, recent briefings to all front line staff includes:- “Low Cost Home Ownership Schemes”, delivered by Registered Social Landlords and “Second Chance Housing Scheme”, delivered by Social Services and Christian Alliance Housing Association. Regular external case law updates are provided with staff taking the opportunity to hear specialists in housing law.

Everyone who uses the service is asked to participate in a Satisfaction Survey which is used to identify problem areas and improve the service.

Homelessness Charter and Advice Leaflets are available together with information on all local and national services. The Homelessness Charter offers advice on the local authorities duties in relation to legislation and details the procedure of offering an appointment system and single case officer as point of contact. In addition, target times are given for processing and determining homeless claims. Advice leaflets show basic guidelines for the variety of advice which is offered and includes both Landlord and Tenant regulations. All applicants requesting assistance are given appointment times and interviewed to allow a full assessment to be undertaken. An application is completed by the officer to establish a person's housing circumstances. The same form is used for applications to the Housing Register but the forms are different colours in order to denote that a request for advice or a claim of homelessness has been made. Advice and assistance is then given dependent on

the situation. If appropriate, the application is then placed on to the Housing Register together with details of the homelessness/advice application. This is a computerised system for recording, statistical and allocation purposes.

Should the person only require advice and assistance the records are amended to close the case. Some applicants fall within “non-priority” categories and this means neither they, nor a member of their household, are vulnerable in any way and are therefore no less able than others to find their own property. In these circumstances, the local authority has a duty to offer advice and assistance and this may take the form of negotiating with a landlord, explaining the legal position or referring to a specialist agency for advice. Applicants within the non-priority categories are given an additional 50 points on their application to the Common Housing Register in recognition of their homelessness. This preference is given to all non-priority applicants without the benefit of secure accommodation on condition that a local connection is established and they have not lost their previous home as a direct result of their own actions.

If an applicant’s circumstances place them in a priority category, for instance they may have dependant children, have been in care or be elderly or infirm in any way, the authority has a duty to ensure that accommodation is made available to them. This may be at the expiry of a fixed term tenancy prior to possession proceedings being taken. Priority would be given at an earlier stage, through the Special Needs Register (see page 8), if it would be difficult to access suitable, secure accommodation.

How are Applications Assessed

Extensive liaison occurs with all relevant agencies where appropriate in order to establish an applicant’s priority and future needs. Medical assessments are undertaken by an Occupational Therapist attached to the department and advice is sought when questions of priority, vulnerability and suitability of accommodation arise.

Should an assessment suggest that people require support for independent living, referrals would be made to the appropriate provider. The Council works closely with all accommodation providers in the district and specialist support is available for young people who may not have lived independently, ex-offenders who need help to return to the community and people who have mental ill health. The organisation would then refer through the “move-on” arrangements (see page 8) when support was no longer required. Similarly, floating support would be withdrawn and leased properties transferred back to the local authority with Introductory Tenancies given to the existing resident.

Direct housing is the ideal but temporary accommodation is utilised where necessary. Homeless applicants are housed, in date order of acceptance, through the Common Registration Scheme which accesses all vacant social housing. The Common Registration Scheme is a list of everyone in the district who needs accommodation or wishes to transfer from their existing home. There are 13 members of the scheme including Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations), Charities and Trusts and they contact the Council when they have vacancies. The register gives applicants a points assessment on their housing circumstances and needs and this denotes the position on the list. When there is a statutory responsibility to rehouse i.e. homelessness, unfit properties, extreme overcrowding, the applicants are prioritised. Points are not given but allocations are made in date order of the duty decision being made.

Allocations

There is close liaison with the supported housing providers working in the district with weekly contact advising of current vacancies and move-on arrangements in place for people who have reached the point where they are able to sustain independent living. All agencies are monitored through Service Level Agreements to ensure quality of service provision and demand for specialist services. The Housing Advice Liaison Officer provides a central point of contact for all other housing providers.

The Allocations Policy has been fully reviewed and approval has been given for the introduction of a choice based system which will be introduced in 2004/2005. A Common Registration Scheme already exists, with 13 members, and all participants will move to the new scheme with all vacancies within the district being advertised. The Common Registration Scheme (CRS) has been in operation since 1994 and is used by all the accommodation agencies in the district. Both new applicants and those requesting a transfer are assessed, using the same criteria, and points are given based on housing need. There are no exclusion policies; however, Council owned accommodation is restricted to people who have lived in the district continuously for a period of six months or who travel more than 15 miles into the district to work. These restrictions are not applicable to RSL's but all offers of property may not proceed if the applicant has an existing housing debt. The CRS is complex with a penalty for refusing properties and a much simpler, less restrictive and more open scheme was needed.

The proposed Choice Based Allocations Policy has been developed by a group representing the Council, RSL's, Tenants and an elected Member and is based on the results of a questionnaire to over 3,000 users and potential users.

All affordable housing will be advertised including rented property and low cost and shared ownership properties. A Housing Register will still operate with two bandings. Band 1 will contain all applications from people where there is a statutory duty to provide alternative accommodation e.g. homeless, overcrowding or unfit conditions. If people choose a property it will be given in date order of acceptance of that duty. Band 2 applications will be given a simple points assessment made on their present circumstances which will reflect the "preferred categories" detailed in the Homelessness Act 2002. These include people living in overcrowded or unsatisfactory conditions or people with urgent housing needs.

This will allow homeless people to choose where they live and have the same opportunities as everyone else. The new scheme will be advertised extensively and the computer programme will be marked to recognise people who may require assistance with responding to the advertisements. This would be provided either by the local authority or the key worker involved with the applicant. Homeless people would be given priority in Band 1 for twelve weeks. If they had not been rehoused during that time, one offer of suitable accommodation would be made.

There are over 2000 applicants on the Housing Register with applications being reviewed annually. The highest demand is for family housing with a rising demand from single people. The revised Allocations Policy allows for under-occupation to try and prevent repeat demand and create settled communities. The Housing Strategy does not support the provision of new one bedroomed properties but recommends single people having two bedrooms to facilitate any change in circumstances.

The Housing Investment Programme shows a total of 412 Council properties let during 2003/2004, 124 being let to homeless. There were 242 lettings to RSL's with 27 being let to homeless.

The Choice Based System does have a restriction regarding applicants who are identified as having previously lost accommodation through anti-social behaviour.

Outreach and Preventative Work

The Authority is centralised but there are contact points in Kenilworth and Warwick with community offices in several areas.

Work has been done to establish the need for outreach housing advice facilities and following a move towards generic working within the Housing Advice team monthly outreach surgeries are provided in Warwick and Kenilworth and a weekly drop-in advice session in Leamington Spa. It is anticipated that there will be an increased demand for additional advice with the implementation of Choiced Based Lettings.

All enquiries, whether by telephone, application, personal visit or other agencies, are referred for a housing advice interview if there was an indication that a homelessness problem could be prevented by advice and assistance. Similarly, any correspondent with relevant difficulties is invited for an interview.

Although staff are trained in a wide range of subjects and are fully informed of the resources in the district, it is still necessary to refer for specialist in-depth assistance. Cases of harassment and illegal eviction are referred to the Council's Legal Department, with one specific officer undertaking all this work, in close liaison with the Case Officer. For the 12 month period to 31st March, 2002 there were 13 cases of harassment or illegal eviction.

It is understood that some people may find approaching the local authority intimidating, or problematic for whatever reason, and an advice service for people under 25 years of age is offered by the Young Housing Project. Enquiries are also frequently made by elected members and the M.P. whose major caseload represents over 600 housing enquiries per year. The M.P., together with Social Workers and Health Visitors, is advised regularly of alterations to any practices and procedures that may affect the allocation of housing or the advice given.

Home visits are made if people prefer or are unable to attend the office. There are also close links with Health Visitors, Social Services and hospitals and visits are frequently made to local hospitals and rehabilitation units.

A 24 hour emergency service is operational from the Council's Control system, (this is a 24 hour service providing a life-line service to elderly and vulnerable members of the community). Requests for assistance are taken and emergency accommodation is provided if appropriate until an applicant can be assessed by a Housing Advice Officer on the next working day.

The authority would wish to be more pro-active in respect of the preventative element of the service, and would be interested in advertising the service, but again there are resource implications.

Rent Guarantee Scheme

A Rent Guarantee Scheme has been operational for 8 years with over twenty families being accommodated within the private sector. This scheme offers Landlords a survey of their property, nominated tenants, a fast track through Housing Benefit and a guarantee of one

month's rent for a six month period should rent arrears occur. Any applicant on the waiting list may be nominated, including homeless, if their application indicates they are interested.

The scheme is beneficial in extending affordable housing provision as properties are only included if the rent is with benefit limits. However, it is administratively expensive in relation to officer time but successful in that further incidence of homelessness is minimal.

Care and Repair

Context and Duties

This authority contracts Age Concern to undertake Care and Repair and there is a close working relationship with both the Housing and Environmental Health Departments.

Review of Present Provision

Care and Repair is available to everyone of 60 years and over, and anyone with a disability. Practical advice is offered to home owners and private tenants who need help with repairs or improvements to allow them to remain in their home.

Short term daily living support is also offered to people over 60 years who may be recovering from an illness or accident, or have been discharged from hospital and are not eligible for Social Services resources.

A "Handyperson Service" is also available, where people are only charged for the cost of materials, not labour, and there is also a Gardening Service.

Home Safety Checks are available to anyone over 55 years of age which aims to identify and make clients aware of hazards both inside out outside their home.

Temporary Accommodation

Temporary accommodation is only utilised if an appropriate long-term solution is not available. Several types of temporary accommodation are used.

- "Homeless at Home"

this classification is used extensively to give potentially homeless people priority for rehousing while they remain in insecure accommodation i.e. staying with friends or relatives.

- Bed and Breakfast

ceased to be used 1st April, 2003.

- Guest Rooms

are fully furnished bedrooms within elderly people's developments. They are accessible through the 24 hour emergency call system and provide safe and secure emergency accommodation for people who may have been subject to fire, floods or violence. Their use is particularly beneficial for elderly homeless.

- Private Sector Leased Properties (PSL)

Five self-contained flats are currently leased from private Landlords. The properties have one or two bedrooms, kitchen, living room and bathroom. Cookers are provided. The properties are inspected when vacant, repaired and regularly redecorated. They have secure door entry systems and health and safety checks are made quarterly. They are centrally situated with close access to all services and any complaints are investigated within 48 hours. Communal areas are cleaned weekly. The private sector leasing is normally let to young people who are without any furnishings, therefore fridges will be placed in the properties and a number of beds will be made available.

- Council Housing Stock

12 self-contained two bedrooomed flats have been transferred from general housing stock. Cookers and curtains are provided, communal areas are cleaned weekly and these properties are also situated near the town centre. Inspections occur as above.

- 2 Units of Temporary Accommodation are suitable for wheelchair users, the number of wheelchair accessible properties will be increased with the construction of a ramp at the Council owned properties.

There is an established need for support for homeless people and this is identified as a priority within the Supporting People Strategy. A Support and Resettlement Officer has been appointed to assist homeless people in gaining access to services and ensure a smooth transition to alternative accommodation. The main aims of this post are to help homeless people who need to be placed in temporary accommodation with welfare benefits, educational and health facilities and applications for suitable future housing i.e. Choice based lettings, and to support the move through to suitable permanent housing, preventing a recurrence of homelessness. It will bridge the gap between the authority, homeless families and welfare and benefit agencies and the success will be judged on user satisfaction and any repeated claims of homelessness.

A protocol exists between Health and Housing for the transfer of information on the movement of homeless people.

Special Needs Register

A Special Needs Register operates for people whose circumstances fall outside basic allocation policies. Allocation policies need to be open and easily understood but cannot provide for every situation that arises. Some applicants would not gain a priority in their present circumstances but may need a very specific type of property in the future. For instance, a disabled person may be hospitalised but requires rehousing in 6 months time. The Special Needs Register gives a record of specific cases, and their requirements, and provides a method of planned return or introduction into the community. It also gives an estimation of the number of adapted properties needed within new developments and reduces the problem of bed-blocking. Referrals are made by Social Services and the primary Care Trust where an applicant with a physical disability, learning difficulty or progressive disease may require specialist accommodation in the future. It is very simple and very successful with more than 40 people with Learning Difficulties being housed in the community over the past four years.

Applications to the Special Needs Register are only accepted if priority cannot be obtained through existing policies and the Register is reviewed quarterly by Social Services and the Primary Care Trusts. There are 9 applicants at 30th September 2004, with 13 applicants having been accommodated since 1st April 2004. Consideration is currently being given to providing shared ownership accommodation for applicants on the Special Needs Register.

Equal Access to Services

The Local Authority strives to ensure that all people, regardless of ethnic origin or disability, have equal access to its services. All information can be made available in Braille, on cassette tape or in other languages and this is identified during assessment. It is not cost effective in an authority of this size to have this provision to hand but it is available on request, as are translation services. The offices are accessible to wheelchair users and there are disabled toilet facilities. Some temporary accommodation is also suitable for wheelchair users. Officers also undertake visits to people at home or hospital if they are unable to attend the offices. The Council has established a member led "Equalities Working Group", as a response to the Race Relations Act, to develop an Equalities and Diversity Strategy and reviews of each Business Unit are being undertaken from April 2003 with Housing being within the first tranche of reviews.

The housing review indicates that, at present, only one service area will require a full impact assessment. The Choice Based Lettings policy has been subject to both an initial and an intermediate review and a full review has been programmed following implementation.

The Council have a Corporate Target to reach the Equality Standard Level 3 by 2007.

Housing providers in the district are monitored by the local authority and Housing Corporation in the case of Registered Social Landlords. Service Level Agreements are in place to ensure both equality of access and service provision. Racial Harassment Policies are a requirement.

Managing Risk

The Housing Department are represented on the Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel to manage the risk of harm which may be posed by serious ex-offenders residing in the community. There is also a Sharing of Information of Protocol which provides appropriate staff, and other agencies, with a list of people where it has been demonstrated that there is a risk of violence.

The Housing Department is currently reviewing the Emergency Plan following a fire which affected 12 properties. The existing plan worked well, but there are simple, cost effective improvements which have been identified as a result of the emergency.

A group has been convened to draft a corporate policy for lone workers and the Support and Resettlement Officer is taking part in this work.

Statistical Information

1. Actual Figures

Analysis of Statistical Information

(P.I.E. Annual Returns for 2000/2001, 2001/2002, 2002/2003 and 2003/2004)

1.1 Total Number of Decisions

	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
No. of Decisions	1065	968	944	1101
No. of Acceptances	170	151	188	206

These figures show the total number of homeless decisions made over the previous 4 years. The numbers may appear to be high in comparison to other shire districts and this may be due to WDC recording all approaches from homeless and potentially homeless people.

1.2

Ethnic Breakdown	2000/2001		2001/2002		2002/2003		2003/2004	
	Accepted	Not Accepted	Accepted	Not Accepted	Accepted	Not Accepted	Accepted	Not Accepted
White	153	802	126	661	166	641	180	774
African/ Caribbean	-	13	1	14	4	13	0	22
Indian/ Pakistani Bangladeshi	5	24	3	20	4	19	4	33
Other	6	36	10	45	8	62	19	53
Not Available	6	20	11	77	6	21	3	13
Total	170	895	151	817	188	756	206	895

1.3 Further Detail of Accepted Households

Priority Need within Household	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
Household with dependant children	87	91	94	115
Household member pregnant with no other children	20	22	25	37
Household member vulnerable due to:- Old Age	10	8	6	1
Physical Disability	10	5	14	6
Mental ill Health	22	15	17	21
Young Person	7	7	2	10
Threat of violence/violence	8	1	17	6
Having been in 'care'			2	1
Having served in HM Forces			1	-
Having been in custody/ on remand			3	
Other Special Reason	5		5	4
Homeless in an Emergency	1	2	2	5
Total	170	151	188	206

- The main priority category for homeless people is clearly families with children, closely followed by people expecting a child.
- Mental ill health is also a significant feature.

Reason for Homelessness	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/1004
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	41	26	31	60
Other relatives or friends unwilling to accommodate	8	7	14	16
Breakdown of relationship - Violent	18	25	22	13
Breakdown of relationship - Non-violent	14	9	12	15
Mortgage Arrears	5	4	2	3
Rent Arrears LA/RSL/Private	2	2	0	3
Loss of Rented or Tied Accommodation	15	13	25	18
Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	31	30	36	31
Leaving Care/Institution	9	10	4	6
Other: (including Rough Sleeping / Returning from Abroad/ Emergency/Form of Violence)	27	25	42	41
Total	170	151	188	206

- The primary cause of homelessness continues to be family and friends no longer willing or able to provide accommodation and this figure gives some indication of “hidden homelessness”.
- Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies has also shown as a principal cause of homelessness, which has increased with their use.
- The number of relationship breakdowns involving violence is significant but very low in comparison to the statistical information held by the Police.

1.4 **Further Details of Households Not Accepted**

	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
Not Homeless	687	706	510	612
Not in Priority Need	205	105	239	276
Intentionally Homeless	3	2	4	1
Not Eligible	-	4	3	6
Total	895	817	756	895

- The high number of applicants who are not homeless have been offered advice and assistance dependent on their housing circumstances.
- Applicants may not be eligible for consideration within homeless legislation depending on their immigration status.

2. Trends in Homelessness

The trends in homelessness have been examined to establish current need and to try to estimate future demands. The homelessness statistics contain a breakdown of the number of applicants, ethnicity, gender, age, family size and the decisions that have been made on the homeless claim.

This analysis concentrated on applicants who were found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need between January 2000 and September 2002. The analysis was produced using "Winchart" Statistical Process Control Software.

Many of the numbers within the breakdown were too small to provide useful information to denote specific trends and it has been necessary to incorporate them. Consequently, there are only two ethnic groups "White" and "Other than White Ethnicity", and applications where the ethnicity was not available have not been included in the specific groups.

Projected Homelessness Trends for applicants who are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need			
Average Number of Applications	High	Low	Average Annual Number
Per Year	196	145	171
Ethnic Breakdown			
	High	Low	Average Annual Number
White	173	125	149
Other than White	23	7	15

	High	Low	Average per Year
Females under 25 years	53	27	40
Females over 25 years	84	52	68
Males under 25 years	22	7	14
Males over 25 years	63	35	49
Couple with one child	31	13	22
Single parent	48	24	36
One person household	40	15	25

These figures show the average, anticipated numbers and the full analysis shows a relatively flat trend. However, there are monthly peaks and troughs, which do not follow any reasonable or understandable pattern, and these can place short term pressures on the system.

The figures for the types of household have not changed over the period which was studied so this trend also remains stable.

Full report appendix no. 4

3. **Properties**

3.1 Local Authority Housing Properties (30th September 2004) Total 5758
Statistical breakdown, area and property type - see attached.

3.2 Registered Social Landlord (RSL) properties within this district Total (awaiting total Jephson)

Statistical breakdown by Association

Housing Association	No. of Properties
Jephson Housing Group	Awaiting Jephson
Orbit Housing Association	1163
Touchstone	84
Warwickshire Rural H.A.	77
Servite Houses	134
Bromford Housing Group	376
Focus Housing Group	8
Raglan Housing Association	22
Ashram Group	17
Total	Awaiting total

3.3 **Right to Buy**

1981 - 2004 3,929 Council properties have been sold under the Right to Buy legislation.

3.4 **New Developments**

The following numbers of new properties are currently being planned:-

Servite	162
Orbit	114
Jephson	110
Bromford	117
Warwickshire Rural	32
Total	535

3.5 Number of Applicants on the Housing Register

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total Households on Register at 1 April	1510	1612	1597	2015	1897	2200
Requiring up to 2 Bedrooms				1470	1281	1633
Requiring up to 3 Bedrooms				444	429	460
Requiring more than 3 Bedrooms				101	169	107

4. Nominations to RSLs

- 4.1 A Common Registration Scheme operates in this district with all affordable housing providers using the same list for both new applicants and transfer requests. Assessment criteria only differs in two elements in that the local authority only accept applicants who have been resident in the area for a period of 6 months, or travel more than 15 miles into the area to work.

There are nomination agreements in place as follows:-

Jephson Housing Group	50%
Orbit Housing Association	50%
Touchstone	-
Warwickshire Rural H.A.	In accordance with Local Lettings Plans.
Servite Houses	-
Bromford Housing Group	100%
Focus Housing Group	-
Raglan Housing Association	-

The applicant at the top of the Housing Register is put forward following a nomination request with the top 5 applicants being referred when a vacancy occurs that is not subject to nomination restrictions.

In reality, most RSL's allow 100% of lettings from the Common Housing Register as some do not have local offices or hold their own waiting lists.

5. Lettings for 1st April 2001 - 31st March 2004.

5.1 Local Authority Lettings

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Total Dwellings Let	745	680	699	366	460	412

5.2 RSL Lettings

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Total RSL Lettings	201	199	201	196	264	242
Households taking up LA nominations to RSL Dwellings	123	144	190	181	232	152

5.3 Lettings to Homeless

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Total LA Dwellings let to homeless households in priority need	186	182	111	103	119	124

6. Private Sector

A Private Sector House Condition Survey was conducted in 1997 which determined that overall a total of 2.3% private stock was unfit. This equated to 1,261 dwellings. A further survey is now being undertaken using a larger sample size.

Houses in multiple occupation (HIMO's) are the largest source of poor housing and the Council are aware of 600 HIMO's in the district, together with a further 600 or so student properties which do not fall within this definition.

A Landlord Accreditation Scheme has been devised to address this problem.