

# Homelessness Strategy 2011-2014

## Executive Summary

### 1 Introduction

Homelessness is more than just not having a roof over ones head. The effect that homelessness has over someone's life is detrimental; it can affect their health, employment, learning and whole well being. Therefore, it is of key importance that Wolverhampton has a robust strategy that works to develop services to prevent homelessness and assist those who are in housing need.

This is Wolverhampton's third homelessness strategy (previous strategies published in 2003 and 2007) and possibly one of the most difficult to develop, with the current financial situation leading to a possible national increase in homelessness.

The strategy in fact is being launched at a time of significant economic difficulty and rigorous cuts to the public and voluntary sector, which could lead to a decrease in services set against an increase in demand. All of which have made this strategy about making best use of existing resources and delivering services that are value for money.

### 2 Development of the strategy

The process of producing the 2011 Homelessness Strategy is similar to the development of the two previous strategies. The development involved consulting with partner organisations, service users and using data (both local and national) to produce a plan of how we will work to prevent homelessness and work with people in housing need for the next three years.

As a result of this work we have been able to assess the:

- **National homelessness context;** including the numbers of people presenting, the numbers being accepted as homeless and the main national causes for concern;
- **Local Homelessness context;** including presentations, acceptances, causes and the local demography of homelessness.

Both the local and national information will enable us to highlight trends and gaps in services with a goal to shaping future service provision.

## What has been achieved so far?

The two previous homelessness strategies brought about changes in the way that homelessness was dealt with in the City.

The clear theme through the previous strategies has been prevention and sustainment. Examples include:

- The implementation of a joint protocol to work with 16-17 year olds in need of advice and/or housing. The protocol links housing providers and social services for children and families in order to offer an alternative to the statutory homelessness route.
- The introduction of a sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic abuse to allow them to remain in their home using security and support.
- The introduction of a prevention officer to implement a variety of homeless prevention alternatives.
- The development of a housing options service from the former homeless services unit. The service looks to offer (alongside the statutory homeless provision) housing advice, mortgage rescue assistance, private rented sector assistance and home visits.
- The production of a 'Move-On' guide to offer information to households moving on from temporary accommodation thus preventing repeat homelessness.
- Development of a domestic abuse advice line.

A large amount of work that has been undertaken could only have been completed with the assistance of our partner agencies. The development of a variety of multi agency forums and groups has enabled us to reduce the numbers of statutory homelessness applications.

## Gaps and emerging trends

It is likely that we are about to experience some of the most difficult times in relation to homelessness and households in housing need.

The increase in the numbers of households experiencing financial difficulties will need to be factored in to any future work related to homelessness. However we will still continue to have households who experience homelessness unrelated to the economic recession.

- **New Migrant Homelessness:** Households who have been through a variety of migration processes are often some of the most complex to work with. Due to their immigration status, the nature of their homelessness and their basic needs, new migrant homelessness is one of the only increasing groups.
- **Households with Complex needs:** The largest group of households who are placed in inappropriate temporary accommodation is that of people with complex needs. People who have mental health problems, substance misuse issues or a background of offending often have to be placed in bed and breakfast due to their exclusion from supported accommodation.
- **Move On accommodation:** Over the last three years, large steps have been made to increase the numbers of move on units for people experiencing homelessness. Though the development of a private sector bond scheme we have assisted over 100 households into private sector properties over the last three years. However, even with the work of the rent bond scheme, there is estimated to be a short fall of over 100 units for people moving on from temporary accommodation.
- **Increase in use of temporary accommodation:** Even with the large amount of prevention work that has been undertaken, over the last 3 years we have seen an increase in the use of temporary accommodation. Wolverhampton had been on track to achieve the national 50% reduction target however since April 2010 we have seen an increase in usage.

It is of key importance that we put services and plans in place to address these gaps and trends. All of which will be set within the Action Plan (Appendix 1).

## 5 Summary and Conclusion

The two previous strategies highlighted that joint working is the only way to achieve the set targets and achieve our goal. This strategy is the same with the emphasis on involving more non housing related services in helping to prevent homelessness.

The delivery of housing related services has gone from strength to strength over the last three years, with new and innovative projects offering both support to assist the sustainment of vulnerable households in their own home and specialist accommodation for those in housing need.

Even with all of these new and established services we still find ourselves in a position where people are in emergency housing need and require assistance therefore we have identified four key areas that need to be addressed through this strategy;

- New Migrant Homelessness
- Households with Complex Needs
- Increase in Move On Accommodation
- Reduction in use of Temporary Accommodation

As well as the four key areas identified above, it is also vital that we make the best possible use of existing services and resources as any new funding will be scarce. Therefore in order to achieve successful outcomes in relation to this strategy and reduce homelessness, we must work smarter and more efficiently.

## Key Facts about Wolverhampton

The following is an overview of Wolverhampton's profile:

- Wolverhampton is located on the western side of the West Midlands conurbation. After receiving City status in 2000-01 it became the smallest city in the region, behind Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke.
- It has a population of 236,300 people of which make up 97,122 households.
- It covers 27 sq miles and is one of the most densely populated areas in England with nearly 9000 residents per sq mile.
- Over 27% of the population are from a BME background and it is estimated that over 40 different languages are spoken in the City.
- It is currently one of the most socially deprived areas in England. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2007, Wolverhampton is the 28<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the country. It also has 2 wards which are in the top 1% of the country's most deprived areas.
- The number of people claiming benefit in relation to unemployment is one of the highest in the UK with there being over 8.2% of the population claiming Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) in early 2009. Between Sept 2008 and Sept 09 the numbers of claimants claiming JSA increased by over 4000 meaning that Wolverhampton has one of the highest rates in the UK.
- Over 30% of Wolverhampton's employed residents are employed in some form of public service (compared to 43% nationally), with a further 20% (compared to 11% nationally) employed within service industries like catering.
- Health deprivation in the city is high. Wolverhampton finds itself in the bottom 20% of all local authorities for life expectancy rates and is nearly 2 years behind the national average.
- In relation to housing, the council owns over 22% of all dwellings in the City (around 24,000) with over 20% in receipt of some form of housing related benefit.
- In 08-09 there were over 4,400 households on the council housing register. With the introduction of choice based lettings in 09-10 this rose to almost 13,000.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Homelessness is far more than just a housing issue and can have an adverse effect on every part of a person's life. The impact on their health, potential to learn and gain employment is all greatly reduced by homelessness and its effects.

According to the Homelessness Charity 'Crisis', the average life expectancy of someone who is street homeless is almost halved to 42 years of age. They also estimate that around 1 in 10 of the adult population will be affected by homelessness in some way; either by experiencing it first hand or through accommodating family members who are in housing need.

Therefore, reducing homelessness has been made a key objective by the current and previous governments. This is evidenced in the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 which made having a homelessness strategy a statutory requirement for local authorities.

It was stipulated that these strategies must include actions that:

- Prevent Homelessness
- Ensure that there is sufficient accommodation available for households who experience homelessness
- Ensure there is support available for households that are at risk of homelessness

This is Wolverhampton's third Homelessness Strategy and has been developed at a key time. As the country goes through major economic upheaval it is estimated that the numbers experiencing or being affected by homelessness will begin to increase. However, this must be off-set against the economic difficulty also faced by the public and voluntary sector that is also likely to experience rigorous funding cuts.

## 1.2 Strategic Links

Wolverhampton's Homelessness Strategy fits into a group of strategic documents that look to plan the future development of the City.

The city's overarching [Sustainable Communities Strategy](#) describes a vision for how Wolverhampton will be in 2026 and what needs to change in the meantime. The City Council's Corporate Plan [Focus on the Future](#) sets out what the local authority will do to ensure Wolverhampton's citizens get a good service.

They ask that we make sure the services we deliver are customer focused, accessible, high quality and offer value for money, whilst making Wolverhampton a City "*where people can thrive*".

This target of looking to create opportunity and to include rather than to exclude is no more evident than in the services that have been put in place over the last 5 years to assist households who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Due to the complex nature of homelessness, the homeless strategy will feed into a number of other strategic documents, including:

- Housing Strategy
- Crime and Safety Strategies
- Mental Health Strategy
- Children and Young People's Plan
- City Centre Strategy.

The strategic document that will link the homelessness strategy into the wider plans is the Wolverhampton Housing Support and Social Inclusion Strategy (HSSIS).

The main focus of the HSSIS is to show how we will meet the needs of vulnerable people and enable them to gain and maintain independence, this includes homeless people.

The HSSIS looks to deliver on five key areas for households in Wolverhampton. The outcomes that it is set to achieve against are making sure that people can:

- achieve economic well being
- stay safe
- be healthy
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution

Linking in to the HSSIS will help raise the profile of homelessness beyond just a housing issue.

## 2 Development of the Strategy

### 2.1 Background research

To develop an effective homelessness strategy we must be aware of current local and national issues related to homelessness and housing need. Therefore through a number of forums and assessment tools we have managed to assess the current situation in Wolverhampton.

To develop the two previous other homelessness strategies we concentrated on the local effects of homelessness. However, it became very clear early on that for this strategy we had to look at homelessness more widely.

### 2.2 National Context

Homelessness affects and ruins the lives of adults and children across the country. It is far from just being a housing issue; people who are homeless often suffer greater levels of ill health, unemployment and drug and alcohol dependency and in the case of children lower levels of educational attainment due to prolonged unavoidable absence.

Examples of these large scale inequalities nationally are

- 1 in 5 homeless people suffer from mental health problems.
- The suicide rates of homeless people are 34 times greater than the population as a whole.
- 80% of street homeless people are addicted to drugs or alcohol.
- Homeless children in temporary accommodation miss on average 11 weeks of schooling.
- 440 individuals have been highlighted as rough sleepers therefore will be sleeping on the streets at any given day.
- Life expectancy of someone street homeless is 42.
- Rough sleepers are 13 times more likely to be a victim of violent crime.
- 77% of Households who are within homeless temporary accommodation (hostels, refuge etc) are not in any form of paid employment.

It is for these reasons that nationally there has been a commitment to reduce homelessness and completely end rough sleeping.



## 2.3 National Homelessness Data

Over the last three years, large strides have been made to prevent homelessness and work with households who are at risk of homelessness. The previous Government introduced a number of priorities that, if worked on, would reduce homelessness and maintain that reduction.

Priority	National Achievement (2007-10)
Increase the numbers of recorded homeless prevention cases on the previous year	Number of prevention cases increased by 30% over the last 3 years (2007-2010)
Decrease the use of bed and breakfast and maintain that families are in no longer than six weeks	Reduced by 60%
Reduce repeat homelessness	Number of overall homelessness cases reduced by 20%
Raise awareness of the cause and effect of homelessness	Every Local Authority in England now has a homelessness strategy
Reduce homelessness against the main causes	Number of overall homelessness cases reduced by 20%
Reduce the numbers of homeless acceptances through improved advice and prevention	Acceptances reduced since 2007 by 20,000
Keep rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible	Official rough sleeping figures now at all time low of 440
Increase the amount of suitable move on accommodation	2010 Government commitment to increase number of affordable housing units

Each Local Authority over the last 10 years has submitted homelessness data. The data highlights the national reduction in the presentations, acceptances and households in temporary accommodation through the work by local authorities and partner agencies

National Homelessness Data				
Year	Decisions	Acceptances	Resident in Temporary accommodation	Street Homelessness
2007-08	138,040	65,060	334,270	483
2008-09	117,460	57,520	292,410	464
2009-10	93,600	42,110	234,520	440

The main reason for the reduction in homelessness has been the rise in awareness and prevention. Since 2008, Local authorities in England have recorded nearly 300,000 cases of homelessness prevention.

## 2.4 Local Context

Since 2007, Wolverhampton's response to homelessness has been very much centred on joint working. It became clear with the first strategy in 2003 that the task of reducing homelessness would require us to work at increasing levels of prevention and increasing housing options.

As a result, in Wolverhampton we have seen the levels of homelessness reduce in 2009/10 to our lowest in 10 years.

## 2.5 Homelessness Presentations

On average, each year between 2,500-3,000 households approach the City Council and are interviewed as at risk of homelessness by the Housing Options Team. The vast majority of these households are assisted via some form of housing advice and therefore do not require a homeless application.

Wolverhampton Housing Options Team			
	Initial Presentations	Housing Advice Referral	Homeless Applications
2006-07	2640	1123	1517
2007-08	2633	1391	1238
2008-09	2693	1627	1058
2009-10	2978	2019	959

## 2.6 Homeless Acceptances

As the number of Homeless applications has decreased, so has the number of households who have been accepted and therefore given some form of housing duty.

Wolverhampton Housing Options Team		
	Accepted homeless applications (Full Homeless duty)	Accepted Homeless applications (Other housing duty)
2006-07	583	386
2007-08	434	348
2008-09	422	274
2009-10	325	272

On average 40% of all accepted homeless applications are given a full homelessness duty due to their vulnerability (dependent children, pregnant female, victims of violence) in line with homelessness legislation.

## 2.6 Causes of Homelessness

Although applications and acceptances have decreased, the main causes of homelessness have remained the same.

- Parent, family or friend no longer wishing to accommodate
- Domestic Violence (friends and family eviction)
- Loss of accommodation due to the end of an Assured Short-hold Tenancy

Over the last five years these three causes have made up 67% of all homeless applications locally and 70% nationally.

Cause Of Homelessness	National Average 05-10 (%)	Local Average 05-10 (%)
Parent, family or friend no longer wishing to accommodate	29%	28%
Domestic Abuse	19%	21%
End of assured shorthold tenancy	19%	18%
Financial Homelessness	11%	10%
Refugee status granted	2%	8%
Homeless due to discharge	3%	4%
Other	14%	7%

Other new causes over the last 12 months have tended to emerge such as financial homeless and homelessness related to migration; however the top three causes have continually made up the vast percentage of homeless cases.

- **Friend and family eviction** - the largest cause of homelessness is friends and family asking a household to leave. It is the single highest reason for homelessness both locally and nationally and between 2005 and 2010, 29% of all homeless applications were homeless due to this reason.

Although over the last three years we have seen a reduction in the number of cases of friend and family eviction this still equates on average to 100 accepted cases a year which range from parental eviction to a lodging friend being asked to leave.

- **Domestic Abuse** - Unlike many areas, Wolverhampton has Domestic Abuse (DA) as the second largest cause of homelessness and for many years had DA as the main cause.

Year	Number of DA homeless applications
09-10	52
08-09	89
07-08	111

Since 2008-09 we have seen a reduction in the numbers of applications from victims of domestic abuse, which can be off-set by the increase in the number of victims accessing other more preventative services including our Safe Home sanctuary scheme. In the last three years 166 households have been assisted via the scheme, which installs security measures and provides support to enable the victim to remain in their home.

There has also been an increase in the number of people accessing the specialist domestic violence floating support. Wolverhampton's domestic violence floating support service saw an increase in the amount of households receiving support (in 2008 180 households' accessed support however in 2009, 208 households accessed the support). This highlights that there are now more choices for victims of DA other than having to leave behind their support network of family and friends, employment and education.

- **End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)** - The ending of a tenancy in the private sector is often due to no fault of either the landlord or the tenant and in the current financial climate the landlord is often forced to end the tenancy.

The number of cases applying as homeless due to the end of their AST has reduced significantly over the last 2 years from 73 cases in 08-09 to only 28 cases in 09-10.

On average the city council's private sector tenancy support officers carry a case load of 30 and often deal with 2 – 3 basic interventions a day and are key to preventing homelessness in the private sector.

Focussing on delivering a reduction in homelessness against these three main causes would enable a positive impact in the all round reduction of homelessness across the City.

## **2.7 Local Homelessness Demography**

Homelessness can happen to anyone regardless of age, household type, ethnic origin or gender. However there are certain specific groups that tend to be more prone to experience homelessness within their life.

### 2.7.1 Age

According our local homelessness data, the most likely age group to experience homelessness is those between 24 and 35 years of age. Over 100 households each year in this group will have homeless applications taken.

Age range	Population of Wolverhampton %	percentage of homeless applications between 2007-10
Under 16	20%	N/A
16-17	5%	1%
18-25	15%	36%
<b>24-35</b>	<b>Not Available</b>	<b>48%</b>
26-54	33%	60%
55+	27%	2%

Young people between the ages of 16 and 17 were previously some of the most affected by homelessness in Wolverhampton. In 2006 around 20% of all homelessness applications were from this age group. However, with the introduction of a young person centred housing service the numbers have reduced considerably.

### 2.7.2 Gender

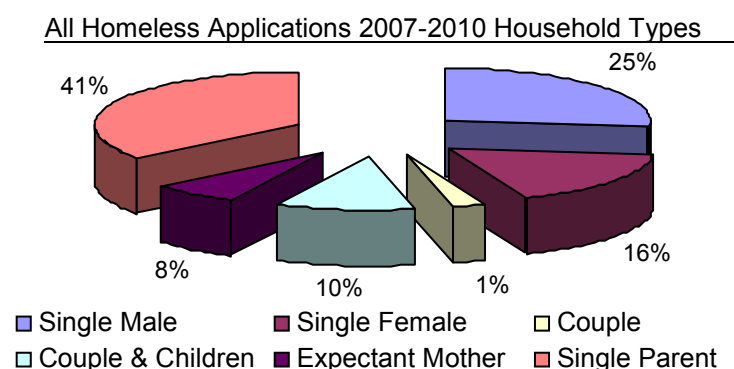
Men outnumber women in the City by over 2,900 (data from [Window on Wolverhampton WOW 2009](#)), however that is not the case in relation to homelessness. In relation to 'head of household' gender, the data tells us that females are far more likely to experience homelessness in Wolverhampton.

Total number of applications (over last three years)	Females	Male	Couple
3813	2716	988	109

The high percentage of females making homeless applications links to specific characteristics of cause of homelessness. For many years in Wolverhampton, domestic abuse has been a key reason for homelessness and though not only being a female issue, the largest numbers of reported incidents are against females therefore this would show a high number of recorded female homeless applicants.

### 2.7.3 Family Type

Presentations for homelessness assistance should not necessarily be linked to specific family groupings. However, in Wolverhampton there is an over representation of single parent families.



This over representation is made even more concerning when we consider the fact that only 8% of all households in Wolverhampton are lone/single parents. Any answer for the high level of lone parent homelessness would be purely anecdotal; however possible reasons are relationship breakdown and higher levels of poverty amongst lone parent families.

#### 2.7.4 Ethnic Origin

Other than Birmingham, Wolverhampton is the most ethnically diverse area within the West Midlands. According to Window On Wolverhampton data, 26% of people within Wolverhampton fall into a BME (Black Minority Ethnic) group.

On average, 40% of all homeless cases are BME households, over 14% higher than the percentage of the local BME population.

Ethnic origin	Percentage of homeless applications 2007-10
White (British European)	60%
Black Caribbean	7%
Asian Indian	5%
Mixed	6%
Asian Pakistan	2%
Black African	8%
Black other	2%
Other	10%

The reasons for BME homelessness are in most cases the same as the British White European population of the City.

However, there are high percentages of homelessness due to discharge from hospital (28%), domestic abuse (31%) and being given leave to remain via the asylum process.

Of the 69 homeless applications that were accepted in 09-10 due to leave to remain 41% were Middle Eastern, 38% African, 12% South-East Asian and 8% were Eastern European.

#### 2.8 Vulnerability

The large amount of households that approach the Local Authority as Homeless are defined using one of the priority group categories (e.g. dependent children, pregnant females, mental & physical health, age)

The table below highlights the main reasons for household vulnerability and the percentage of homelessness applications:

Reason for vulnerability	Percentage of applications 2007-10 Wolverhampton	Percentage of applications 2007-10 National
Dependent Children	64%	62%
Violence	16%	10%
Pregnancy	8%	10%
Mental & physical health	8%	9%
Age	2%	8%
Other	2%	1%

The specific vulnerable groups making homelessness applications in Wolverhampton is very similar to that of the national figures with the largest percentage being households with dependent children.

On average, in Wolverhampton, 450 children a year are part of homeless households. This number is of concern given the impact that homelessness has on the development of children later on in life (the national statistics highlight that young people who experience homelessness as children are 6 times more likely to experience homelessness as an adult).

In relation to violence, the numbers of households vulnerable due to violence is higher in Wolverhampton than the national average. However, this can be linked with Wolverhampton's above national average number of presentations due to domestic abuse.

Vulnerability due to pregnancy is comparable with the national average which is positive for an area which has one of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in England.

The average to low levels of homeless pregnant females has in part to be put down to specialist supported accommodation for young families. Services are commissioned in the city to support young households, often pregnant teenage females, and offer supported accommodation in order to prevent homelessness and further vulnerability.

Households with physical disabilities and mental ill-health are often some of the most complex and problematic if made homeless and with 8% of cases this equates to around 30 cases a year.

People with mental ill-health in particular often spend a longer period in temporary accommodation due to an inability to find suitable move on. People with mental ill-health often fail within general needs accommodation thus becoming homeless, often repeatedly, and are often less likely to complete the statutory application process and therefore be accommodated, due to the chaotic nature of their behaviour.

Finally, in relation to vulnerability due to age, Wolverhampton is below the national average. Vulnerability due to age is often related to two distinct characteristics (16-17 year olds and those aged 60+) and with the reduction of homelessness amongst 16-17 year olds and elderly homelessness only accounting for single figure cases, the numbers at present are not substantial.

### 3 What has been achieved so far?

The Homelessness Strategy 2007-10 made various changes to how homelessness was dealt with in Wolverhampton. It placed prevention as a key focus and highlighted that via multi agency working, many vulnerable people would not have to suffer the negative effects of homelessness.

#### 3.1 Prevention Achievements

The strategy highlighted the key drive towards reshaping homeless services into prevention services and this was highlighted most in the number of registered cases of homelessness prevention.

2009-10 Prevention Cases	
Method of prevention	Numbers of households where homelessness has been prevented
Multiple prevention	267
Financial prevention	40
Private Sector work	48
Accommodation Assistance	79
Other Prevention	76
Total	521

In 12 months, 521 households were registered as being assisted by some form of homelessness prevention.

The prevention work ranging from tenancy support /outreach to private sector mediation has successfully sustained households in their current accommodation.

##### 3.1.1 Other Homeless Prevention Achievements

Other prevention achievements include:

- The introduction of a sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic abuse to allow them to remain in their home using security and support.
- Introduction of an officer to work with owner occupiers who are at risk of repossession alongside a Citizens Advice Bureau debt advice officer.



- The implementation of a joint protocol to work with 16-17 year olds in need of advice and/or housing. The protocol links housing providers with children and families social services in order to seek an alternative to the statutory homelessness route.
- Introduction of a dedicated homeless prevention officer to work on multi tenure homelessness prevention. ( including access to a homelessness Prevention fund)

### **3.2 Accommodation Achievements**

The introduction of the Homeless Link Move-on Plan Protocol (MOPP) in 2007 allowed us for the first time to be able to assess the level of need for accommodation in Wolverhampton specifically for those moving on from supported or temporary accommodation. The MOPP highlighted that households within temporary accommodation were often staying longer due to a lack of available move on accommodation, a gap we have now been able to partially fill using the private sector.

#### **3.2.1 Other Accommodation Achievements**

Other accommodation achievements:

- The introduction of a successful rent bond guarantee scheme to allow households who would not normally have access to properties in the private sector. The Housing Options Team has implemented in excess of 100 bonds over three years with only a handful of failed tenancies.
- Implementation of supported emergency accommodation provision for young people using existing accommodation. The pilot project meant that rather than young people having to be placed in bed and breakfast they could be placed in one of three emergency units within a local authority scheme.
- The development of accommodation for those with complex needs. The scheme was developed in partnership with neighbouring authorities Walsall, Dudley and Birmingham has meant some of the region's most complex and vulnerable people have been accommodated successfully in a supported environment.
- Re-model of the council's allocation policy into a choice based lettings system which allows homeless people to have complete choice on where they live.
- Development of a single male direct access hostel provision into an assessment centre with second stage accommodation.

### **3.3 Advice and Support Achievements**

The development of accommodation and support for those who are homeless is nothing new in Wolverhampton. In fact, nearly 10 years ago floating support was and still is available for vulnerable people. However over the last three years, the units for support have increased to include support for those with complex needs and a history of exclusion.

### 3.3.1 Other Advice and Support Achievements

Other advice and support achievements:

- Introduction of a single point of contact for housing offenders.
- The remodelling of the previous homeless day centre into a HUB where advice is delivered and meaningful activities for homeless people are undertaken.
- The introduction of an advice line to offer victims of abuse confidential advice as well as support.
- The development of a contact and outreach team to work with chaotic rough sleepers and encourage them to engage with services and accommodation providers.

## 4 Gaps and Emerging Trends

A large number of changes have occurred both locally and nationally since the last strategy in 2007. This section identifies current gaps in service delivery and emerging trends that will need to be addressed through this strategy.

### 4.1 Financial Homelessness

The current national economic situation has meant that we have seen an increase in the number of households requesting assistance in relation to financial homelessness in particular related to mortgage repossession.

In June 2009 we introduced a Mortgage Rescue Officer to focus on preventing homelessness in the owner occupier sector. On average they have around 20 presentations a month of which between 6 and 13 become full mortgage rescue scheme (MRS) applications.

Month	Number of new Mortgage Rescue cases
March 10	13 cases
April 10	8 cases
June 10	8 cases
July 10	9 cases
Aug 10	6 cases
Sept 10	10 cases
Oct 10	12 cases
Nov 10	13 cases

At the same time as the number of MRS applications increased, the region's Citizens Advice Bureau also saw an increase to the point where over 9000 households approached the CAB with regards to housing related debt.

This increase in need led to the Local Authority working with the local CAB to introduce a CAB debt advisor into the Housing Options Team to work on

advising people on maximising income, prioritising debts and preventing homelessness. However, with the housing benefit reductions, an increasing number of repossessions and an increase in unemployment, the need to work with households at risk of homelessness due to a reduction in finance are likely to continue and possibly increase.

#### 4.1.1 Financial Homeless service : Priorities

- A need for more for more good quality housing related debt advice.
- A need to develop better links with the local citizens advice bureau, employment services and financial services ( local credit union, My Home Finance etc).
- More easy to read debt advice information.
- A need for better links between housing and employment services.

#### 4.2 New Migrant Homelessness

Reforms to migration policy in May 2004 led to the introduction of 8 new nations with a further 2 nations added 12 months later. This changes have recently begun to effect homelessness in the City. Whilst undertaking rough sleeper's counts, we have highlighted a small but significant number (between 8 and 10) from Eastern Europe.

These people, who are often single males, are problematic as they are unable to gain benefits and therefore are often unable to access accommodation and end up destitute.

Other less complex new migrants experiencing homelessness are households having to leave Home Office Accommodation. These are former asylum seekers who are given positive decisions on their asylum claim and therefore need to leave Home Office Accommodation but have nowhere else to go. The level of homelessness for those who have been given positive asylum decisions has increased over the last 12 months. The table below highlights the cases given leave to remain that have been accepted as homeless by the Local Authority.

Year	Former Asylum Seeking Households accepted as homeless
09-10	69
08-09	29
07-08	18

In part, this can be attributed to the [Case Resolution Programme](#) which sought to resolve asylum claims more quickly. This meant that large numbers of asylum claims were given a positive decision over a short space of time. This then led to these people having to leave their current accommodation and often becoming homeless as a result of having nowhere else to live.

#### **4.2.1 New Migrant Homeless : Priorities**

- Need better understanding and knowledge of the housing needs of new migrants.
- Need more information for new migrants on housing pathways.
- Need a developed protocol for working with migrants who may have limited housing pathways.

#### **4.3 Households with complex needs (mental health, substance misuse offending etc)**

Households that have complex needs are often problematic in relation to homelessness and a requirement for specialist assistance is often needed.

It is understood that the statutory homeless process is not ideal for people whose needs are complex. It is often more appropriate to involve services with specialist skills to assist in meeting complex individuals' accommodation and support needs rather than just addressing their accommodation needs through the normal homelessness process.

On average, the highest numbers of placements in emergency accommodation are from people with complex needs; between 2007-10 around 70% of all placements in emergency accommodation were households with complex needs. These placements were often due to short notification of their homelessness, breakdown of tenancy or discharge from an institution or due to the lack of suitable available accommodation.

#### **4.3.1 Households with complex needs: Priorities**

- Need protocols with housing providers, mental health services, substance misuse services and offender services on access to emergency accommodation.
- A need for more accommodation for people with complex needs.
- A need for better links between complex needs support providers and the statutory housing services to assist the homeless prevention of households with complex needs.

#### 4.4 Move -on Accommodation

Over the last three years whilst undertaking our move-on audits we have highlighted gaps in move-on accommodation for households leaving temporary accommodation.

Date	Number of move On units estimated	Number of actual	Gap in units
07-08	140	43	97
08-09	156	58	98
09-10	152	51	101

The need for move-on has in previous years been absorbed by local authority housing. However, with a reduction in housing stock to about 24,000 properties, (20% of all Wolverhampton dwellings) local authority housing can no longer be the main choice for households experiencing homelessness.

The private sector is seen as an ideal alternative to meet the gap in move-on and tentative steps have been made to utilise the private sector. The Council's Rent Bond Scheme accommodates on average 30 households a year, however that only works out to about 1% of all households moving on.

##### 4.4.1 Move- on accommodation: Priorities

- A need for more work to develop the use of the private sector as a housing option for households at risk of homelessness.
- Need a system of sourcing private accommodation for the use of accommodating households in housing need.
- Need specialist staff dedicated to moving people on from temporary accommodation.
- Need better links between housing providers to enable access to move on accommodation for homeless households.

#### 4.5 Increase in use of temporary accommodation

The use of emergency / local authority temporary accommodation has been incredibly problematic over the last three years. Since 2007-08 the numbers of households placed in temporary accommodation has been incredibly sporadic.

Date	Number of placements in local authority temporary accommodation on 31 <sup>st</sup> March
31.03.08	32
31.03.09	37
31.03.10	41

Even with the increased levels of prevention and reduction in applications, the numbers of placements in local authority temporary accommodation have increased.

The impact that temporary accommodation can have on a household is incredibly negative. Children missing school and families being away from support networks and the general isolation are common factors even for households in the most supportive temporary accommodation.

One plus side has been that the length of stay within temporary accommodation has remained relatively static with 90% of statutory homeless cases being in temporary accommodation for less than 6 months.

#### **4.5.1 Increase in use of Temporary Accommodation : Priorities**

- The need for a better understanding of the placement of households in temporary accommodation and reasons for placements in temporary accommodation.
- The need for more viable alternatives to a placement in temporary accommodation.

## **5 Summary and Conclusion**

Homelessness is more than just about a person being in housing need. The impact that homelessness has on a household's health, ability to remain in employment and maintain social networks is significant.

Wolverhampton is highlighted as a prime area for homelessness, given the high levels of unemployment, high level of benefit dependency and other social factors. However over the last few years we have started to see a marked decrease in the levels of homelessness across the City. The preventative work of services across the City has meant that large numbers of people have been able to avoid homelessness.

Preventative work is now a key driver for all homeless services and where possible prevention and sustainment are at the heart of all services that work with households at risk of homelessness.

This strategy identifies that even with the preventative work already in place, the following four key areas still need to be addressed in order to reduce homelessness further:

- New migrant homelessness.
- Use of temporary accommodation.
- Move-on accommodation.
- Homeless households with complex needs.

These are all factors which, if not addressed, are likely to mean a return to previous years where over 1,500 households were accepted as statutorily homeless.

The only way that homelessness can be dealt with is via multi agency working and by all partners sharing a common goal. We have over the last three years been successful in reducing the numbers of households experiencing homelessness, but this work needs to continue and increase to respond to the changing needs of the city.

The ethos of joint working has never been more important than now, with the effect of having to make financial savings and a possible increase in households experiencing homelessness these will be very difficult times.

We are however very fortunate to have some exceptional housing related services in Wolverhampton and we will need those services more than ever over the next three years in order to successfully deliver the requirements of this strategy.