

Helping Homeless People

Homelessness Monitoring Group Report – March 2008

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FOREWORD

No one should be homeless in a modern and prosperous Scotland. We welcome this report from the Homelessness Monitoring Group which tracks progress towards the 2012 homelessness target to abolish priority need, giving all unintentionally homeless people the right to permanent accommodation.

The target is ambitious. The report indicates areas of good progress but reveals we still have a way to travel. Some local authorities face significant challenges; however, we remain committed to 2012 and to working together in partnership to ensure that delivery is managed and sustainable.

Our Concordat reflects the shared commitment by the Scottish Government and local government to achieve national and local priorities. Our working relationship is based on mutual respect and partnership. This relationship should lead to significant benefits for all users of local services, including homeless people, across Scotland. To meet 2012 we need to continue to work collaboratively by using the collective powers, assets, resources, skills and creativity of all partners – including local and central government, housing associations, community planning partners and the health and voluntary sectors. The range of partners involved demonstrates the complexity of homelessness and the response required to prevent and tackle it.

We would like to thank the Monitoring Group for their report which is a valuable assessment of evidence on local authorities' capacity to meet the 2012 target. We also welcome the publication of the report of the 2012 Homelessness Support Project. This independent study, undertaken by two local authority homelessness strategy officers and sponsored by ALACHO, COSLA and the Scottish Government, reports on local authorities' own views about their support needs and readiness to meet 2012. We have been impressed by the level of commitment from those who participated in the project, and the commitment from the people in our communities who provide homelessness services.

Together these two reports help inform our strategic planning for delivery of the 2012 target.

STEWART MAXWELL MSP
Minister for Communities

CLLR HARRY McGUIGAN
COSLA Spokesperson for Community
Wellbeing and Safety

HOMELESSNESS MONITORING GROUP REPORT – MARCH 2008

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Introduction

1. The Homelessness Monitoring Group was formed in autumn 2007 by the Minister for Communities and Sport with the following revised remit:

- Assess progress against the five top-level outcomes for homeless people including, where relevant, progress against the Homelessness Task Force recommendations.
- Consider the implications for future progress and provide strategic advice on policy delivery to the Minister for Communities and Sport.
- Assess progress against the 2012 target and capacity for further progress.
- Report to Scottish Ministers in 2007/08 on these areas.

2. The five top-level outcomes are as set by the previous Homelessness Monitoring Group and reported on by local authorities through the current monitoring framework of local outcome agreements and progress reports. These are:

- No-one need sleep rough;
- Existing homelessness is made more visible;
- Sustainable resettlement is secured for people who become homeless;
- Fewer people become homeless in the first place; and
- The duration of homelessness is reduced.

3. Membership of the Group is attached at Annex A.

4. The content of this report is directly informed by local authorities' local outcome agreements and progress reports for 2006/07; national official homelessness and housing statistics; the findings of the ALACHO/Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Homelessness Support Project (referred to hereafter as the 2012 Homelessness Support Project); the findings of Communities Scotland's independent inspections programme, as exercised under regulatory powers in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001; alongside members' own knowledge and feedback from the organisations they represent. Where other specific research or analytical work has informed sections of the report this is highlighted in the text.

5. Given that it is now six years since the Homelessness Task Force's final report was published this report reflects on the current situation taking into account progress that has been made in that time to ensure good levels of services are provided to homeless people while also planning to meet future targets and responding to broader contextual change. The report focuses particularly on activity in 2006/07 and identifying the key challenges to be addressed in progressing the top-level outcomes and achieving the 2012 target.

6. In line with our remit, this report does not track progress against each and every Task Force recommendation but focuses on those directly relevant to the top-level outcomes and the 2012 target.

Changed context

7. Since the Task Force reported, a number of major changes have taken place which have radically altered the landscape against which public and voluntary agencies deliver services to homeless people. Some of these have come about as a result of implementation of the Task Force's recommendations; others concern the broader context within which the recommendations are now being taken forward.

The Government's Purpose

8. The Government's Purpose: "to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable growth", published in November 2007, has been set out in the Government Economic Strategy¹. A set of targets support delivery of the Purpose and define the characteristics of sustainable economic growth across Scotland.

Relationship between Local and National Government

9. The Scottish Government and COSLA have also agreed a Concordat² setting out the terms of a new relationship between national and local government and encompassing a new outcomes focused National Performance Framework. Each part of the National Framework is directed towards, and contributes to, the Government's Purpose. A central element of the new relationship is the creation of a Single Outcome Agreement between each Council and the Government based on 15 mutually agreed national outcomes and reflecting established corporate and community plan commitments across local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships.

10. The national outcomes are supported by a set of 45 national indicators and targets developed by the Government to track progress towards outcomes; indicator 22 is that all unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012.

11. The Concordat underpins the funding to be provided from the Scottish Government to local government over the period 2008/09 to 2010/11. The number of separate funding streams will be reduced substantially, with ring-fences around homelessness and housing support funding amongst those being removed. Single Outcome Agreements will set out the outcomes each local authority is seeking to achieve, determined by the national outcomes and local needs and circumstances. Performance reporting at the end of the financial year will also be streamlined with submission of one report setting out progress and achievements. COSLA and the

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/12115041/0>

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/923/0054147.pdf>

Scottish Government are putting in place arrangements to oversee and monitor the new working relationship.

Service development and delivery

12. Since 2002 there have been a number of further broad changes which have impacted on the way in which homelessness and related services are delivered in Scotland. For example, there have been fundamental changes in the organisation of health services and a significant strengthening of strategic approaches to ensuring the health needs of homeless people are identified and met. In line with national guidance all Health Boards adopted Health and Homelessness Action Plans in April 2002. A Health and Homelessness Steering Group consisting of representatives from the homeless voluntary sector, the NHS, local government and the Scottish Executive provided support to this period of development for the NHS. This momentum culminated in the development of the Health and Homelessness Standards which all Boards began implementing from April 2005. The Standards are at the centre of the commitment to improve the health of homeless people and are a key element in achieving the holistic approach recommended by the Task Force.

13. Elsewhere, an employability framework has been developed and Community Justice Authorities have been established. The Scottish Government has also published Firm Foundations – a discussion document on the future of housing in Scotland³. The Welfare Reform agenda at a UK level may also have a significant impact on benefits issues relevant to homelessness services and developments in this area are discussed further in Section 2.

14. Where specifically relevant to achieving the top-level outcomes or the 2012 target, these developments will be referenced directly in the remainder of this report. However they are also relevant more broadly for those planning and delivering services for homeless people.

15. Broader societal changes are also likely to be relevant – demographic changes such as the increased number of single person households and inward migration from Eastern Europe are already having an impact on the delivery of services for homeless people. Other factors such as climate change and the ‘credit crunch’ could potentially have a very significant impact in the future.

Joint working

16. Homelessness strategies have been in place in all local authorities for a number of years, as required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, with most authorities now looking to revise these. The process of developing and agreeing strategies has helped to drive partnership working, innovative approaches, inter-service protocols and improved commissioning processes and arrangements, as indicated by the findings of the 2012 Homelessness Support Project.

17. Strategies have provided a framework for increased local joint working, as evidenced through the local outcome agreements and progress reports. All

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/10/30153156/0>

authorities report the establishment of fora to develop and implement their strategy and often these include subgroups considering specific issues, such as the development of a Common Housing Register or an integrated assessment process. In addition most authorities made reference to networking opportunities for front-line practitioners and broader events held to bring partners together throughout the year.

18. Joint training events are also common as are service level agreements and protocols that have been put in place with partners. There is also recognition of the importance of the voluntary sector and the need to support the sector to ensure its full participation. Several authorities reported that there is an increased focus on homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment across the range of partners and that this is reflected in community planning and Alcohol and Drug Action Team planning, for example.

19. One particular example of unprecedented levels of cross sector working has been the Glasgow hostels reprovisioning programme which has had a major impact on addressing homelessness in the city (accounting for a fifth of all homeless households in Scotland). The final hostel closed in March 2008 and a longitudinal study established to identify the most significant lessons is due to report in 2010.

20. Despite the changes which have taken place and the real improvements made, it should be noted that the need to improve further joint and corporate working on homelessness has been highlighted by the voluntary sector and was raised as a major issue by local authority staff participating in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project. Activity to improve joint working should focus both on existing and potentially new interfaces, for example the emerging adult protection framework. The particular need for services to work together to find effective responses for clients with multiple and complex needs was also emphasised through this project and in local outcome agreements and progress reports. The 2012 Homelessness Support Project also noted significant missed opportunities to work corporately and with other agencies to prevent homelessness.

21. It should also be recognised that Communities Scotland inspectors have found that, with some notable exceptions, homelessness services often do not get the level of corporate support that other housing services appear to. This may lie behind the relatively low profile of grades for homelessness services as compared to councils' housing management services and property management services. Of the 19 homelessness services for whom Communities Scotland has now published inspection reports, one council received an A grade, one a B grade, eleven a C grade and six a D grade. This means that 90% of councils have been graded as fair (C) or poor (D).

22. This level of performance indicates that, despite improvements which have taken place to date, there is ample scope for further progress. Local authorities and partners will wish to address this through taking forward the actions suggested in the report of the 2012 Homelessness Support Project and by ensuring local issues are reflected as Single Outcome Agreements continue to develop.

Changes to homelessness legislation and guidance

23. The legislative changes recommended by the Task Force in its final report were enacted through the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. This built on the homelessness provisions contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, informed by the Task Force's interim report. The key changes introduced by the 2001 Act included:

- Local authorities required to produce a homelessness strategy: as noted above, strategies are now in place in all local authority areas.
- Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) required to provide accommodation for homeless people in certain circumstances: this introduced a new duty on RSLs to participate in rehousing homeless households. Currently approximately 20% of RSL lets go to homeless people and Communities Scotland inspections have found a variety of approaches to managing the relationship between local authorities and RSLs in terms of securing lets for homeless people. The operation of this aspect of the 2001 Act is currently the subject of a review being carried out by the Scottish Government; this is discussed further at paragraph 83.
- Temporary accommodation to be provided to all homeless households: this increased entitlement to temporary accommodation led to an upturn in usage. The upturn is currently continuing due to demographic changes and shortages of permanent social lets. The number of households in temporary accommodation has risen from 5,488 in 2003 to 9,164 in 2007. Regulations have been put in place to govern the type of temporary accommodation which should be offered to households containing children and pregnant women. These have resulted in a decrease in the numbers of these households in bed and breakfast accommodation; however this type of accommodation is still commonly used for other homeless households, despite a significant increase in the provision of alternatives such as temporary furnished flats and houses. The impact on temporary accommodation of moving towards the 2012 target is considered in Section 3.

24. The 2003 Act sets the framework for further fundamental changes to the handling of homelessness applications and the outcomes to which homeless households are entitled. In particular, the Act contains the target that the current distinction between households assessed as having a priority need for accommodation and other households who are currently assessed as 'non-priority' be abolished by 2012. At this point, all unintentionally homeless households would have the same entitlements to accommodation. Section 3 of this report looks at current progress towards this ambitious target and the capacity for it to be achieved.

25. The 2003 Act also allows Scottish Ministers to change the operation of current legislative provisions which allow local authorities to refer households without a 'local connection' to their area to another local authority where they do have such a connection. A consultation on a proposal to suspend these referral powers between Scottish local authorities was carried out in 2006/2007. The issues raised during this consultation period and by participants in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project are to be discussed within a working group to be established by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

26. The 2003 Act sets out a new regime of accommodation and support to apply for intentionally homeless households. Research on the accommodation and support needs of intentionally homeless households⁴ was carried out and published in 2006. The Scottish Government is currently exploring ways in which better corporate working across local government and between local agencies can be encouraged in order to ensure the most effective response to the challenges posed by some intentionally homeless households. An evaluation is also taking place of intensive intervention projects established to work with families at risk of eviction because of anti-social behaviour. This will inform implementation of these sections of the 2003 Act.

27. The legislation also reflects an increased focus on prevention of homelessness with requirements to take housing benefit delays into account in repossession cases and the introduction of notification by landlords in these cases also. This emphasis on prevention was also highlighted in the revised Code of Guidance on Homelessness published in 2005⁵ and the publication of research into preventative activity in 2007.⁶

28. Guidance on addressing homelessness in black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and on promoting the best interests of homeless children is being developed by the Scottish Government in partnership with stakeholders and will be published shortly. The need for further guidance on temporary accommodation and allocations processes is also being considered.

Culture change and the service user perspective

29. The Task Force emphasised the need for services for homeless people to ensure effective participation of their end users in the design and delivery of these services and the need for a personalised and holistic response which brings together relevant services to deliver the best outcomes for the individual. The 2012 Homelessness Support Project also highlighted the continued need to address the stigmatisation of homelessness and homeless people. Existing research⁷ shows that negative attitudes and widely-believed myths about homeless people impact upon service delivery and the ability of authorities to help homeless people sustain accommodation.

30. There have been a large number of national and local conferences and other events focussing on aspects of homelessness and emphasising the focus on joint working, prevention and better outcomes which the Task Force highlighted. The Chartered Institute of Housing delivered seminars examining the issues highlighted in research into the knowledge, understanding and views of homelessness amongst service providers which was published in 2006.⁸ The approach to homelessness in Scotland has also attracted interest internationally with interest from Norway, France, the Czech Republic, the USA, Canada and Australia. The Homelessness etc

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/19111326/0>

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/26095144/0>

⁷ See footnotes 8 &9 below.

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/06142528/2>

(Scotland) Act 2003 received the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions' Housing Rights Protector award in 2003.

31. Findings from a Scottish Social Attitudes Survey module on homelessness were published in 2007⁹ and provide a useful insight and a good baseline against which to measure the impact of future policy development and implementation.

32. All local authorities have funded training for staff delivering services to homeless people. As noted above, this is accessible to staff across a range of public agencies in order to encourage better shared understanding and joint working. In some cases it is also open to, and funded for, staff in voluntary organisations also. Scottish Training on Drugs and Alcohol has developed bespoke training courses covering housing and homelessness issues and the Scottish Government provides core funding for the delivery of training to housing and homelessness staff.

33. Communities Scotland inspectors consider whether authorities are promoting values, attitudes and behaviours which deliver responsive and personalised homelessness services, and the extent to which service users are involved in improving services and tests with tenant assessors. The Scottish Housing Best Value Network also facilitates a peer review process for homelessness services, including an element of service user review.

34. Glasgow Homelessness Network will shortly publish a toolkit of good practice in service user involvement in the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. The toolkit has been developed with service users and providers and will offer practical assistance on how best to implement service user involvement in all services – including mainstream services – which have a stake in homelessness; this involves identifying the benefits to both the service and the service user.

35. Shelter Scotland has recently published a resource pack (“But Why Here?”)¹⁰ to give accommodation providers practical help on how to work more effectively with communities to ease concerns and head off conflict.

Conclusions:

Local authority and community planning partners should prioritise joint working on homelessness in the development of their Single Outcome Agreements and other relevant plans and strategies. The impact of the new relationship between the Scottish Government and local government on delivery of homelessness services should be monitored, particularly in terms of corporate support.

COSLA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers should act as champions for corporate working within councils to tackle homelessness and focus on preventing homelessness.

⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/13153139/0>

¹⁰ <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/files/seealsodocs/32866/1122%20Butwhyhere%5FWEB%2Epdf>

Future development of the Housing Regulator and broader changes to Scotland's regulatory framework following the Crerar Review should take account of the need to promote joint and corporate working.

Resources developed to address issues of stigma and prejudice should be disseminated widely. Further consideration should be given to additional methods of challenging these attitudes.

SECTION 2: PROGRESS AGAINST TOP 5 HOMELESSNESS OUTCOMES

Introduction

36. This section considers progress against the top 5 outcomes as set out in the Group's remit. This focus on outcomes for homeless people has been emphasised through the reports of the previous Homelessness Monitoring Group and the local outcome agreements and progress reports requested from local authorities.

37. For each of the outcomes, this section considers information from homelessness statistics, local outcome agreements and progress reports submitted by local authorities and Communities Scotland's independent inspection programme in order to assess progress. This section also describes activity being undertaken at a local and national level to attempt to improve outcomes for homeless people. As part of that consideration the report also notes progress against the relevant Task Force recommendations. It is acknowledged that some areas of work contribute to many, or indeed all, of the outcomes, for example health and homelessness; for the purposes of the report this topic is discussed under outcome 3.

38. It should be noted that robust information on outcomes for homeless people is not always available and that some information which is collected is not straightforward to interpret. Communities Scotland inspectors have found that councils vary in their practice in recording homelessness applications and assessments, and also found a range of examples of inaccurate reporting of outcomes. The national homelessness statistics system has recently been revised but further work is required to ensure returns are as consistent as possible.

39. Also, it should be borne in mind that there are many factors which could potentially affect outcomes for homeless people and a number of these will be outside the control of local services.

40. In some cases, working towards achieving one outcome may be seen to be at the detriment of achieving another – for instance uncovering hidden homelessness could lead to a conclusion that an authority is failing to prevent homelessness as the numbers being assessed as homeless increase. However, the authority may actually be achieving both outcomes – i.e. assisting people in 'hidden homeless' situations to make an application where appropriate but also acting to prevent homelessness for other people where that is an appropriate course of action.

41. Given the broader contextual changes outlined in Section 1 there is a case for reviewing the current reporting framework to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complementary to the National Performance Framework. This should include consideration of the continued appropriateness and relevance of the top 5 outcomes as currently construed, with a specific focus on the meaning and concept of hidden/visible homelessness.

Conclusions:

The current reporting framework should be reviewed.

Section 2: Outcome 1: No-one should have the need to sleep rough

42. This outcome is a continuation of the previous national target that by 2003 no-one should have the need to sleep rough. Research carried out by George Street in 2005¹¹ showed that this target had been narrowly missed; whilst overall across Scotland there was enough accommodation, this was not the case in every single council area. In addition to understanding the capacity of local authorities to provide bed spaces, the local outcome agreement and progress report process sought to gain a better understanding of local authorities' efforts to engage people sleeping rough and provide appropriate services to them which would help them achieve better outcomes.

43. National homelessness statistics indicate that 7% of homeless applicants report that at least one member of their household slept rough the night before the application. In March 2007, the six-monthly statistics bulletin¹² gave a brief discussion of the information gleaned from data and emphasised that this could only give a partial picture of the true extent of rough sleeping in Scotland. The bulletin estimated that during the period for which there is both statistical data and street counts, the former measured about 40% of the number estimated to have slept rough using street counts. However whilst statistical data on rough sleeping is incomplete, it can be used to track trends, as the downward trend in rough sleeping recorded through street counts is also apparent in the statistical data for the same period.

44. Whilst the national proportion of applicants reporting that they slept rough the night before applying is 7%, this figure varies hugely amongst individual local authorities from less than 1% to 22%. On the whole, urban areas show a higher proportion.

45. Overall, the national data indicate a decrease in the proportion of applicants reporting they slept rough the night before applying, from 10% in 2002-03, to 7% for 2005/06; the absolute number has also decreased from 443 applicants per month to 323 per month. Whilst the overall trend is downwards, six authorities show an increase in the absolute number of people reporting rough sleeping via the national statistics. Three authorities show very large decreases.

46. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, eight authorities reported that capacity is sufficient to meet demand, or that there was no need to sleep rough, in their areas. The majority of the other authorities did not explicitly state that they can meet demand, but said that there was very little rough sleeping in their areas.

47. Some rural authorities reported that while they had little or no direct access accommodation, they did provide adequate temporary accommodation and make information on this service widely known. Some innovative approaches to emergency accommodation provision were mentioned – such as the development of a Nightstop service offering a safe and secure environment for young people while

¹¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/03/20887/55013>

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/12095510/0>

solutions are found to their housing problems, and a crash pad facility where hosts make available a spare room in their family home for use by a homeless person for a defined period of time.

48. However, three authorities stated that it was very difficult to meet demand for emergency accommodation in their areas. Communities Scotland inspectors have also found that some councils did not discharge their duties to provide accommodation to people who were roofless. This is a breach of statutory duties, which is obviously of very serious concern and is being addressed in improvement plans agreed with the relevant councils.

49. A number of authorities commented that the statistics they provide on a national basis do not reflect the reality of rough sleeping in their area. In most of these cases it was reported that the official statistics over-estimate the prevalence of rough sleeping, although one authority stated that the statistics were likely to be an under-estimate. Most of those local authorities which do not feel the figures are robust are putting in place processes to address this.

50. A wide range of services are in place to meet the need of rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough. Many authorities have introduced dedicated street teams and/or outreach workers and also have dedicated daycentres which provide services such as health provision, food, and washing and laundry facilities. Some authorities have dedicated health workers, such as GPs, nurses (who can administer a needle exchange), community psychiatric nurses and counsellors.

51. In common with the more generally reported concern, several authorities noted that it can be difficult to put in place appropriate measures for those rough sleepers who have multiple and complex needs – specific difficulties reported relate to a lack of specialist services in a rural area; the reluctance of accommodation providers to engage with these households; and the lack of crisis cover in other services, such as mental health. However, there are examples of authorities adopting targeted approaches, for example the reprovisioned services put in place through the Glasgow hostels closure programme addressing areas such as alcohol related brain damage.

52. Local authorities were asked to report on issues regarding rough sleepers' non-engagement with services through their local outcome agreements and progress reports. Most authorities reported very low levels of non-engagement with services offered. A few authorities acknowledged that their knowledge of non-engagement was limited with some of these doing further research to quantify this. Some authorities stated that they were tackling non-engagement through raising awareness of availability of services.

53. In reporting on outcomes for rough sleepers, most authorities focused on the basic measure of bedspaces available. However some authorities also reported on other activities such as health outreach and better engagement with a few referring to use of the matrix model to track improvements for people engaging in services. One authority has its own methodology for identifying and tracking outcomes and has used this to provide information on many aspects of rough sleepers' lives. Another has developed and is implementing a cross sector crisis response

framework which identifies the steps in the process of tackling homelessness crisis and can support monitoring of any gaps and blockages in the system. Such monitoring models will become ever more important in designing, delivering, improving and funding services now that the ring-fence around local government homelessness services has been removed.

Conclusions:

There is some evidence that rough sleeping is reducing although the impact appears variable in different local authority areas and it would be useful to know more about why this is.

A wide range of services designed to prevent rough sleeping and to address the needs of those who do sleep rough has been put in place. However a small number of local authorities are unable to meet their obligations to provide accommodation; this is being addressed through improvement plans agreed with Communities Scotland.

Work at a national and local level to ensure more appropriate provision for those with multiple and complex needs should take account of the specific needs of rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough. Further consideration of the needs of the hardest to reach is also required.

There is a need for local authorities to ensure that their monitoring of the prevalence of rough sleeping is as robust as possible and to consider monitoring frameworks which will support the design and delivery of services which are person-centred and aimed at effective prevention of rough sleeping.

Section 2: Outcome 2: Existing homelessness becomes more visible

54. The number of households applying for assistance under the homelessness legislation increased rapidly from 2000/01 to 2005/06. This coincided with improved rights to temporary accommodation for households assessed as 'non-priority' and the numbers of households in temporary accommodation at any given time also increased significantly. Almost all of the increase has been from single person households – reflecting demographic change but also the fact that they are most likely to benefit from the legislative changes. The increase in applications and numbers in temporary accommodation has put significant pressure on housing supply.

55. The most recent figures indicate that the rise in applications is levelling out, with a 2% drop recorded for 2006/07. The number of homelessness applications from single person households also reduced in 2006/7, compared to the previous financial year. This could indicate that, at a national level, most hidden homelessness has been uncovered, although sources such as the Scottish Household Survey suggest that there are likely to be significant numbers of individuals who continue not to approach the local authority for assistance.¹³

56. Through the local outcome agreement and progress reports, 13 local authorities directly expressed their views as to whether homelessness was now completely visible in their area. All these authorities were confident that homelessness was certainly more visible than in the past due to a combination of greater legal entitlements encouraging presentations, more effective signposting between services, effective advice and information and awareness raising.

57. Six of these local authorities were reasonably confident that most hidden homelessness had now been brought to light. However three other areas felt that it could still be a significant issue, and this was also mentioned by participants in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project, citing evidence of insecurity of tenure and sofa surfing amongst waiting list applicants. Others felt that there could be significant levels of hidden homelessness in particular groups such as young couples living with one set of parents or that further work was needed to come to a firmer view. Some of these, for example women, are more likely to find their own solutions. One authority noted that their experience was that hidden homelessness had declined significantly and that outreach teams were able to engage proactively with households in this position.

58. Most authorities reported that they monitor levels of hidden homelessness from waiting list data and wider studies of unmet housing need carried out to inform their Local Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy or allocations policy. One authority discussed housing need assessment explicitly in the context of research around future community care needs and another highlighted the personal housing plan approach as a method for gaining a clear understanding of hidden homelessness. Additionally a number of authorities had carried out specific work relating to unmet need and hidden homelessness amongst BME communities, gypsy travellers and A8 nationals.

¹³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/01084217/0-2>

59. One authority mentioned that they were aware that other services in the area were experiencing increasing demand from A8 nationals which suggested there were housing issues to be addressed even though there was no direct evidence of hidden homelessness amongst A8 nationals at that time. Reference to working specifically with Polish nationals to consider these issues was made by 3 further authorities. Research on EU8 migrants' access to health, housing and other social care services in Edinburgh was published in 2007 and indicated little demand for social housing from this group¹⁴.

60. As regards activities undertaken to progress this outcome, all authorities cited the provision of effective and accessible advice and information as being key to making hidden homelessness more visible. A significant majority had achieved or were working towards national Homepoint Standards for housing advice and were funding and supporting provision of advice across statutory and voluntary agencies. A number of authorities reported having arrangements in place with Citizens Advice Bureaux and other advice agencies and referring a high number of clients to these agencies. Housing options guidance, linked to individual triggers such as rent arrears or to broader developments such as the creation of a common housing register, was also mentioned by a high number of authorities. The benefit of web based referral systems was mentioned by one authority.

61. Outreach work to uncover hidden homelessness was specifically mentioned by a number of authorities although it was not always entirely clear what this consisted of. Authorities emphasised the need to work pro-actively with certain groups (households living in rural areas; those vulnerably housed in the private rented sector; children in care or who have left care and other young people; lone parents; people leaving prison; people who have experienced domestic abuse; and others at risk of rough sleeping) to ensure that they are aware of assistance available if necessary. However it was noted by one authority that recording of these types of contacts needs to be considered carefully as a large proportion of people do not attend a formal homelessness interview when one is arranged. In some circumstances, non-attendance could reflect internalisation of stigma and prejudice.

62. Training staff across a range of agencies, including healthcare professionals, was also mentioned by the significant majority of authorities. This focussed in particular on recognising homelessness triggers and situations (even where these are not necessarily acknowledged by the client themselves); addressing stigma attached to homelessness; and attitudes and awareness of reception staff. In some cases this training was delivered through job shadowing or in conjunction with that on substance misuse, welfare rights and domestic abuse.

63. All local authorities emphasised the importance of publicising and promoting existing services and making as many people as possible aware of their rights to assistance. Activity included ensuring material is available in a variety of languages and formats; providing translation services where necessary and advertising these clearly; holding roadshows; ensuring material is prominently displayed in all public buildings and other locations throughout the community; ensuring round the clock

¹⁴ <http://openscotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/18150102/0>

prompt telephone access; developing and disseminating directories of services; using local media; and plasma screens. Less traditional methods such as carrying information on carrier bags, and in football programmes and town maps, were also deployed. One authority has also developed hostel TV.

64. A number of authorities expressed their confidence that rising applications were directly related to the success of these awareness raising approaches. In most cases local authorities were not able to substantiate this view with direct evidence but one did note that monitoring of usage rates indicated a sharp increase in uptake of specific services following an awareness raising campaign focussed on those particular services.

65. One council was notable for the particular prominence it gave to involving service users in the process of assessing hidden homelessness and designing effective services to uncover and address these unmet needs. This included involvement in an anti-stigma project and in designing relevant information that will reach the people who need it most.

66. It should be noted that success in achieving this outcome, ensuring that homeless people are identified and assisted appropriately can lead to increased pressure on services and therefore impact negatively on local authorities' ability to achieve the other top-level outcomes. However that is not to say that it does not lead to positive outcomes for those individuals being assisted. As noted earlier, there is a need to consider more fully the concept of hidden/visible homelessness in the context of future reporting.

Conclusions

A lot of work has been undertaken at local levels to uncover hidden homelessness and ensure people are aware of their rights under the homelessness legislation.

In some areas this is thought to be responsible for rising applications although it is difficult to demonstrate a direct causal link.

There is some evidence that the majority of hidden homelessness may now have been uncovered but also significant concern that this is not in fact the case. There is therefore a need to consider whether there will be a future increase in demand for accommodation and services from people currently on the waiting list, from inward migration, or for other reasons.

Section 2: Outcome 3: Sustainable resettlement is secured for people who have become homeless

Introduction

67. Achieving sustainable resettlement is key to the successful delivery of homelessness services and obviously of utmost importance to homeless households. Although the securing of settled accommodation is a crucial element of a sustainable solution, a range of other supports may also be necessary depending on the circumstances of the household. At a national level it is difficult to consistently monitor some aspects of this approach in terms of outcomes for individuals.

68. National homelessness statistics indicate that the proportion of repeat¹⁵ homelessness cases has stabilised at around 8% which suggests that the significant majority of households assessed as homeless receive a satisfactory outcome. However, there is some debate around measuring repeat cases and data on levels of tenancy sustainment for homeless households, which would be the most useful indicator of progress against this outcome, is not available at a national level.

69. Through the local outcome agreement and progress reports, most authorities indicated confidence that more sustainable outcomes for homeless households were being achieved. However one authority mentioned that reducing the duration of homelessness by ensuring households receive permanent accommodation more quickly had affected tenancy sustainment levels, perhaps because appropriate support was not in place due to speed of rehousing. In this particular authority this led to a reversal of the previous trend whereby homeless households were more likely than others rehoused from the general list to sustain their tenancy for a year or more.

70. A few authorities mentioned that they were in the process of developing better monitoring systems or focussing on particular scenarios to improve their information on tenancy sustainment, repeat homelessness and the most difficult cases in order to inform the commissioning of new services or development of existing ones. Other authorities quoted figures which illustrate that over 90% of homeless households retain their tenancy for at least 12 months and that, generally, higher sustainment rates are noted where furnished tenancies are provided. As noted above, more systematic recording of tenancy sustainment by landlords would help inform local planning and monitoring of outcomes.

71. Communities Scotland inspections have found that a number of councils have developed effective ways to help support homeless people they have rehoused, and inspectors have noted improvements in tenancy sustainment levels. Examples of activity include: provision of support services; settling in visits for vulnerable new tenants; independent living skills courses for young tenants; help with accessing furniture; mediation services; and homelessness advice lines.

¹⁵ A case is defined as repeating if – (1) it is assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, (2) there is a previous case from the same households which was also assessed as homeless or potentially homeless, and (3) The data of closure of the previous case is within twelve months of the assessment date of the current case.

Accommodation

72. Focussing on the provision of sustainable accommodation, national statistics indicate that the proportion of unintentionally homeless households in priority need who are offered permanent accommodation has increased from 58% in 2002/3 to 70% in 2006/7. When these households are offered permanent accommodation, the vast majority accept the offer of accommodation - 87% acceptance in 2002/3 rising to 92% in 2006/7. This may suggest that generally offers of accommodation are appropriate but there are alternative interpretations including concern that inappropriate offers might be accepted due to low expectation of more suitable accommodation. As noted below, homeless households do not always receive the same level of choice as other applicants for social housing.

73. The Task Force were clear that where permanent accommodation was provided this should be in a community in which the household would feel comfortable and included, where possible. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, all authorities stated that they take the household's preference and proximity to existing social networks, relevant educational establishments and employment into account when making an offer of accommodation – some making clear that this applies to both temporary and permanent accommodation.

74. A number of authorities stated that although they take these factors into consideration, they are not always able to make an offer which meets the applicant household's preferences. This was generally reported to be due to overall pressures on housing supply although the difficulty of providing adequate support in some locations was also mentioned. This disjunction between aspirations and the feasibility of meeting them may underlie concern expressed by Shelter Scotland that their clients' views do not support the picture of local authority practice outlined above.

75. In order to address these issues, authorities mentioned changing their assessment processes to ensure that relevant factors were taken into account; reviewing and amending allocations policies to allow greater choice and also to give greater prominence to the needs of homeless people; entering into protocols with local housing associations in order to broaden the pool of accommodation available; and carrying out research into the reasons for refusal of offers so that practice can be improved if possible. One authority reported that it looks to convert temporary accommodation into permanent in order to minimise disruption to households who have settled in temporary accommodation and to enhance support to households at risk of repeat homelessness.

76. However it was noted that progress in securing the most appropriate accommodation would be limited in some areas unless broader housing supply issues could also be addressed. This point was also made strongly by participants in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project.

77. Communities Scotland, in its current role as housing regulator, monitors the number and quality of accommodation offers through their inspections of local authority homelessness services. Inspections look at the level of allocations to homeless people compared with the level to other applicants and in the context of

the number of people applying as homeless and in priority need. Inspections also look at the type of and location of lets, although the level of analysis that is possible is largely determined by the quality of information held by each local authority.

78. Since April 2006 Communities Scotland has published eleven inspection reports, two of which were for local authorities that had transferred all their housing stock to new registered social landlords. For the nine authorities that have housing stock, the levels of lets to homeless people as a percentage of all lets ranged from 31% to 58%. Six of these authorities measured what proportion of homeless people given permanent accommodation remained in that accommodation 12 months later, and reported sustainment levels from 72% to 96%.

79. However, inspectors found that none of the eleven authorities comprehensively monitored the outcomes for all homeless people who used their services, and only two always took account of homeless people's needs when allocating permanent accommodation. Six were able to demonstrate that they gave homeless people the same level of choice as other applicants in the location of permanent accommodation. Inspectors found that one authority gave homeless people fewer offers and a lower quality of houses than other applicants for housing.

Registered social landlords

80. It is clear from local authorities' outcome agreements and progress reports and from Communities Scotland's inspection that there are some areas where effective partnership working is taking place and achieving good outcomes for homeless people. However in other areas the relationship is more strained and a number of participants in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project commented upon this.

81. Communities Scotland also monitors the responsiveness of registered social landlords (RSLs) to councils' requests for accommodation for homeless people made under section 5 of the 2001 Act. In 2004/05, RSLs let 14.5% of their house to homeless people in discharge of their duties under section 5. This increased to 16% in 2006/07, with a further 4% housed through nomination agreements (this was first measured in 2006/07). So, in total, around one in five lets by RSLs is to a homeless person to help councils to discharge their statutory duties. These figures include lets by the three whole stock transfer RSLs – two of these are currently using around the same proportion of lets for homeless people as other RSLs; the other is using significantly more.

82. In effect, RSLs' contribution to housing homeless people has changed little over the three year period since 2004. This contribution needs to be fully maximised to assist in reaching the 2009 and 2012 targets.

83. The Scottish Government is reviewing the operation of section 5, taking account of other studies on its local application, in order to determine whether further action is required. Research has been commissioned with the aim of improving understanding of how RSLs and local authorities are using section 5 and placing homeless people in RSL accommodation. The research will contribute to the evidence base on homelessness and is the first key step in the review. The lettings

situation for whole stock transfer RSLs in comparison to the remainder will also continue to be monitored.

Private rented sector

84. Generally the outcome information available focuses on the provision of Scottish Secure Tenancies. However, there has been growing acknowledgement that sustainable resettlement is possible in a variety of tenures, and particular interest in the contribution that can be made by the private rented sector in Scotland. In its discussion document 'Firm Foundations: The Future of Housing in Scotland' the Scottish Government set out its view that the private rented sector has much to offer its tenants in terms of flexibility, choice of location and, in most cases, good quality housing and can therefore make an important contribution to meeting housing need.

85. The Scottish Government will consult shortly on amendments to the Homeless Persons Interim Accommodation (Scotland) Regulations 2002, with a view to allowing local authorities more flexibility in using the private rented sector to house homeless households. This will take into account the need for the sector to represent an appropriate and sustainable solution to homelessness.

86. To support this consultation, the Scottish Government is also carrying out a comprehensive review of the private rented sector. One of the main objectives of the review is to look at how best to increase the supply of private rented accommodation for homeless and low-income households. The review will look at how local authorities can best increase their engagement with the private rented sector and how best to tackle barriers which may prevent landlords from letting to homeless and low-income households. This may also help to progress the Task Force's recommendations on rent deposit schemes and lead tenancies.

87. In terms of current progress on rent deposit schemes, information received through the local outcome agreements and progress reports indicated that 29 local authorities had a scheme in operation, two were in the process of finalising a scheme and one authority is exploring alternative approaches following the failure of a pilot scheme. Schemes were either run by local authority staff or by local voluntary organisations and nearly all were able to provide figures on the number of households assisted.

88. A few local authorities reported difficulties including benefit rules; recruitment of landlords; matching of tenants; publicising the service effectively; sourcing private sector landlords willing to accept homeless tenants/tenants on benefits; and the current lack of flexibility in discharging duties under the homelessness legislation.

89. A national development officer has been funded by the Scottish Government to provide support to local rent deposit schemes. The development officer has established a network for schemes to share practice and in February 2008 published a report detailing the nature of schemes in Scotland, their cost effectiveness and their role in creating sustainable communities and preventing homelessness¹⁶. Good

¹⁶ Deposit Guarantee Schemes in Scotland – A Sustainable Housing Option; Crisis, 2008.

practice guidance on the development and operation of schemes was also published in February this year¹⁷.

Furniture

90. The Task Force also emphasised the importance of providing furniture as a factor in sustaining tenancies and this was reinforced by Glasgow Housing Association's study on tenancy sustainment in their stock¹⁸. Targets set by the Task Force for 1,000 furnished tenancies a year for five years across Scotland have been exceeded, with local outcome agreements and progress reports indicating the creation of 4,000 such tenancies for homeless people in 2006/07 alone.

91. Guidance issued in 2007 highlighted the following priorities for furnished tenancy development as indicated by monitoring of practice from 2003 onwards: the creation of permanent rather than temporary tenancies; the use of furniture recycling projects; and the elimination of service charges.

92. Where information was provided through local outcome agreements and progress reports, it appears that approximately three quarters of tenancies created were recorded as permanent, with the other quarter either temporary or unrecorded. The large majority of these tenancies were in the local authority sector, with fewer RSL tenancies and only very few in the private sector.

93. Twelve local authorities indicated their use of, and financial support for, furniture recycling projects. This reflects broader growth of the furniture recycling sector. In 2006 furniture projects estimated that the number of people assisted had more than doubled since 2003/04 and 55% of their clients were moving out of homelessness, up from 50% in 2003/04. The number of people employed in the furniture reuse sector has more than doubled in this period. The National Furniture Reuse Projects Co-ordinator, funded by the Scottish Government and based at Community Recycling Network Scotland (CRNS), has produced a toolkit¹⁹ for Local Authorities and RSLs that want to purchase furniture packs from furniture projects and will provide practical support to housing providers.

Housing supply

94. As noted above it is not possible to achieve sustainable resettlement for homeless people without an adequate supply of socially rented or alternative affordable housing. Through local outcome agreements and progress reports a number of local authorities have indicated that aspects of availability of affordable housing has detrimentally affected their ability to achieve sustainable resettlement for homeless people. In some areas this is an issue of overall quantity, in others it relates to the type, size, quality or location of affordable housing available. The impact of available supply on local authorities' ability to meet the 2012 target is considered further in Section 3.

¹⁷ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/page.builder/goodpracticeguide.html>

¹⁸ http://www.gha.org.uk/content/mediaassets/doc/tenancy_sustainment_summary.pdf

¹⁹ <http://www.crns.org.uk/index/publications>

95. In the period since the Task Force reported, Local Housing Strategies (LHS) have been at the centre of the framework for planning the supply of affordable housing. The first round of LHS were completed in 2003/04 and assessment by Communities Scotland found that while links with homelessness strategies were generally good, the analysis of, and responses to, the housing supply dimension of homelessness required to be properly developed.

96. The Scottish Government has made clear that the LHS should play an enhanced role at the heart of a reformed delivery framework for achieving a step change in housing supply, and should set out the requirements and targets for housing across all tenures. Homelessness will remain a key national housing priority to be fully addressed in the next round of LHS, which are currently scheduled for completion in 2009.

97. The Government expects that LHS developed in the next round will be shorter, strategic, and outcome-focussed. In addition, in line with the Government's aim to streamline the requirements placed on local government, it is proposed that housing and related strategies are rationalised. New guidance on Strategic Housing Need and Market Assessments to be published in spring 2008 will ensure greater consistency and a more robust approach to the assessment of future housing need and demand across all tenures.

98. In its discussion paper, 'Firm Foundations', the Scottish Government set out reform proposals to increase the output of social housing from available public investment. The Government is considering how the current Strategic Housing Investment Framework should evolve further in light of the responses to the proposals put forward in Firm Foundations. The indicators used to assist Ministers determine priorities at a national level for affordable housing from 2009/10 onwards will include a housing supply indicator which combines measures of housing demand and homelessness. Work to refine this indicator is currently ongoing.

99. As is noted above, the provision of accommodation, although crucial, may not be sufficient to ensure sustainable resettlement for all homeless households. Alongside the provision of furniture, the Task Force also focussed on the following elements as being central to sustainable solutions to homelessness:

- The provision of appropriate support to homeless people;
- Action to improve the health of homeless people;
- Action to improve the employment prospects of homeless people; and
- Strengthening the social networks of homeless people.

Support

100. In terms of providing support to households resettling from homelessness, 17 authorities stated through their local outcome agreements and progress reports that they are meeting the terms of the relevant Task Force recommendations with 12 authorities making progress towards it. Many authorities have specialist teams or provision established to cater for the needs of particular groups – these include former rough sleepers; single people; young people; families/single parents with

babies; ex-offenders; people with mental ill health; people with addictions; and people with multiple and complex needs.

101. The voluntary sector is regularly mentioned as a support provider, with less frequent mention also made of partnerships with RSLs who provide support. It is clear that there are a number of different models of accommodation and support provision in place with mention being made of supported lodgings and residential projects for example. At the other end of the scale, some authorities highlighted starter pack projects developed to offer the most basic assistance.

102. A number of authorities highlighted work which has been done to develop effective tools for measuring the impact of support provision, whilst one authority emphasised the need to develop this as a priority. In one case there was a reference to a shared approach to monitoring with the voluntary sector in order that a consistent approach can be taken.

103. The majority of support appeared to be funded via Supporting People although this has been supplemented by homelessness funding; the Housing Revenue Account; delayed discharge monies; and throughcare and aftercare funding. Local authorities and other support providers will wish to take new funding arrangements into account in the future provision of support.

104. Most local authorities provide support for both households who have been homeless and are resettling and households who are currently in tenancies or other accommodation but need support to avoid the threat of homelessness. However a number of authorities stated that they currently have insufficient resources to offer the full range of support services required – this was commonly related to reductions in Supporting People funding. A lack of specialist services or appropriate services for those with complex needs was mentioned by some authorities – while some others stated that they are currently only providing support to those in temporary accommodation and not to those in permanent tenancies.

105. In 2005/06 £71.6 million was spent on housing support services assisting over 32,000 homeless people from the Supporting People programme. This was a 15% increase in expenditure and a 17% increase in client numbers supported over the previous year. Supporting People client statistics for 2006/07 will be published by the end of March.

Health

106. At present there is no consistent information on health outcomes for homeless people. However the importance of ensuring access to health services is well understood, as are the links between homelessness and poor health. Compliance with the Health and Homelessness Standards is monitored through NHS Boards and the majority now report overall compliance of 90% or above – 7 boards report overall compliance of 95% or more. However, feedback from local partners would suggest that work needs to continue at local level to minimise variability in performance within and across the Standards at both national and board levels. Future monitoring of compliance against the Standards should be considered.

107. To assist boards in continued development locally, options are being explored with key stakeholders for the establishment of a health board Health and Homelessness Leads Network. The network would act as a platform for mutual support and the sharing of good practice across boards on health and homelessness issues.

108. The Scottish Government is setting out its agenda to challenging health inequalities - describing it as the single most pressing and demanding challenge we face today. The focus is on helping people, particularly in disadvantaged communities, to sustain and improve their health through better diet, better ways of tackling alcohol and drug misuse, mental health and wellbeing; all of which is intrinsic to the health and homelessness agenda.

109. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, local authorities reported specifically on recording the GP registration of homeless households and developing co-ordinated local action to tackle substance misuse and homelessness. The majority of authorities reported good progress in both these areas. The majority stated that information on the applicant's GP registration is recorded routinely as part of the homelessness assessment and some have revised their applications forms to include this. Roughly one third of local authorities reported providing information on accessing a GP, transferring to another practice and accessing other community health services where appropriate (including operating a referrals system). One authority stated that GP information is only recorded where an applicant has a medical condition or when a housing support assessment is being carried out.

110. Some authorities advised that local service contracts are in place to provide dedicated clinical staff for homeless applicants; this is generally provided at hostel accommodation or at drop in centres or clinics. Others reported partnership working with the health sector: examples include advising the local health board of any problems experienced by homeless applicants in registering with a GP; and the creation of a health and homelessness officer post to work in partnership with the local board in agreeing communication and access frameworks. One authority reported good links between homelessness and health services due to a central health care team being remitted to deal with the homelessness client group.

111. In relation to developing co-ordinated local action to tackle substance misuse and homelessness, the majority of authorities mentioned specific partnerships with a variety of organisations (including Alcohol and Drug Action Teams (ADATs), the NHS, Child Protection teams and the voluntary sector); corporate working arrangements were mentioned frequently as were arrangements with neighbouring authorities. Some local authorities reported strong partnership working and integration of homelessness, housing, health and addictions strategies and services; others indicated a need for further work to ensure appropriate linkages are in place.

112. A number of authorities highlighted improved homelessness assessment procedures to help identify substance misuse issues at the point of presentation. Many mentioned protocols on referrals to appropriate services, some of which were provided by external partners under service level agreements. Training and awareness raising for staff members was also mentioned.

113. Other action taken to meet the needs of homeless people living with addiction included the use of support workers; dedicated supported accommodation and clinical staff; needle exchange; and drop-in centres. The main challenges identified included the lack of supported accommodation facilities, funding and supply issues around clients accessing services at the point of crisis and limited access to specialist floating support.

114. One third of authorities referred to work being carried out - or planned - to improve knowledge about the housing and support needs of homeless people with substance misuse issues and identify gaps in provision. This includes research, evaluation of existing services and ongoing review of local strategies. One authority mentioned a pilot project being undertaken with ADATs and Child Protection working with families with children affected by substance misuse which has the aim of a more coordinated approach to identifying and meeting needs.

115. Research has been commissioned from the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to identify and review available evidence on models and approaches that produce positive outcomes for people with substance misuse problems who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The research is exploring the nature of the relationship between substance misuse and homelessness and aims to develop potential outcome indicators for homeless people who misuse substances. The final report from the research is expected in summer 2008.

Employment

116. The Scottish Homelessness and Employability Network (SHEN)²⁰ was created in 2004 and continues to gather evidence on the implications of benefits and employment policy for homeless people in Scotland and to encourage cross sector partnership working in this area. Evidence is gathered through engagement with stakeholders partly through focus groups based around the themes of Task Force recommendations on employment but taking into account the impact of UK and Scottish policies on welfare reform and employability which have relevance for homeless people in Scotland.

117. This has been a particularly active area of policy development in 2006/7 in the context of the Welfare Reform Act (2007) and the associated Green Paper: *In work, better off: next steps to full employment*²¹ and the launch of initiatives such as the City Strategies. These build on previous progress in developing an Employability Framework for Scotland²² and the piloting of Working Future.²³

118. Improved links between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Scottish Government are key to the promotion of employability as a route out of homelessness. SHEN focus groups involving Jobcentreplus and DWP have

²⁰ <http://www.shen-scotland.org/>

²¹ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfare-reform/in-work-better-off/>

²² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/12094904/0>

²³ Working Future is a joint, pilot project between the Greater London Authority, East Thames and the London Boroughs of Waltham Forrester, Redbridge and Newham established to increase levels of employment among homeless families in temporary accommodation. An evaluation of the project was published in November 2007 and is available at <http://www.workingfuture.org.uk>.

identified a number of issues which would benefit from future discussion, including the potential for more flexibility around housing benefit. The Government Economic Strategy highlights the need to focus on reducing inequality in Scotland and influence the UK Government to ensure welfare reform addresses Scotland's social equity issues²⁴. A discussion paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland has also been published²⁵.

119. Twenty one local authorities made reference to employment initiatives or broader approaches to employability in their local outcome agreements and progress reports. Most councils referred to investing in training to increase employability and approaches such as therapeutic and supported employment are also referred to.

120. There appears to be a clear focus on partnership working in the majority of councils, reflected in the setting up of multi-agency forums and the development of local employability frameworks. Such approaches bring together members of local authority departments, voluntary sector providers of services, social enterprises, Scottish Enterprise, private sector employees and the DWP. It is important that this co-ordinated approach is maintained to ensure partnership plans include a focus on homelessness.

121. A number of local authorities reported statistical outcomes such as number of service users assisted and break down outcomes in relation to education, training and employment.

Benefits

122. Few local authorities specifically mentioned benefits in their local outcome agreements and progress reports, aside from provision of advice on maximising income. Nationally within Scotland, section 12 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 came into force in July 2004 and requires courts to take into account delays or failures in payment of housing benefit in cases of repossession. Significant improvements have also been seen in the time taken to process Housing Benefit claims.

123. It is particularly important that the ongoing Housing Benefit reform agenda takes account of issues such as Single Room Rent, rent levels in Temporary Accommodation and benefits for prisoners as these continue to have a considerable impact on homeless people. Homelessness charities have expressed support for recent announcements regarding flexibility around the 16 hour rule in Housing Benefit and it is to be hoped that further changes can be progressed in light of the Government Economic Strategy and the discussion paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland.

Social networks

124. A Scottish Social Networks Forum has been established with a national co-ordinator funded by the Scottish Government to provide support and guidance to

²⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/12115041/0>

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/02/01150409/0>

local authorities in developing social networks projects and share good practice. A number of events have been held to raise awareness of the importance of social networks in preventing homelessness and sustaining tenancies, including a national conference. The Forum has a web presence²⁶ to help share information about projects and practice and an online database came on stream early in 2008. Two resource packs have been published: a social networks training pack and a toolkit on development of successful mentoring, befriending and mediation projects.

125. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, all local authorities but one stated they are making progress on working to build or rebuild homeless people's social networks. The one authority not currently progressing this issue advised that it is to be addressed in their revised homelessness strategy.

126. Approximately one third of authorities indicated that social networks are considered as part of homelessness assessment and resettlement. The majority mentioned the existence of specific social networks projects or posts; mediation was mentioned most frequently, particularly mediation aimed at rebuilding the family networks of young people. Other projects mentioned included befriending, peer support and education/training (most commonly associated with living skills).

127. Some local authorities reported the opportunities provided by volunteering or initiatives such as social clubs or participation in sports or leisure activities in helping to build social networks. A number of local authorities provide free school transport for children in temporary accommodation to allow them to continue at their school while accommodated elsewhere. Many local authorities use service contracts with the voluntary sector to provide social networks projects or training to their staff in mediation skills.

128. A number of authorities indicated that the (re) building of social networks is part of the work undertaken by Housing Support workers; others make a direct link to work on health and homelessness. Some authorities indicated they are actively seeking to develop protocols with existing services to facilitate better access for homeless households.

Conclusions

Local authorities and their partners have put a range of services in place to attempt to achieve sustainable resettlement. The strategic framework within which such services are developed has been strengthened since the publication of the Task Force's report.

There is a lack of robust information about some aspects of resettlement, although repeat homelessness and tenancy sustainment figures which are available would suggest that most homeless people receive a satisfactory outcome; however, it is acknowledged that interpretations of this data vary.

²⁶ www.scottishsocialnetworks.org

Local housing strategies and housing investment should take account of the need to provide sufficient affordable housing to ensure that sustainable resettlement of homeless people is possible.

Research into the operation of section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and consultation on amendments to the Interim Accommodation (Homeless Persons) (Scotland) Regulations 2004 should be progressed urgently in order to ensure that RSLs and the private rented sector fulfil their potential to house homeless people.

The national co-ordinator posts relating to rent deposit schemes; furniture reuse projects; social networks; and homelessness and employment should be retained with post-holders working with local staff to ensure that local authorities' greater funding flexibility is utilised to support sustainable approaches to these issues.

Local authorities should consider the most sustainable approaches to providing adequate and appropriate support services for people who are at risk of homelessness, or who have been homeless.

Community Planning Partners should jointly agree outcomes and priorities on how to prevent and address homelessness via the Single Outcome Agreement process.

Local and national government should consider implementation of the local connection and intentionality provisions of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 with a particular focus on the contribution these changes would make to providing more sustainable outcomes for homeless people and achieving the 2012 target.

A network to bring together health and homelessness practitioners should be established.

The Scottish Government should take full account of the interests of homeless people in taking forward discussions with DWP in the context of the Government Economic Strategy.

Landlords should take steps to record more systematically levels of tenancy sustainment to help monitor the effectiveness of their service.

Section 2: Outcome 4: Fewer people become homeless in the first place

Introduction

129. HL1 data for 2006/07 shows that nationally 14% of all applicants assessed as either homeless or potentially so, are assessed as potentially homeless. Of those potentially homeless, 35% became homeless before the authority's duty was discharged. Local authorities maintained contact with 70% of potentially homeless until their duty was discharged. However there is huge variation between authorities on both these measurements.

130. In March 2007 the Government published research commissioned from Heriot Watt University on local authorities' prevention activities which showed that authorities have developed a more prevention-centred approach and are engaging in, and funding, a large variety of such activities. However the research also showed that such activities are often not embedded into the main homelessness activities/approaches and remain distinct and apart from the key functions of the local authority. This finding was also confirmed by the 2012 Homelessness Support Project which underlined a perceived lack of joint working and corporate buy-in for preventative activity. To some extent this appears to be due to the difficulty in evaluating such activities and showing that they are cost-effective.

131. The research provided a "map" of local authorities' prevention measures and followed up in more detail measures aimed at preventing youth homelessness (such as mediation), assisted access to private tenancies (through e.g. rent deposit guarantee schemes), provision of housing advice, and tenancy sustainment schemes. The information gathered in this research will be used to inform prevention guidance to be developed and issued during the next financial year.

132. Communities Scotland inspectors also found that councils are increasingly looking at prevention, partly due to the challenge of meeting the 2012 target, but also as a positive approach to assist homeless and potentially homeless households. Councils are working with vulnerable groups, with particular emphasis on responding to the needs of young people who are at risk of becoming homeless. Inspectors saw a range of activity on prevention, including work with partner agencies, outsourcing independent advice and providing support services.

133. The Government has funded a number of small-scale projects through its Innovation Fund. These on-going projects cover a huge variety of approaches, such as participation in sport, anger management, and sanctuary schemes. All the projects are being evaluated and the lessons learnt from this will also feed into the development of the prevention guidance.

134. Many of the Homelessness Task Force recommendations and much subsequent activity concentrate on preventing homelessness amongst groups known to be at particular risk. Current progress on work relating to these groups is summarised below:

Looked after children

135. The “We Can And Must Do Better” document and action plan²⁷, published in January 2007, is being taken forward by a programme board and sub-groups, one of which (the Safe and Nurtured Group) is examining how to ensure that looked after young people do not leave the care system without appropriate and suitable accommodation for them to move into, as well as considering how care leavers can avoid homelessness.

136. The Safe and Nurtured Group has been formally tasked with taking forward actions 17 to 19 in the action plan, and is currently looking at suitable models of accommodation and support for people leaving care. Through increasing awareness of corporate parenting, some authorities are taking positive steps to prevent care leavers becoming homeless, and offering support to young people in sustaining tenancies. The group is also considering how to promote more joined up and strategic approaches within relevant departments of local authorities, and between local authorities and their partners in the voluntary sector, to ensure that throughcare and aftercare are properly planned and delivered. The continued need for focussed attention on preventing homelessness for this group of young people was confirmed during the 2012 Homelessness Support Project.

Ex-service personnel

137. The Veterans Programme (Scotland) Steering Group has been established to consider a wide range of issues including homelessness and appropriate accommodation for veterans. The revised HL1 has been in operation since April 2007 and will provide information on the number of veterans (and their households) applying as homeless when the next statistical bulletin is published.

Ex-offenders

138. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, many authorities reported prison outreach work to prevent homelessness amongst ex-offenders. The Scottish Government has just established a short life working group to report to Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers on a sustainable model for housing advice services for prisoners. The group will consider delivery options and a provisional timetable for change and will report in late summer 2008.

People at immediate threat of eviction

139. Sections 11 and 12 of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 offer additional protection to individuals involved in repossession cases. Section 12 – which allows for delays or failures in Housing Benefit to be taken into account in these cases – is currently in force. A consultation exercise on the implementation of section 11, which requires landlords and creditors to notify the local authority in repossession cases, was carried out last year²⁸. Communities Scotland inspectors

²⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/01/15084446/0>

²⁸ An analysis of responses to the consultation was published in February 2008 and is available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/02/13101539/0>

have found some local authorities already have such arrangements in place with RSLs.

140. Through local outcome agreements and progress reports, some local authorities reported funding legal and/or in-court advisors to work with tenants and owners at risk of eviction. A few authorities also referred to invoking the Mortgage Rights (Scotland) Act 2001 and the mortgage to rent scheme to assist people in this situation.

141. Following concerns raised by some stakeholders about a lack of awareness among private tenants of their rights in relation to eviction proceedings and concerns that illegal evictions were not being given sufficient priority by some agencies, the Scottish Government agreed to consider the issue. As a result, the Scottish Government worked with stakeholders to prepare a briefing note for local authorities and police forces on private renting and illegal evictions²⁹. This note aims to raise awareness of the legislation related to illegal evictions and how best police and local authorities might deal with cases where a tenant has been evicted or is threatened with eviction without the correct procedures having been followed.

142. In addition, the Scottish Government has developed a new leaflet for tenants on illegal evictions and harassment³⁰ and a new leaflet for landlords on private renting³¹ and these have been disseminated widely to help raise awareness of landlords' responsibilities and what tenants can do if they have been evicted illegally.

Disabled people

143. In terms of ensuring that people do not become homeless for want of appropriate adaptations, 18 authorities reported through the local outcome agreements and progress reports that they met the terms of this recommendation, 11 stated that they were making progress towards it and 1 that no progress was being made. The authority reporting no progress is one which transferred its housing stock and is now experiencing difficulties in planning appropriate provision of barrier free housing for varying needs and responding promptly to the requirement for stock adaptations.

144. In most areas, local authorities expressed confidence that they were able to provide adapted properties where necessary for homeless people – and several mentioned that they were able to make such provision in temporary as well as permanent stock. Overall provision of such stock was planned through the Local Housing Strategy process and private owners are assisted through the Private Sector Housing Grant. A number of local authorities mentioned the role of occupational therapists in assessing need proactively.

145. Generally authorities were confident that this range of activity results in provision which is adequate to prevent homelessness, although one authority noted a lack of suitable ground floor properties. The need for good links with hospitals was

²⁹ Copies are available from the Scottish Government by calling 0131 244 7952.

³⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/207733/0055109.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/206281/0054814.pdf>

also mentioned by one authority – in order that patients are not ‘bed-blocking’ whilst awaiting adaptations. Groups such as Ownership Options and Shelter Scotland have however raised significant concerns regarding the availability of adapted properties based on their experience of individual cases.

Domestic abuse

146. The National Domestic Abuse Delivery Group (NDADG) was established in December 2006 to review current policy and practice in relation to children and young people affected by domestic abuse in Scotland and develop and implement an integrated package of measures to improve outcomes for these children and young people, their families and communities.

147. The provision of safe housing options and prevention of homelessness for children and their mothers affected by domestic abuse have been identified as key priorities for inclusion in their package of measures. The NDADG will build on the work of the Domestic Abuse Accommodation and Support Provision Working Group (DAASPWG), a subgroup of the National Group to Address Violence Against Women, which has developed a comprehensive Action Plan setting out a rationale and recommendations - at a strategic level - to improve accommodation and associated support provision for women and their children affected by domestic abuse.

148. The DAASPWG Action Plan focuses recommendations on five key areas: Training and Regulation, Funding Framework, Strategy Framework, Joint Working and Homelessness Prevention and Community Services. The NDADG will publish a Delivery Plan in Spring 2008 setting out the range of measures it will take forward over the three-year period 2008 – 2011, and activities to support their implementation.

149. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, the majority of local authorities stated that they had reviewed their domestic abuse policies to ensure that they did not lead to avoidable homelessness. Many authorities work closely with Women’s Aid and have domestic abuse forums in place to facilitate joint working. Some local authorities reported providing a range of security systems to enable women to stay in the family home.

Proactive provision of advice and support

150. More generally, local authorities’ outcome agreements and progress reports reflected the findings of the Heriot Watt research, Communities Scotland inspections and the 2012 Homelessness Support Project as outlined above. Local authorities reported details of a wide range of advice and support being made available to those threatened with homelessness. This included:

- Provision of housing support officers and anti-social behaviour teams to assist tenants with rent arrears or issues with anti-social behaviour.
- Providing housing education for young people. Many mentioned using national materials such as those developed by the Scottish Council for Single

Homeless for this purpose whilst others focused on local approaches such as a CD made by local children who have experienced homelessness and working directly with education colleagues to ensure homelessness is covered in delivery of the curriculum. Local authority homelessness staff and staff from relevant voluntary agencies are also involved in lesson planning and delivery within schools and ensuring that young people are aware of the realities of homelessness.

- Commissioning legal representation to be provided by legal agencies.
- Investment in training staff to ensure they meet the National Standards for Housing Information and Advice.
- Funding and working with third parties to ensure the provision of independent advocacy and advice. Shelter Scotland and CAB were mentioned most frequently but a range of local voluntary agencies are also engaged in this work. Some authorities mentioned that they have developed an advice network in order to facilitate joint working amongst providers and for accreditation purposes. A number of authorities were clear that their decision letters to homelessness applicants clearly signpost relevant advice and advocacy services in the area. It is clear that local authorities target provision to certain groups of people felt to be at greatest risk of homelessness, or of exclusion from mainstream services. These groups include young people; prisoners; rough sleepers; disabled people; and people from BME communities. Where services focus on particular topics these are most commonly finance/debt; benefits; or health. A number also focus on tenancy information or tenancy sustainment more broadly.
- Development of a housing options approach.
- Developing service directories which publicise the range of assistance available in the area.
- Provision of mediation services, either in house or in conjunction with other agencies.

151. As well as the provision of services a number of authorities reported that they had changed their working practices to take more account of the need to prevent homelessness and were working with other local partners to achieve that aim. Most of the activity mentioned related to the development of shared assessment processes in order to identify households at risk of homelessness and protocols put in place to meet the needs of these households effectively. The range of partners involved included RSLs, money advice agencies, hospitals and private landlords.

Recording outcomes

152. It is clear from the local outcome agreement and progress report process that many authorities struggled to define outcomes that focussed on the end result of the activities undertaken. Outcomes defined did not usually focus on whether or not actual homelessness had been prevented but rather focussed on intermediary steps

such as whether support posts were in place or whether information and advice had been provided. In some cases information was provided on how many people received a service but this did not go on to be explicit about the outcome achieved as a result. In other cases outcomes were defined in terms of prevention and tenancy sustainment but without making it clear if these outcomes were actually being attained or not.

153. There were some exceptions. A few authorities were able to track the impact of their activities and show that the number of evictions was decreasing. Other authorities were able to state that there had been a reduction in the number of ex-offenders presenting as homeless immediately after release. Some local authorities reported that they were developing outcomes and would have monitoring in place in the future.

Conclusions

There is a range of prevention activity taking place across Scotland but it is not placed at the centre of housing, homelessness or other services. Whilst there has been some good examples of joint and corporate working to prevent homelessness, this approach is far from embedded.

There is scope for local and central government to work together to develop guidance on preventing homelessness which could cover: improving understanding of prevention work; good practice examples; monitoring and recording practices, including local monitoring; and cost/benefit illustrations.

In prioritising joint working on homelessness in the development of their Single Outcome Agreements and other relevant plans and strategies, local authorities and partners should focus in particular on strategic approaches to preventing homelessness.

The Scottish Government, Scottish Prison Service and local authorities should consider implementation of the model service specification for housing advice services currently being developed.

There are challenges in measuring the impact of prevention work and new data from the revised HL1 should be considered with a view to informing future activity.

National activity to implement section 11 of the 2003 Act, and to prevent homelessness amongst prisoners and care leavers, should be progressed as a matter of urgency.

The Scottish Government should consider appropriate housing for disabled people as part of its work on independent living.

Section 2: Outcome 5: The duration of homelessness is reduced

154. National homelessness statistics indicate that for those cases assessed as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the median case duration, from application to duty discharge, has increased from just under 6 weeks in 2002/3 to nearly 18 weeks in 2006/7.

155. Through the local outcome agreements and progress reports, a number of reasons were given for an increase in the time taken to close cases. In the main these related to the limited supply in the area of affordable social housing and the need to rehouse others in waiting need as well as homeless households. One authority mentioned particular difficulties following stock transfer given that arrangements with local RSLs were not fully in place.

156. It was also noted that it sometimes took time to properly attend to support needs before a sustainable tenancy could be offered and that in some cases the longer wait for a case to be resolved was offset by the fact that this led to a more positive outcome for the household than could have been offered immediately. Some authorities noted that this choice was explicitly made by the applicant household themselves, particularly where they were entitled to more than one offer of accommodation and were relatively happy to remain in good temporary accommodation in the meantime. However it was also mentioned that in some cases, these expectations of a better offer were unrealistic and therefore caused delay with no prospect of a more positive outcome.

157. Local authorities are taking forward a wide range of actions to attempt to reduce the duration of homelessness. A number of authorities are focussing on steps they can take to reduce the time taken to make assessments and reach decisions. These include integrating assessment processes; recruiting additional staff; appointing a homelessness services co-ordinator to ensure consistent quality across the area; streamlining the appeals process; and introducing monthly performance monitoring against agreed targets.

158. Most local authorities are working towards reducing time spent in temporary accommodation with some adopting the approach of employing staff dedicated to shortening the journey time through the system for particular groups of clients (families with children for example) or focussing on particular types of temporary accommodation (e.g. B&B). Where young people are involved, one local authority highlighted that the duration of homelessness can be reduced where the youth mediation officer is able to intervene to facilitate an appropriate return to the family home.

159. Move on services have also been developed linked to hostels and other types of temporary accommodation where people tend to stay for longer periods and may require assistance to acquire independent living skills or to address entrenched behavioural issues. Local authorities are also developing furnished tenancies, furniture and starter packs and offering advice on finance and benefits entitlement in order to support households to move into sustainable permanent accommodation more quickly. One authority highlighted their practice of converting temporary accommodation to permanent where appropriate.

160. Half of authorities mentioned that they are running Private Sector Leasing Schemes or were in the process of exploring this option. Rent deposit/guarantee schemes and better information on the market were also mentioned as important mechanisms for increasing access to the private rented sector.

161. In terms of accessing permanent accommodation, a significant number of authorities are reviewing their allocations policies in order to set targets for percentages of lets going to homeless households. Significant numbers also mentioned establishing or reviewing arrangements to access RSL properties under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001; this may help to address the current relatively low level of lets to homeless households by RSLs.

162. A number of local authorities have also created, or are in the process of creating, a common housing register which is seen as a positive development for homeless households looking to access permanent social housing. One authority mentioned taking a more flexible approach to allocating properties to single people (i.e. giving single people equal access to 2 bed properties) and another highlighted a decision to offer all relets to homeless people in the first instance for a limited period of time. One authority noted that they were conducting a review of properties refused by homeless households to inform their allocations policy going forward.

163. A number of authorities take a housing options approach to enable homeless households to make an informed choice about their preferences for rehousing. This covers both priority need households in order that they can make realistic choices regarding their options and also non-priority households so that they are aware of the range of options open to them.

164. A number of authorities discussed the broader actions being taken to improve the supply of affordable housing in their area and one focused on a specific review system for tackling voids.

165. Reflecting local authorities' responses, Communities Scotland inspectors found that the periods of time spent by homeless people in temporary accommodation are often linked to the supply of permanent accommodation but that the priority given to homeless households in a number of councils' allocations system is also a factor, as are weaknesses in the management of applications.

Conclusions

The duration of homelessness has increased. This is mainly linked to lack of availability of appropriate move-on settled accommodation. However there are also other avenues which local authorities are exploring to reduce waiting time in temporary accommodation while also ensuring an appropriate response is provided.

Landlords and advice services should develop housing options approaches. These should ensure that people in housing need are aware of their entitlements, local services and the range of accommodation options in order that they can make an informed choice about the most sustainable option for their circumstances.

SECTION 3: PROGRESS TOWARDS 2012

Introduction

166. This section of the report sets out the current position in relation to progress towards the 2012 target. This takes account of feedback provided by local authorities via their local outcome agreements and progress reports and through participation in the ALACHO/Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Homelessness Support Project, findings of Communities Scotland inspections and official national homelessness and housing statistics. This feedback is set against the factors outlined in the Ministerial Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need published in 2005 by the previous administration. The section also discusses the initial findings of modelling of future capacity to meet the target carried out by the Scottish Government.

Current position

167. Local authorities consistently reported that the key issue in meeting 2012 is the availability and accessibility of permanent social lets. This issue was generally highlighted in the context of broader pressures on the supply of affordable housing in their areas. The main barriers to increasing supply are land availability and cost; planning and infrastructure constraints; and the effect of Right to Buy. Rural councils reported particular issues relating to the location of accommodation; higher construction costs; and the second homes market. These issues are discussed in further detail in the report of the 2012 Homelessness Support Project.

168. The Ministerial Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need, published by the then Scottish Executive, set out the factors which should be taken into account in assessing capacity to meet the target of abolishing the priority need distinction by 2012. The primary indicators were identified as: the impact on social lets; temporary accommodation; sustainability of solutions; and progress towards the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). Secondary indicators were: voids management; support needs; hidden homelessness; and preventative activity. Local authorities were asked to comment on their position against these indicators through the local outcome agreements and progress reports for 2006/07.

169. Local authorities have also been set interim targets for 2009, based on making a 50% reduction in the proportion of homeless households assessed as 'non-priority' from a baseline of 2003-04. The current position in terms of progress towards these targets is attached at Appendix B. This shows that:

- Three local authorities – Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire and Midlothian - have already met the interim target;
- Eight local authorities are moving in the opposite direction to the target, i.e. the proportion of homeless cases assessed as in priority need was less in 2006/7 than compared to the baseline year in 2003/4. It is of particular concern that 5 of these authorities have most to do to reach the 2009 target; and
- In order to meet the interim target by 31 March 2009:

- 12 local authorities would need to increase the proportion of homeless cases assessed as in priority need by up to five percentage points per annum;
- 15 local authorities would need to increase the proportion of homeless cases assessed as in priority need by between five and less than ten percentage points per annum; and
- Two local authorities - Orkney and Moray - need an annual uplift in excess of ten percentage points per annum.

170. Local authorities were given flexibility to devise a local approach to meeting the interim target. From the local outcome agreements and progress reports for 2006/7 there were 11 authorities who had yet to reach a clear decision as to how to progress towards the interim target or who had not stated the method in the report. Of these, 4 were clear that this is due to a desire to maintain good outcomes for those currently assessed as having a priority need in circumstances where access to appropriate accommodation and support is challenging. Others are considering options in conjunction with neighbouring authorities.

171. 13 local authorities reported that they will proceed, or were actively considering proceeding, on the basis of extending priority need to particular age groups or to particular age groups and other categories of applicant. Other categories include non-resident parents, people who have experienced marital breakdown, people with addictions and people leaving institutions. Four authorities were focussing on more sensitive assessments of vulnerability or relying on continuation of current trends to meet their interim target. Angus Council have opted for the 'big bang' approach and have removed the priority need test altogether.

172. Communities Scotland has begun to comment on local authorities' planning for 2012 as part of the inspection process. Inspectors have found that while some councils are planning strategically to help them achieve the targets for 2009 and 2012, others are not yet doing so. Inspectors recognised the real pressures for some authorities in terms of supply, and found evidence that this had impacted on the priority given to prevention work by some Councils. However, councils had not always factored in the likely impact of prevention work and the subsequent reductions in demand for accommodation into their planning assumptions.

Factors set out in the Ministerial Statement on the Abolition of Priority Need

173. Through their local outcome agreement and progress reports and participation in the 2012 Homelessness Support Project, local authorities have provided the following assessment against the primary indicators set out in the Statement:

a) Impact on social lets:

174. Social lets to homeless households are recorded through the national homelessness statistics, the annual performance statistical returns for registered social landlords and the lettings return made by local authorities. These sources of data do not agree exactly but indicate that in 2006/07 a fifth of all RSL lets and between 34% - 39% of all local authority lets were to homeless households. In the

local authority sector, the proportion of all lets going to homeless households has almost doubled in the last five years. If transfers are excluded then a quarter of remaining RSL lets and between 43-49% of remaining local authority lets were to homeless households.

175. However the situation is varied between local authorities with three giving less than 20% of all lets to homeless households and nine giving 50% or more of lets. Potential impact on lets should continue to be a key consideration in assessing capacity to meet the 2012 target.

176. A number of councils are working to improve the accessibility of available social lets through development of a common housing register; developing referral and nomination protocols with housing associations; and revising allocations policies. Others have developed, or are in the process of developing, a more effective relationship with private landlords and the voluntary sector so that they can play a more significant role in rehousing homeless households.

177. However overall supply remains a key issue for many authorities. In this context, local authorities reported significant concerns about meeting the needs of homeless households whilst also coping with demands from others in housing need; one of the island authorities reported that all its lets in the main towns are now going to homeless households. Other authorities forecasted that they will need a high percentage of lets, or all lets, to go to homeless households in order to meet the 2012 target.

178. Within the available supply, local authorities are also facing challenges relating to mismatches between demand from households and current stock (in terms of size and location). Some authorities also mentioned challenges posed by negative reaction to housing homeless households on the part of some communities. In part, this reaction may be an adverse local response to lack of housing stock; however, it also highlights the need for continued work to change attitudes towards homelessness. Further engagement with communities may be helpful in promoting better understanding of the circumstances of homeless households and help dispel prejudice where it occurs.

b) Temporary accommodation

179. The national figures on temporary accommodation show that usage is continuing to increase, following on from the new duties to provide accommodation to all homeless households introduced in 2002, demographic change and limited availability of appropriate permanent social lets. As at 31 March 2007 there were a record number of 9,164 households in temporary accommodation. Of these, 59% were in social rented stock, 17% were in hostels and 17% in B&B.

180. Nine local authorities recorded breaches of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) Order 2004 on this date, affecting 34 households containing children or pregnant women. However, the number of breaches has decreased substantially and many authorities who breached the Order in the past have now stopped doing so. Some areas reported having to use B&B accommodation due to overall pressures on temporary accommodation despite

having moved away from this practice previously. Authorities who have breached the Order have put in place policies to avoid future breaches such as sourcing more temporary accommodation from RSLs and the private sector.

181. More than half of authorities mentioned the pressure on temporary accommodation as a key challenge in meeting the 2012 target in their local outcome agreements and progress reports. In the majority of cases this is linked directly to limited availability of permanent social tenancies as people spend longer in temporary accommodation awaiting a permanent let. In some authorities this pressure on temporary accommodation has led to situations where some homeless households cannot be offered appropriate accommodation.

182. Through the 2012 Homelessness Support Project particular difficulties were raised regarding sourcing temporary accommodation in remote and rural areas and more broadly ensuring that accommodation is suitable in terms of access to social networks and services. The potential for negative reaction to the location of temporary accommodation for homeless people in particular areas was also mentioned, as were the costs of temporary accommodation and benefit rules which have a bearing on the cost to the provider and to the occupier.

c) Sustainability of solutions

183. Local authorities did not focus on repeat homelessness as a major concern in terms of meeting the 2012 target. However a number did emphasise difficulties in terms of effectively meeting the needs of individuals and families with multiple and complex needs and continuing drug users.

d) Progress towards the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

184. Six authorities noted that working towards the SHQS and wider regeneration activity will have some impact on their ability to meet the needs of homeless households and achieve the 2012 target. One stated that this will probably only be a minor impact and another expected a short-term disadvantage which would have a positive impact by 2012. One further authority stated there may be an impact but was unclear as to the extent of it. However the other three were more concerned that demolitions associated with regeneration would have a significant negative impact on the availability of social lets for homeless households and therefore on their ability to meet the 2012 target.

185. In terms of the secondary factors the feedback was as follows:

e) Voids management

186. Through local outcomes agreements and progress reports, two authorities explicitly stated that improvements in void management procedures had helped to reduce the duration of homelessness and the time spent in temporary accommodation. A number of other authorities referred to streamlining allocation processes which may have encompassed an improved approach to void management.

f) Support Needs

187. Just under half of authorities explicitly mentioned in their local outcome agreement and progress report that pressure on support services is a key challenge in meeting the 2012 target. While lack of adequate support services in itself does not impact on the 2012 target to provide permanent accommodation to unintentionally homeless households, it has a clear link with prevention of homelessness and tenancy sustainment. As is noted above, local authorities placed particular emphasis on the challenge of providing an effective response to those with multiple and complex needs but more broadly there is concern that funding for appropriately targeted support services is not at an adequate level to ensure that related outcomes on prevention and sustainable resettlement are achieved.

g) Hidden Homelessness

188. As is noted in Section 2 Outcome 2 three local authorities noted through their local outcome agreement and progress report that currently hidden homelessness may have a significant impact on their ability to meet the 2012 target. Another noted that the perception that being homeless was the only way to be allocated a social let would have the same effect. Through the 2012 Homelessness Support Project a number of local authorities also raised this issue – feeling that more people would present as homeless given increased rights to accommodation and a perception that the ‘homelessness route’ was the most effective way into social rented accommodation. It is important to note that achieving the top level outcome to make homelessness more visible may place greater pressure on local authorities in relation to meeting 2012.

h) Preventative activity

189. As is clear from Section 2 Outcome 4, all local authorities are carrying out actions aimed at preventing homelessness. However there is some doubt expressed about the impact of these activities in terms of assisting towards meeting the 2012 target with only 3 authorities specifically stating that prevention activity will be a major factor in determining their capacity to do so.

190. The main issues noted through the 2012 Homelessness Support Project were that prevention activity could be difficult to resource in the absence of tangible benefits up-front. This was linked to inconsistent corporate buy in and a perceived inflexible approach from other services – i.e. a failure to engage at an early stage to address relevant issues. The lack of support services or voluntary agencies in some areas was also flagged as a barrier to prevention activity, as were benefit rules (particularly in relation to Single Room Rent for young single people).

Modelling findings

191. The Scottish Government has carried out some initial modelling considering:

- The supply of social rented lets (taking account of letting patterns; the impact of new build as currently planned; planned demolitions; and the impact of Right to Buy and discounting transfer lets);
- Demand from homeless households (taking account of the proportion of households assessed as being in priority need who currently receive a let at the end of the process); and
- The level of social lets, minus transfers, which would therefore be required to meet demand from homeless households without increasing the provision of temporary accommodation.

192. A number of these variables are unpredictable and therefore assumptions have been made for the purposes of this modelling exercise at present. These relate to the levels of new build and loss of stock to right to buy; homelessness assessment levels; the rate at which applicants lose contact with the service or achieve another housing outcome outwith the homelessness legislation; and level at which RSL lets are used to rehoused homeless people. These assumptions are for the purpose of establishing a baseline position, not because they are seen as statements of what will actually happen in the future.

193. The primary value of the model is to explore a range of possible projected scenarios rather than to provide a definitive forecast of future events and interpretation of the findings should take this into account. Bearing this in mind, initial findings suggest that a continuation of current trends would lead to a situation whereby a quarter of local authorities would find meeting the 2012 target very challenging.

194. The modelling demonstrates that capacity to meet the target is strongly linked to the level of homelessness presentations and assessments. The initial findings highlighted the dramatic effect that preventing 5% of current homelessness would have on the number of lets required to meet the target. This underlines the importance of activity to prevent homelessness where possible, in terms of capacity to meet 2012 alongside improving outcomes for the households involved.

195. The modelling also strongly indicates the importance of maximising lets from RSLs across all local authorities. Where there is a sufficient private rented sector the modelling also indicates that this can make a contribution to achieving the target.

196. Overall, this modelling indicates that some areas face very significant challenges in achieving the 2012 target and also demonstrates the value of additional affordable housing supply in these areas in the years leading up to 2012. This information could be used to inform housing investment in this timescale.

197. There would be great value in refining the modelling already carried out to take account of emerging information regarding the assumptions currently made.

The Scottish Government intends to take this forward in discussion with local authorities.

198. Local outcome agreements and progress reports set out the range of activity which local authorities and their partners are undertaking to reach the 2012 target. As well as responding effectively to existing homelessness it is essential that central and local government and their partners work together to respond to the significant challenges they face in moving forward to 2012.

199. Key to this is maximising the availability of affordable housing for homeless people and others in housing need. The Scottish Government has clearly signalled that an increase in supply is required and there are a number of options for local authorities to pursue, including building their own houses if they have the capacity to borrow prudentially. There is also a need to ensure that the maximum contribution towards tackling homelessness is being realised from the RSL and private rented sectors, and that current barriers to rehousing homeless people in these sectors are identified and addressed if possible.

200. Local authorities also have the option to apply for 'pressured area status' in order to protect stock from future right to buy sales. The modelling demonstrates that, where homelessness levels remain constant and there is little contribution from the private rented sector, limiting right to buy sales could have a small but positive impact on capacity to achieve the 2012 target in those areas where sales are currently relatively high.

201. The modelling also reiterates that prevention of homelessness is extremely important in terms of achieving the 2012 target as well as for social and financial reasons. There is a need for prevention activity to be embedded across local authority departments and within other public agencies and for a greater focus on preventing homelessness wherever possible.

Conclusions

There is variety across Scottish local authorities in terms of current progress towards the 2012 target and future of capacity to meet the target.

The adequate supply of affordable housing in the right places is central to meeting the target. Central and local government and their partners must work together to maximise the availability of such housing. This should include action to ensure that the RSL and private rented sectors fulfil their potential to prevent and address homelessness and that current barriers to rehousing homeless people in these sectors are addressed if possible.

Activity to prevent homelessness should be embedded across local and central government and their partners and can have a significant impact on capacity to meet the 2012 target. Preventative activity should be seen as a primary, rather than a secondary, factor in assessing capacity to meet 2012.

Modelling work undertaken by the Scottish Government can inform future housing investment and should be refined to take account of newly emerging evidence in order to track progress to 2012 and inform local responses.

This modelling would suggest that several authorities face very significant challenges in terms of providing enough social lets to meet the demands which homeless households will represent in 2012 if current trends continue. These difficulties would be further exacerbated should levels of homelessness rise in these areas.

Modelling indicates that a number of areas will have sufficient social lets available to meet demand if RSLs and the private rented sector make an appropriate contribution to rehousing homeless people. However these areas may well face difficulties in matching available stock to demand; or in providing adequate support to homeless households.

The actions suggested in the report of the ALACHO/Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Homelessness Support Project should be pursued by the Scottish Government, ALACHO, COSLA and other bodies as appropriate.

Further engagement with communities should be undertaken to help promote better understanding of the circumstances of homeless households and help dispel prejudice where it occurs.

ANNEX A – MEMBERSHIP OF HOMELESSNESS MONITORING GROUP

Mike Foulis	Scottish Government (chair)
Laura Bannerman	Association of Directors of Social Work
Olga Clayton	Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers (representing Community Planning interests)
Struan Macdonald	Ministry of Defence
Cllr Harry McGuigan	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Cathy Roarty	Community Health Partnerships in Ayrshire
Kenny Simpson	Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers
Archie Stoddart	Shelter Scotland
Margaret Taylor	Glasgow Homelessness Network
Andy Young	Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Graeme Youngson	Scottish Prison Service
Karen Watt	Communities Scotland
Danielle Wells	Department for Work and Pensions

ANNEX B – LOCAL AUTHORITY PROGRESS TOWARDS 2009 TARGET

	% of homeless/potentially homeless households assessed as having a priority need		
	2003/2004	2008/09 target	2006/07
Aberdeen City	65	82	66
Aberdeenshire	68	84	70
Angus	81	90	76*
Argyll & Bute	60	80	74
City of Edinburgh	68	84	81
Clackmannanshire	73	84	82
Dumfries & Galloway	71	85	81
Dundee City	86	93	81*
East Ayrshire	58	79	69
East Dunbartonshire	68	84	72
East Lothian	51	75	62
East Renfrewshire	75	87	71*
Eilean Siar	55	77	65
Falkirk	69	84	72
Fife	62	81	66
Glasgow City	88	94	85*
Highland	56	78	71
Inverclyde	67	83	69
Midlothian	69	84	84
Moray	60	80	54*
North Ayrshire	76	88	81
North Lanarkshire	67	83	76
Orkney	83	91	69*
Perth & Kinross	76	88	69*
Renfrewshire	73	86	86
Scottish Borders	73	86	67*
Shetland	64	82	69
South Ayrshire	61	80	75
South Lanarkshire	65	82	73
Stirling	62	81	67
West Dunbartonshire	81	90	90
West Lothian	70	85	80
Scotland	73	87	77

Notes

* indicates movement against direction of target.
2003/2004 and 2006/07 data is from HL1 returns.

This document is also available on the Scottish Government website:

www.scotland.gov.uk/publications

or by contacting

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