

# **HOUSING (SCOTLAND) ACT 2001**

## **GUIDANCE ON HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES**

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Scottish Executive Development Department  
March 2002**



# HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES GUIDANCE

## Introduction

1. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a statutory duty on each local authority to:
  - carry out an assessment of homelessness in its area and
  - prepare and submit a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness in its area
2. Interim Guidance to local authorities on the assessment element of this duty was issued in September 2001. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the preparation of homelessness strategies which in the first instance should be prepared to come into effect from April 2003.
3. A homelessness strategy should take full account of the information gathered as part of the homelessness assessment. It should reflect the current Code of Guidance on Homelessness, except where that has been superseded by subsequent guidance; it should reflect the changes to legislation which were effected by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and it should take account of the second and final report of the Homelessness Task Force (February 2002) the recommendations of which have been accepted by the Scottish Executive.
4. It is also a statutory requirement under the 2001 Act that the strategy should state how a local authority is to comply with its equal opportunities duty under section 106 as regards matters included in the strategy.
5. The homelessness strategy should incorporate Health and Homelessness Action Plans prepared by the relevant Health Board in consultation with partners.
6. Finally, in so far as the strategy addresses the specific needs of people currently sleeping rough it should take account of the Scottish Executive target to remove the need for anyone to have to sleep rough by 2003. Local authorities which have developed strategies within the context of the rough sleepers initiative, and which latterly have developed these into Local Outcome Agreements, should ensure that their homelessness strategy fully embraces this target, and incorporates those elements of the Outcome Agreements which are appropriate.

## **SECTION 1: KEY PRINCIPLES OF A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

7. A homelessness strategy should be based upon a clear understanding of the extent and nature of homelessness in the local authority area, and of the resources available to address homelessness. In setting out mechanisms and action to prevent and alleviate homelessness, the following key principles should be incorporated:

### **8. Homelessness strategies should:**

- Establish between partners a shared understanding of and commitment to the issues taking full account of the complex needs of homeless people, the priorities in addressing these issues and the way forward;
- Provide an agreed framework within which aims and objectives are set, options identified and appraised, progress is monitored, impact evaluated and resources / finances allocated;
- Be developed consistently with other appropriate thematic and service plans;
- Ensure that equal opportunities are implemented at each stage of the process and embrace diversity, being flexible and responding to the different needs and service requirements of people regardless of sex, race, colour, disability, age, creed, marital status, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender re-assignment;
- Make sure that the needs of children are considered during the formulation and implementation of policies to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- Recognise the essential contribution to service development provided by consultation with homeless people and people who have experienced homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. As effective and practical approaches emerge, Communities Scotland will identify and promote good practice examples to local authorities and their partners.

## SECTION 2: CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

9. Homelessness is rarely only a housing problem and the homelessness strategy will require a corporate approach from the local authority, in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as homeless people themselves.

10. It will be important within the local authority that there is an individual named, with appropriate authority, who can take responsibility for the delivery of the strategy. In most instances this will be the Chief Executive, although other alternative arrangements may be acceptable. Whatever arrangements are adopted, the key priority must be to ensure corporate ownership of the strategy and of its implementation.

11. Any homelessness strategy must involve a broad corporate awareness of prevention, risk and the causes of homelessness. Some local authorities already have integrated departments and committees and these structures may be used in the development of the homelessness strategy.

12. The following local authority departments have been identified as appropriate for involvement in the development and delivery of the strategy (individual authorities may vary in their specific allocations of responsibilities).

Department	Reasons to be involved
Corporate Policy	Overview of council strategy. Possible lead department for homelessness strategy.
Housing	<p>Strategic role, enable housing provision and related support, meet statutory duty to homeless people, direct housing provision</p> <p>Links with other strategies including the Local Housing Strategy, the Community Plan, the Social Inclusion Plan, the Tenant Participation Plan and strategies on Youth Homelessness, Supporting People, Domestic Abuse, Rent Arrears, Anti-Social Behaviour, Empty Homes.</p>
Social Work	<p>Strategic role, enable or provide care and support, through-care, criminal justice, regulation of care</p> <p>12.1 Links with other strategies such as Youth Homelessness, Community Care and Children's Service Plans, strategies on Supporting People, Rent Arrears, Anti Social Behaviour and Domestic Abuse and with legislation including the Social Work (Scotland ) Act, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984</p>

Education	Strategic role, education for school children, further education and lifelong learning  Links with other strategies and legislation such as Youth Homelessness, the Children's Services Plan and Children (Scotland) Act 1995
Community Education/ Development Planning	Strategic role, youth services, and basic / core skills training Development of land, property etc.
Finance	Strategic funding role, Housing Benefit administration, grants budgets, and other funding responsibilities
Environmental Health	Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

13. In developing the homelessness strategy an agreed partnership framework covering strategy, planning and operations should be evidenced in each local authority area with joint protocols to ensure that support is provided, and homelessness prevented for vulnerable groups. It may be useful to agree a **definition of vulnerability** within this context and this should include those groups considered as being in priority need under the 1987 Act as well as groups identified in the Code of Guidance. The recommendations of the Homelessness Task Force report regarding the expansion of, and eventual abolition of, priority need should be taken into account. The full needs of particular sectors of the community should be integrated within the strategy.

14. Consideration should be given to how those with the appropriate authority and local elected members will be involved in the development, endorsement and monitoring of the strategy. It will be important to ensure the commitment of elected members to support the implementation of homelessness strategy at a local level.

## **SECTIONS 3: PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

15. The successful development and delivery of the strategy will be dependent on strong partnership arrangements with other statutory and voluntary organisations.

16. Wherever appropriate in developing these partnerships, existing partnership frameworks should be used rather than inventing new structures.

17. The strategy should identify the roles and responsibilities of partners in planning and delivering the statutory duties set out in the Act.

18. The strategy must take account of where geographical boundaries of different agencies do not coincide (for example health boards and local authorities). It should allow for people who need/ choose to access services outside their local area or who have no local connection, and it should take account of the need to provide services across boundaries, (such as in the case of domestic abuse or sex offenders).

19. The strategy should clearly establish partners' interests, aims and expectations of the strategy, as well as what they will commit to its delivery. Partners should be clear about their relative decision making status and the strategy should identify clearly the decision making structure. In particular, if appropriate the strategy should make clear how the diverse interests of a number of voluntary organisations may be represented.

### **Training**

20. The strategy should require that partners involved in its delivery ensure they have suitable training plans in place to enable staff to make a full contribution to its delivery, and to engage successfully in joint working. Partners are advised to develop joint training packages focusing on a common agenda and to ensure procedures are in place which enable the swift communication of any new developments (e.g. new legislation or best practice). Training should include the promotion of values, attitudes and behaviours which deliver responsive and personalised services. Training should cover, as appropriate, the definition of homelessness, risk assessment techniques to help 'first-to-know' agencies respond effectively, joint working with other agencies, support packages, consultation techniques, and how to help and empower people experiencing homelessness to find appropriate solutions.

21. Partners in developing and implementing the Homelessness Strategy could include the following sectors. The list is not comprehensive, and local authorities should consider the full range of partners appropriate to their circumstances, as well as links to other sectors' and agencies own plans and strategies:

Sector/Organisation	Reason for involvement
<b>The Voluntary Sector</b>	As providers of a large range of services, accommodation and support designed to prevent and tackle homelessness, the voluntary sector will have a large amount of experience and knowledge of the homelessness problem within a local authority area. It is also likely that the voluntary sector will have arrangements in place to take the views of homeless people which could be built upon. Their 'front line' contact may offer an important contribution in gauging the views of service users / people who have experienced homelessness.
<b>Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)</b>	are important providers and managers of social housing, including temporary and permanent housing for homeless people. The Housing Act sets out the statutory role of RSLs in providing accommodation to homeless people, where requested to do so by a local authority. A protocol will set out the basis for the relationship between the RSL and the local authority in respect of day to day management of requests to house homeless people.
<b>Private Landlords</b>	are also important as housing providers, and are particularly relevant in relation to housing certain groups (eg young single people). It is important to ensure effort is made across the sectors to prevent homelessness and ensure good communication about people at risk. Private sector landlords contribution may be developed. They may also be involved as part of a rent deposit/guarantee scheme, or lead tenancy scheme as identified by the Homelessness Task Force. In rural areas in particular it would be useful to involve representatives of private landowners (such as the SLF or the NFUS) in the development or delivery of the strategy.
<b>Health Board, Primary Care Trusts, Local Health Cooperatives</b>	are responsible for assessing, and providing for, the health needs of homeless people within their area. Health Boards have already been asked to develop 3 year Homelessness Action Plans (2002-05) in consultation with local authorities. These Homelessness Action Plans will form an integral part of the local Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy should also make link with other strategies such as the Health and Homelessness, Youth Homelessness, the Community, Community Care and Social Inclusion Plans and with legislation such as the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and the Mental Health Act



	<p>(Scotland) 1984.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> The Bridges 'Designing a Youth Homelessness Strategy' sets out useful information on 'Forging Partnerships with the NHS'.</p>
<b>Criminal Justice System:</b>	<p>Police and the Prison Service are responsible for community safety and crime prevention; both services will be in contact with people who are also homeless or precariously housed, and actions by either service can impact on the success or otherwise in preventing someone from becoming homeless. It is particularly important to ensure appropriate liaison about the housing arrangements for prisoners likely to lose accommodation as a result of their imprisonment; and for those who have no accommodation identified on release. Careful consideration should be given to addressing issues surrounding the housing of sex offenders.</p> <p>Police may have direct contact with people living on the streets, and should be involved in the development of a strategy to tackle rough sleeping. The police will also have a contribution to make in cases of harassment, illegal eviction and domestic abuse.</p>
<b>Department for Work And Pensions (Benefits Agency, Jobcentre Plus)</b>	<p>make benefits available to those being re-housed and to prevent homelessness (Crisis Loans, Community Care Grants etc.); involved in the delivery of transitional housing benefit and Supporting People; can work jointly to assist homeless applicants complete forms, for example for Income Support, and where possible process these quickly; is the delivery mechanism for New Deal, routes into employment. Links between local authorities, the DWP and the voluntary sector will ensure a multi-agency approach to providing training and support to young people at risk of homelessness including both training for employment and the provision of life skills training such as confidence building and homemaking.</p>
<b>Local Enterprise Company</b>	<p>assistance into training and employment, local labour market</p>
<b>Careers Service</b>	<p>advice and information, routes into education and employment</p>
<b>Communities Scotland</b>	<p>is the organisation responsible for the regulation and inspection of local authorities' homelessness functions, and should be involved at an early stage in the development of the homelessness strategy. Reference should be made in developing the strategy to Communities Scotland's Performance standards. (see Regulation and Inspection section in this</p>

	document) In addition, Communities Scotland will continue to be involved in the development of market context statements, advise local authorities on the content of Local Housing Strategies development funding strategies
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## SECTION 4: SETTING AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

22. The assessment of homelessness will have identified the:

- causes of homelessness
- households types/ vulnerable groups affected
- the problems and needs of those affected
- variations within the local authority area and over time
- gaps in services
- resources available

This information should be the basis on which the strategy is developed.

### Setting Aims

23. The homelessness strategy should clearly set out:

- **The overall aims** setting the vision of what the strategy is seeking to achieve (within a particular time-scale). These aims should reflect the local authority's values, corporate agenda and strategic vision. They will form the rationale for subsequent action and provide the basis for the authority to measure the success of the strategy.
- **Objectives**, with timescales, which establish how an aim is to be delivered. The objectives should flow from the aims; should be consistent with the analysis of underlying problems evidenced in the homelessness assessment; and be explicit in terms of what is to be done and over what time-scale. The objectives provide the basis of monitoring and evaluation of progress over time. They should involve the development of indicators of change which set out what success would look like, and will require the continued collection of data over time to measure the extent to which each objective is achieved.

**The aims and objectives together should clearly prioritise the prevention of homelessness, and set out how partners will work to alleviate and resolve homelessness when it does occur.**

- An **Action Plan**, which will set out clearly what will be done, when, and by whom in order to achieve the aims and objectives set out in the strategy. The Action Plan will address the current problem, but will make significant allowance for action to be taken to prevent homelessness in the future. It will clearly detail performance measures, time-scales involved and the lead agency for each objective. It needs to clearly identify targets.

24. As local authorities and health partners increasingly move towards a local outcome agreement framework it may be appropriate to adopt this model, incorporating local targets and time-scales to establish desirable outcomes. In

the instance of the Rough Sleepers Initiative, those authorities which have already developed local RSI outcome agreements should ensure that the aims, objectives and targets are an integral part of the homelessness strategy – including any specific local targets agreed with service deliverers.

## **Resources**

25. Interim guidance issued in September 2001 included a model template for assessing resources spent on homelessness in each local authority area.

26. In order to undertake a thorough evaluation of the contribution of the strategy towards preventing and alleviating homelessness, the strategy should identify the resources, financial and otherwise, dedicated to its delivery by members of the partnership. With resource pressures, calculation of inputs is necessary to provide a complete, balanced view of performance, highlighting economy and efficiency to complement the effectiveness of interventions.

27. Resource shortfalls and potential funding sources (such as transitional housing benefit) will need to be addressed. There may be some resources which are outwith the homelessness strategy (for example voluntary sector services funded by an external source). However, local authorities and partners should aim for the situation where all services to prevent and alleviate homelessness can be seen to be working together to deliver the strategic aims set out in the Strategy.

## **SECTION 5: IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR ACTION**

28. The Code of Guidance on Homelessness (1998) sets the framework for the delivery of local authorities' homelessness duties prior to the 2001 Act. As that Act is commenced, further guidance will be produced to amend and supplement the Code. In due course the Code will be revised to take account of the legislation, and the further recommendations of the Homelessness Task Force. However the greatest part of the Code remains extant, and relevant, and full account should be taken of the Code of Guidance, and subsequent guidance from the Scottish Executive, in developing a homelessness strategy.

29. The final report of the Homelessness Task Force (February 2002) is the second key document which should guide the content of homelessness strategies. This report, which is based on a comprehensive review of homelessness policy and practice, makes 59 recommendations the majority of which will be relevant to local action. Key areas addressed by the Task Force, and the manner in which they may be translated into local homelessness strategies are set out below in the order in which they are covered by the Task Force Report.

### **Legislative change**

30. Strategies should facilitate the delivery of current legislative duties, and should take into account the accepted recommendations of the Task Force for future legislative change. In particular, in assessing current and future housing needs they should take account of the recommendation to remove the priority need category over time. In due course data collection and monitoring should allow for an assessment of the impact of the removal of the 'local connection' provisions in current legislation.

### **Housing Policy**

#### **Supply and quality of housing**

31. There must be strong links between homelessness strategies and local housing strategies. Housing strategies should identify homelessness as a priority and should set out the actions required to achieve the removal of the priority need category within 10 years. Homelessness strategies should be developed in light of this information.

#### **Access to housing**

32. All local authorities should take measures to improve homeless people's access to housing, in both the social rented and private sector. This may include the use of model agreements between local authorities and RSLs to provide a framework for the RSLs' duty to co-operate on homeless requests. Such model

agreements need not be restricted to those RSLs involved in stock transfer.

## **Young People**

33. Young homeless people are likely to have particular difficulty in accessing housing. Local authorities should assess the local availability of affordable housing for young people seeking their own accommodation for the first time and homelessness strategies should include proposals to address any shortfall.

## **Furnished Tenancies**

34. Where the assessment has shown this to be necessary the strategy should establish targets to increase the number of furnished tenancies, particularly for young people.

## **Rent Deposit Schemes**

35. The strategy should ensure that a rent deposit/guarantee scheme is made accessible in the area by 2004.

## **Allocations**

36. Research supporting the Task Force report identified repeat homelessness as a particular problem. In many cases this can be as a result of inappropriate housing solutions being identified in the first place. Strategies should establish the principle that homeless people entitled to permanent accommodation receive at least as many offers of accommodation as those on the mainstream waiting list. These offers need to be reasonable and suitable if the tenancy is to be sustained.

37. When arranging temporary or permanent accommodation, homeless people should also be treated fairly in terms of quality of housing and location. The reasonableness of the initial response could well prevent a worsening, or a repeat of the homeless situation.

## **Housing Benefit**

38. The administration and processing of Housing Benefit is a key issue to be addressed in local authority homelessness strategies. The performance of different local authorities in administering housing benefit varies widely. Homelessness strategies should ensure links are established between the Finance Department, Housing and Social Work to ensure housing benefit administration is sensitive to the needs of homeless people.

39. The strategy should ensure that standards are established for dealing with housing benefit claims and that targets for improvements are also established. It is a recommendation of the Task Force that local authorities' performance in delivering these standards and targets will be monitored by Communities

Scotland in collaboration with Audit Scotland, DWP and the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate.

### **Action to Prevent Homelessness**

40. Local authority homelessness strategies should prioritise the prevention of homelessness, and in so doing should identify actions which will make early and effective interventions to support people at risk of becoming homeless. These may include:

- arrangements for early identification of those getting into housing difficulties, across the full range of tenures and landlords
- ensuring access to advice and support for those getting into difficulties and those known to be at particular risk of homelessness, such as young people living on their own or people discharged from institutions
- ensuring the availability of, and access to family / relationship counselling /mediation, financial debt/advice, drug/alcohol counselling and proactive action to manage neighbour disputes and tackle harassment
- the provision of leaving home and housing education in schools and other youth services
- The identification and implementation of good practice examples of preventative services from elsewhere

41. Homelessness strategies should ensure the *proactive* provision of support to those at risk of homelessness.

### **Eviction**

42. In potential eviction cases, a corporate and partnership approach is essential. The strategy should establish how Housing, Social work and Finance Departments within the local authority will pursue agreed and co-ordinated programmes of action in which the need to sustain tenancies is prioritised alongside income maximisation. Specific, concentrated support programmes for those threatened with eviction should include the provision of access to independent advice and representation.

43. The strategy should ensure good communication between housing departments and RSLs and other housing providers including early notification of any possible evictions to prevent homelessness occurring.

### **Housing Management**

44. In drawing up homelessness strategies, local authorities should review their policies for arrears management and anti-social behaviour to ensure they

do not lead to avoidable homelessness.

45. Other social landlords should be included in such reviews as part of their contribution to homelessness strategies.

### **Groups at Risk**

46. In establishing preventative measures as part of homelessness strategies, local authorities should ensure that groups at risk in their area receive advice and support appropriate to their circumstances. Many of these specific groups have been identified earlier in Section 3: Partnership Working , but for completeness are listed below. Joint protocols and assessments between housing providers and social work and links to the voluntary sector will help to identify those at risk of losing their tenancies. This may include those with a history of failed tenancies and therefore seek to address the issue of repeat homelessness.

- **Those leaving institutions:** Local authorities should check that preventative services are available within institutions in their area, such as those responsible for looked after children, prisoners, hospital patients and the armed forces and that appropriate linkages are made with services in the community prior to discharge. The provision of housing for sex offenders raises particular difficulties, and local authorities should consider appropriate means to address these.
- **Youth Homelessness:** Where an assessment has indicated a particular problem of youth homelessness, the homelessness strategy should specifically identify this as an area for action. It may be that it would be appropriate to consider a specific strategy to prevent and address youth homelessness.
- **Children and Families:** Homelessness strategies should include provision of preventative services for the particular problems of children and families and should ensure that housing responsibilities under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children's Service Plan are identified and implemented as part of the homelessness strategy.

In this area in particular the strategy should encourage consideration of good practice examples in providing multi-agency support to homeless families in other areas which prevent repeat homelessness and disruption to the lives of children and adults.

- **Asylum seekers and Refugees:** The strategy should ensure that the particular needs of asylum seekers and refugees are recognised and addressed, and that appropriate provision, and assistance to access that provision, is available.



## **Action to deliver an effective response to homelessness**

### **Integrating Services**

47. Local authorities, through their strategies, should provide the direction and create the framework within which all agencies join up to bring together a range of accessible options and opportunities for homeless people. New levels of communication will need to be established between local authorities and individual voluntary sector agencies and between agencies.

### **The development of 'Crisis Response' services**

48. Local authority homelessness strategies should contain comprehensive crisis response systems which will produce both short term, emergency responses, and long term solutions. The following key principles of crisis responses have been established by the Task Force and should be developed in the homelessness strategy.

49. The crisis response system should ensure

- that all those without accommodation are able to access at least immediate emergency accommodation until appropriate assessment is carried out.
- that the crisis response system is, in some form, permanently available and accessible, acting as a gateway to the effective use of accommodation and services. It should perform a 'triage' function of initial assessment, information and filter and ensure correct referral across a full range of services.
- that there are flexible and individualised responses to the different experience of homelessness of different groups and the different service requirements of people of differing age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, family background and belief.
- Responses should be based on joint protocols and procedures for needs assessment to ensure appropriate support for people with complex or multiple needs.
- There must be effective referral arrangements in place with response staff responsible for ensuring linkage into the full range of relevant services.
- explicit exit strategies from the crisis response stage must be devised immediately upon assessment of homelessness, to ensure the resettlement process begins immediately.
- re-settlement services should be monitored and evaluated, adjusted and improved wherever appropriate.



## **Resolving Homelessness**

### **Advice and Information**

50. As required by the 2001 Act (s2) separate guidance will be issued on the form and content of information and advice to be provided by local authorities. The guidance will stress the need for local authorities to review access to information, advice and practical assistance for homeless people and new tenants and to target information and advice to reach people who are vulnerable to homelessness or moving on from homelessness.

51. Local authorities should ensure the availability of independent and informed advocacy services within their area and ensure their availability is well publicised. They should ensure that advice and information is made available in forms which are accessible to people of all abilities and ethnic groups.

### **Accommodation and Re-settlement Support**

52. Local authorities should build upon the assessment of homelessness in their area and, through their housing and homelessness strategies, plan the delivery of a sufficient supply, range and location of permanent, temporary and interim accommodation. By its very nature, non-permanent accommodation will not be intended as a long-term solution, although some people will need to access this accommodation on a long-term basis. For the majority, the focus of such accommodation will be to move on to permanent accommodation with support as appropriate. The strategy should acknowledge the links between independent advice and information and successful resettlement.

53. Homelessness strategies should include provision for housing support to homeless people in temporary accommodation and during their transition to a permanent tenancy until it can be demonstrated that a tenancy can be sustained. In addition local authorities should plan housing support for a full range of people who may be at risk of homelessness or need support to sustain accommodation. These services should cater for a variety of support needs and client groups, such as families, those with mental health problems or those with disabilities and support may be provided in designated projects or by floating / flexible support schemes. Homelessness strategies should feed into, and be consistent with, the authority's Supporting People strategy.

### **Intermediate Accommodation**

54. It is essential that, as part of this process, homelessness strategies should clearly identify which forms of non-permanent or intermediate accommodation are appropriate. It should therefore be a feature of homelessness strategies to reduce the use of accommodation considered inappropriate to aiding the re-settlement process. This would include a reduction in the number of homeless people placed in bed and breakfasts and

large-scale hostels and the elimination of bed and breakfast provision for families.

55. Domestic Abuse: Provision of accommodation should cater for the different needs of various groups including families, young people, those with mental health problems or challenging behaviour. Particular priority should be given to women and children fleeing domestic abuse, which often leads to homelessness. Homelessness strategies must make links to domestic abuse strategies and a review of refuge places and forms of accommodation for victims of abuse should form part of the process.

## **Healthcare**

56. Health and Homelessness Action Plans, being developed by Health Boards, should form an integral part of the homelessness strategy, and should be developed in close partnership with the local authority.

## **Employment**

57. In developing its homelessness strategy, the local authority and its partners should recognise the key role of employment in prevention of homelessness and in successful re-settlement strategies. Links between local authorities and the Working Age Agency will improve gateways for homeless people to access mainstream employment services and programmes.

58. Employers, including public sector employees and the voluntary sector, should be encouraged to develop employment initiatives targeted at vulnerable and homeless people. They should be invited to examine ways of creating and expanding work opportunities for homeless people and new public sector initiatives such as those providing services for homeless people should consider the employment of homeless people in the provision of these services.

59. Partnerships between local authorities, the DWP and local employers as part of the development of homelessness strategies will highlight the role of employment and training in developing self esteem, economic independence and the social networks of homeless people thus combating problems of debt and isolation and promoting social and financial inclusion.

## **Social Networks**

60. Isolation and loneliness have been identified as major factors in resettlement breakdown. As part of the review of assessment procedures in local authorities homelessness strategies, the strength of a homeless person's social networks should be an integral part of the assessment of their needs and of the support offered in temporary accommodation and permanent resettlement.

61. Homelessness strategies should include a common strategy amongst local authorities and their partners to promote and support opportunities for

positive social interaction for homeless people. This may be through training and education, local community initiatives, etc.

62. Local authorities homelessness strategies should develop practical means of enabling people affected by homelessness to rebuild social networks. Methods may include the provision of local mediation, befriending and mentoring services for homeless people.

## **SECTION 6: MONITORING, EVALUATING AND REVIEWING THE STRATEGY**

63. The homelessness strategy should establish a framework against which it will be monitored and evaluated. Review processes should coincide and be part of complementary planning processes. **In monitoring and evaluating their strategies, local authorities should ensure that their homelessness services meet good practice.**

### **Information**

64. Local authorities currently keep data on statutory Accounts Commission performance indicators (priority need and number of households provided with four types of temporary accommodation), as well as the HL1 data supplied to the Scottish Executive, and RSI monitoring data.

65. It will be important to develop the right information structure to monitor the strategy. Local authorities will need to go beyond current information sources and reach different organisations and parts of the Council to monitor the Strategy, e.g. contract monitoring with RSLs and the need for information flows between organisations.

### **Time-scale**

66. Local authorities and partners should establish their own clear review timetable for the Homelessness Strategy. This should include both a time-scale for a complete review of the Strategy, and flexibility that will enable particular aspects of the Strategy to be reviewed and reshaped if appropriate. Local authorities should ensure that details of these time-scales are set out in the Strategy.

### **Strategy Process**

67. As well as monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the Strategy itself, the Strategy processes should be evaluated (for example information sharing). The use of protocols and joint working should be part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

### **Customer Research**

68. The views of service users will be crucial in determining the success of the Strategy. As stated above, users should be consulted about their own views on their situation, needs, experience of services and 'what works', gaps in services, barriers to services, suggestions for improvement etc.

69. Local authorities and partners should undertake regular surveys of service users, which should form part of their Best Value monitoring. Customer research

should also incorporate the views of other agencies.

## REGULATION AND INSPECTION

70. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 has established a single regulatory framework. It is a key function of Communities Scotland to regulate and inspect RSLs and the landlord, homelessness and factoring functions of local authorities.

### Performance Standards

71. Performance Standards will lie at the heart of the regulatory framework for homelessness services in Scotland. They have been developed to ensure all partners work towards:

- protecting the interests of current and future tenants and service users
- protecting public investment and access to private funds
- promoting high standards in homelessness functions in a way that encourages innovation and self-reliance, openness and accountability
- contributes to wider social justice and equality objectives

72. The standards set out performance expectations for regulated bodies and provide a framework for self assessment and evaluation. The standards underpin the regulator's inspection of the homelessness functions of local authorities and RSLs. The regulator will assess how well each Homelessness Strategy has been developed, the quality of the strategy and how well it is being implemented. The standards deal with partnership working, access to services, prevention of homelessness and quality of outcomes for homeless people. They also set out the guiding principles for the way homelessness functions should operate in relation, for example, to the promotion of equal opportunities, service planning and the pursuit of continuous improvement. The standards should be taken fully into account in the development of the homelessness strategy.

73. The standards are set out in ***Performance Standards for social landlords and homelessness functions***, published jointly by CoSLA, Communities Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

## **PUBLICATION**

74. The homelessness strategy must be made available to anyone who wishes to see it. Service providers, RSLs, central and local government departments, strategic partner organisations and service users will all have an interest in the strategy and should be able to access it. Consideration should be given to the need to provide the homelessness strategy in a variety of formats to be accessible to as many people as possible. Local authorities may consider, for example, producing summaries, making documents accessible to people in different languages or to people with sensory impairment, or in electronic format or designed for internet users.



## **HOMELESSNESS TASK FORCE REPORT: DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS<sup>1</sup>**

We identified a range of housing situations that defined the meaning of homelessness for the purposes of our work. This definition embraces the following categories<sup>2</sup>, which are not mutually exclusive, but all have been specified in the interests of clarity.

1. Persons defined in current legislation as homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness – i.e. those:-
  - without any accommodation in which they can live with their families.
  - who can't gain access to their accommodation or would risk domestic violence by living there.
  - whose accommodation is “unreasonable”; or is overcrowded and a danger to health.
  - whose accommodation is a caravan or boat and they have nowhere to park it.
2. Those persons experiencing one or more of the following situations, even if these situations are not covered by the legislation:-
  - Roofless: Those persons without shelter of any kind. This includes people who are sleeping rough, victims of fire and flood, and newly-arrived immigrants<sup>3</sup>.
  - Houseless: Those persons living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for homeless people. Examples of such accommodation are night shelters, hostels and refuges.
  - Households residing in accommodation, such as Bed & Breakfast premises, which is unsuitable as long-stay accommodation because they have nowhere else to stay.
  - Those persons staying in institutions only because they have nowhere else to stay.

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from “Homelessness: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response”

<sup>2</sup> Beyond the above specific categories of persons in situations of homelessness or ‘near’ homelessness, we have, in our recommendations, recognised a range of other vulnerable persons at particular risk of homelessness, who are the subject of proposed preventative action

<sup>3</sup> The responses to newly arrived immigrants are governed by separate UK legislation and rules administered by the Immigration Service.

- Insecure accommodation: Those persons in accommodation that is insecure in reality rather than simply, or necessarily, held on an impermanent tenure. This group includes:-
  - tenants or owner-occupiers likely to be evicted (whether lawfully or unlawfully).
  - persons with no legal rights or permission to remain in accommodation, such as squatters or young people asked to leave the family home.
  - persons with only a short-term permission to stay, such as those moving around friends' and relatives' houses with no stable base.
- Involuntary Sharing of Housing in Unreasonable Circumstances: Those persons who are involuntarily sharing accommodation with another household on a long-term basis in housing circumstances deemed to be unreasonable.

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