This good practice guide provides information on the design, procurement, and implementation of a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness. The guide is based on an evaluation of homelessness prevention activity across ten local authorities. It provides good practice examples, and offers suggestions on how to improve the monitoring of homelessness prevention services.
Homelessness Prevention

a guide to good practice

June 2006

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Ever since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, local authorities have been expected to prevent, as well as to respond to homelessness. A purely responsive stance towards homelessness has never been condoned in official policy. A wide range of preventative approaches have been promoted by successive versions of the ministerial Homelessness Code of Guidance, designed to help councils interpret legislative requirements.

1.2 Since the Homelessness Act 2002, however, central government has increasingly encouraged local authorities to become more pro-active in tackling homelessness. A central component of this new regime is the requirement for local authorities to produce homelessness strategies. A key requirement was for authorities to set out proposals for homelessness prevention.

1.3 The government’s wish for local authorities to develop a more interventionist approach to homelessness more generally, was also signalled in its 2002 policy publication ‘More than a Roof’ (DTLR, 2002). That report advocated a number of practical initiatives seen as contributing to homelessness prevention. These included a greater emphasis on the provision of advice on housing, employment and welfare benefits, together with the development of services such as family mediation, support with dealing with domestic violence, access to detoxification services, and employment training.

1.4 Ministers have also committed more than £360 million to grant-funding local authority homelessness prevention activities. With the significant reductions in homelessness acceptances seen since 2003, it appears that some of these have already had a measurable impact (DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming). Nevertheless, local authority performance in this area remains uneven. The production of this guide to encourage the wider implementation of effective prevention, is therefore seen as timely.

Purpose and Scope of the Guide

1.5 The two main objectives of this guide are to:

- summarise what is meant by ‘homelessness prevention’ and its implications for the ways that local authorities deliver relevant services, and

- show how the homelessness prevention ethos can be delivered in practice.
The guide focuses on the six ‘homelessness prevention’ activities shown by research as being those most commonly operated by local authorities:

- housing advice
- rent deposit schemes
- family mediation
- domestic violence victim support
- assistance for ex-offenders
- tenancy sustainment services

A number of more unusual interventions aimed at helping people avoid homelessness were covered in the companion research project (see below) and are discussed in an annex to the separately published research report (DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming). These include the creation of emergency accommodation, supported lodgings, and credit union schemes to assist social renters evicted for rent arrears to secure re-admission to social housing.

As confirmed by the research evidence, some homelessness prevention activities are focused mainly on households judged as ‘potentially in priority need’ under the homelessness legislation. That is, they are made available primarily to family households and/or single ‘vulnerable’ people at risk of homelessness. Services such as housing advice, assistance to ex-offenders and tenancy sustainment interventions however, are often provided irrespective of any assessment as to a household’s likely status in relation to the homelessness legislation. In any event, many good practice messages are applicable to services irrespective of whether they are targeted mainly at priority need groups.

Sources

The guide is largely based on research commissioned by ODPM (now DCLG) in 2004/05, which examined the homelessness prevention activities of 10 local authorities in England. The report of this research is to be published separately (DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming). The research objectives, the list of case studies, and the limitations of the project are set out in Annex 1.

Existing sources of good practice advice to which reference is made in this report include:

- Improving Rent Arrears Management – ODPM Good Practice Guide (Flint, Pawson and Scott, 2005)
A number of other official publications are highly relevant to homelessness prevention. These include:

- Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives. A strategy for tackling homelessness ODPM (2005)
- Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers: A Good Practice Handbook; Rough Sleepers Unit (2001)

A full list of references, including internet links, is at the end of this guide.

Structure of the Guide

The guide is structured as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the meaning of ‘homelessness prevention’ and its implications for local authority homelessness work. Here we set out some general principles on the operation of homelessness prevention services, and on procurement and monitoring. This links to a discussion about the cost-effectiveness of homelessness prevention and how this can be measured.

Each of the following chapters focuses on a particular type of service and is structured in a similar way. As well as describing the nature of the service, we look at the client group(s) to whom the service is provided, at procurement issues, at monitoring and evaluation systems, and at cost-effectiveness considerations. At the start of each chapter there is a checklist of key good practice messages for local authorities.

This guide includes examples of different policies or procedures used by local authorities. These examples are intended to highlight the wide range of approaches local authorities have taken to preventing homelessness. DCLG is not recommending any individual authority’s practice or procedure. Pointers to good practice drawn from the evaluation of a variety of approaches are set out in the main body of the text.
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The ethos of homelessness prevention and good practice principles

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The Ethos of Homelessness Prevention and Good Practice Principles

Key Messages

- Homelessness prevention interventions should not be targeted exclusively towards households judged likely to meet the ‘priority need’ test

- Analyse local homelessness data, and data gathered for homelessness strategies and reviews, to inform homelessness prevention priorities

- Look at establishing a standard housing options interview procedure to focus initial attention on preventing rather than responding to homelessness once it has already occurred

- Ensure that a requirement to participate in a ‘housing options’ interview does not act as a barrier preventing or discouraging homeless people from seeking help – and does not prevent or delay necessary enquiries if there is reason to believe they are homeless

- Encourage homelessness staff to see their role as primarily about assisting clients to avoid homelessness rather than rationing social housing

- Look at the scope for developing specialist skills within the homelessness team, and assess the recruitment and training implications

- Assess whether existing staffing structures and job descriptions are consistent with the new prevention-focused, strategically-guided approach to homelessness

- Consider whether existing procedures lay sufficient stress on the value of home visits by homelessness officers

- In procurement decisions relating to homelessness prevention services, adopt a Best Value approach

- Establish clear service standards, performance indicators and (where applicable) targets for homelessness prevention services
The Ethos of Homelessness Prevention

2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 is central to the ‘prevention-focused’ approach DCLG seeks to encourage among local authorities. Under the Act every housing authority is required to develop a homelessness strategy, based on a review of homelessness in their local area. Strategies must aim to prevent homelessness and ensure that accommodation and support will be available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. According to guidance issued by ODPM in 2002, an effective homelessness strategy will, among other things:

- Identify the services needed to prevent homelessness occurring or reoccurring
- Identify the resources currently available to meet these needs
- Identify additional resources as required
- Involve other public voluntary and private agencies in partnership work

(Randall and Brown, 2002).
2.2 More recently, homelessness prevention has been defined as ‘activities that enable a household to remain in their current home, where appropriate, or that provide options to enable a planned and timely move and help to sustain independent living’ (ODPM, 2003a). ODPM (now DCLG) also identified three stages where local authority (or other agency) intervention can prevent homelessness:

- Early intervention: where those at risk are identified and services provided to support the person and their environment before incipient problems or disputes escalate beyond repair

- Pre-crisis intervention: which can take the form of advice services, mediation services, negotiation with landlords to avoid imminent loss of a home and targeted services at known risk points such as those leaving local authority care, prison or armed forces

- Preventing recurring homelessness: tenancy sustainment is seen as key to preventing recurring homelessness where there are problems that cannot be resolved by rehousing alone.

ODPM (2003b).

2.3 Central government has argued that relatively modest investment in prevention initiatives could yield very substantial longer-term savings (ODPM, 2003c). The ‘spend to save’ principle is an important component of the homelessness prevention ethos. Cost-effectiveness issues are further discussed in paragraphs 2.49-2.62.

2.4 Local authorities are also expected to work towards a number of specific homelessness prevention objectives. The most significant of these are to:

- Reduce levels of homelessness against main causes\(^1\)

- Reduce levels of repeat homelessness

- Reduce the inappropriate use of temporary accommodation\(^2\)

In January 2005 the ODPM introduced a national target to:

- Halve the total number of households in temporary accommodation between 2005 and 2010.

\(^1\) In terms of the main immediate cause of homelessness for those accepted as homeless and in priority need. Nationally, in 2004/05 these were: parents/friends/relatives unwilling to continue to accommodate (38% of acceptances), relationship breakdown (20%: 13% involving violence and 7% not involving violence), loss of assured shorthold tenancy (13%).

\(^2\) Including the elimination of the long-term use of B&B hotels as temporary accommodation for family households
New Approaches to Managing Homelessness Work

**Making the Cultural Shift**

2.5 Embracing the homelessness prevention ethos implies a substantial change in the traditional culture of homelessness work. One leading local authority summed up its aim in fostering a prevention-oriented approach as changing staff attitudes from “nothing can be done to prevent homelessness in high demand areas’ to ‘every case is preventable” (Harrow LBC, 2003, p37).

2.6 It is clear from the research evidence that – in conjunction with official guidance and central funding – Harrow’s homelessness prevention work has been immensely influential. Many local authority homelessness teams have been encouraged to break with the traditional legalistic focus of homelessness work to adopt a pro-active, customer-focused, problem-solving ethos.

**Housing Options Approaches**

2.7 A crucial component of the new ethos of homelessness work is the ‘housing options’ approach. This involves a standard procedure whereby all new housing applicants participate in an initial interview to review their housing circumstances and prospects. The aim is to discuss, in detail, the feasibility of securing the applicant’s existing accommodation or, failing that, to examine the full range of possible routes to accessing a new tenancy. Essentially, housing options interviews are a forum for the provision of housing advice (a service discussed in more detail in Chapter 3).

2.8 In accordance with the legislation, where the housing officer has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, a formal Housing Act Part VII assessment is initiated. Under the housing options approach, the procedure for households likely to be eligible and in priority need for homelessness assistance is now therefore likely to be operated as a two-stage process, with options and prevention considered first, but with safeguards in place where a person is eligible for and requires assistance under the homelessness legislation. Where a Part VII assessment is triggered through a housing options interview, for example in cases of threatened homelessness, all possible measures to prevent actual homelessness should be undertaken in parallel with this.

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3 i.e. people facing homelessness and others seeking to move into social rented housing.

4 The Homelessness Code of Guidance provides explanation of the homelessness legislation. Paragraph 8.3 states that a ‘person is “threatened with homelessness” if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days’ – see DCLG, DoH, DfES (2006). This is the definition provided under s. 175 (4) of the Housing Act 1996. Hereafter, where this guide uses the term ‘homeless or threatened with homelessness’, it refers to this statutory definition. Chapter 6 of the Code clarifies what is meant by “reason to believe” a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
2.9 Housing options interviews can be a useful way of focusing initial attention on practical steps to avert homelessness. They also enable the interviewing officer to form a judgement as to whether there is ‘reason to believe’ that the household may be homeless or threatened with homelessness. This is crucial because if such reason exists an authority is legally obliged to conduct a formal homelessness assessment.

2.10 In line with the government’s wider commitment to customer choice, the housing options approach recognises the limited scale of social housing resources. It avoids any initial assumption that a social rented tenancy is necessarily the most appropriate solution for the household concerned.

2.11 Housing options interviews are a crucial element of the new approach to homelessness prevention. It is, therefore, important that this process improves outcomes and does not unduly delay a statutory homelessness assessment if this is necessary. It is also important that it is inspired by a desire to improve the help on offer, and not by a ‘gatekeeping’ mentality – i.e. where the process is seen primarily as a device to prevent or discourage people from seeking housing assistance. The housing options approach should never replace or delay a statutory homelessness assessment where the authority have reason to believe that someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

2.12 In summary, the essential principles of a housing options approach should include:

- Providing an improved service for all customers with less distinction in the service provided to applicants in relation to their probable ‘priority need’ status – asking ‘how can we help?’ rather than ‘who can we help?’

- Examining all possible accommodation solutions both in relation to retaining any existing tenancy or residency and in respect of accessing a new tenancy

- Exploring the pros and cons of any available and appropriate options to help applicants themselves make informed decisions or choices

- Adopting no prior assumptions as to whether a social rented tenancy might prove to be an applicant’s most appropriate rehousing solution

- Making full use of information about an interviewee’s current housing circumstances to assess whether there is ‘reason to believe’ the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness – and therefore eligible for a formal homelessness assessment

- Processes with sufficient flexibility so that – where applicable – a full homelessness assessment can be conducted without delay.
Home Visits

2.13 Alongside the more ‘outward looking’ ethos inherent in homelessness prevention work, which frequently requires extensive networking with local agencies and stakeholders, the new pro-active prevention ethos emphasizes the value of home visits as part of homelessness investigations. It appears that many local authorities have recently re-discovered the value of home visit procedures. The Harrow guide advocated a routine home visit procedure for all cases involving people reporting having been asked to leave the homes of parents, friends or relatives (‘family/friend exclusions’). Home visits are particularly appropriate when a young person has been asked to leave by family or friends because of the timely provision of housing advice and the possibility of reconciliation between the young person and the other party.

2.14 As recommended by the official homelessness Code of Guidance (DCLG, DoH, DfES, 2006) mediation should be routinely used in an attempt to reconcile the parties in ‘parental exclusion’ cases (other than where there is judged to be risk of abuse or violence). A home visit by a homelessness officer might be seen as a first step in the process. Whether or not it amounts to ‘mediation’, home visits by homelessness staff are seen by many councils as an opportunity to negotiate with the host household to allow a young person to remain in the property until a planned and sustainable move can be made. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion on family mediation and its potential role in preventing homelessness.

Re-shaping Staffing Structures, Recruitment and Training

2.15 The renewed emphasis on homelessness prevention has significant implications for the nature and organisation of local authority homelessness work. This may mean, for example, the re-allocation of homelessness officer staffing resources by designating specific team members to develop particular skills and knowledge (e.g. on welfare benefits, debt counselling, and substance abuse rehabilitation).

Assigning specialist roles for homelessness staff

In Leicester City Council’s Housing Options team individual staff have been assigned various specialisms in, for example, rehousing ex-offenders, Housing Benefit liaison, and tenancy relations. In Bournemouth, specialisms have been developed by homelessness officers in respect of landlord liaison, domestic violence victim support, and the provision of assistance to young people.
More generally, a prevention-focused homelessness service calls for somewhat different skills and approaches to traditional local authority homelessness work. There is a greater emphasis on networking with community organisations and with private landlords, and a greater stress on negotiation, problem solving, and creativity. Inherent within this style of work is an implication that front-line staff are allowed greater discretion, and encouraged to think more imaginatively. Partly in recognition of these new skills requirements, the Harrow guide recommends that local authorities should rethink the common assumption that previous experience of housing work is essential for homelessness team recruits. Instead, authorities are advised to ‘look to bring in fresh people with enquiring minds and a desire to problem solve’ (Harrow LBC, 2003, p4).

Another organisational trend common to a number of case study authorities selected for this research was the establishment of strategy and monitoring posts to develop and take forward homelessness strategies. This was partly in recognition of the different skill requirements of operational management and strategic activity.

**Restructuring homelessness functions**

In **Telford & Wrekin BC**, the demands of the new homelessness regime have been recognised through the establishment of a Homelessness Strategy Implementation Co-ordinator post. **Bournemouth BC** has split the operational and strategic management of homelessness to create specific managerial posts tasked with these two distinct aspects of homelessness-related activity. In a number of other case study authorities – e.g. Bristol – designated policy and monitoring posts have been created to properly set up, oversee and review homelessness prevention services outsourced to housing associations and other external agencies.

The new demands made of homelessness staff under a prevention-oriented regime have important staff training implications. Whilst there is a continuing need for detailed knowledge of legislation and caselaw, officers are also likely to need to employ negotiating and analytical skills. Training programmes will also need to emphasize the importance of monitoring and recording practices which – as the research evidence demonstrates – are currently not always given sufficient priority. As further argued in paragraph 2.28, delivering effective homelessness prevention services implies a need for LA investment in staff recruitment and training.
Re-thinking Homelessness Work – Summing-up

2.19 In gearing up for prevention-focused homelessness services, therefore, local authorities need to review their homelessness teams in relation to:

- organisational structures i.e.:
  - to emphasize strategic as well as operational roles
  - to ensure that appropriate staff resources are targeted at prevention and options as well as at the processing of homelessness claims

- to ensure that appropriate staff resources are targeted at prevention and options as well as at the processing of homelessness claims

- job descriptions and person specifications

- staff recruitment and training programmes

Targeting Services

Strategic Targeting

2.20 At the strategic level, determining the homelessness prevention priorities appropriate for a particular local authority is a central function of the homelessness strategy. As the relevant government guidance recommends, this should involve analysing the nature of local homelessness and the resources available to meet the needs identified (Randall and Brown, 2002, p30-33).

2.21 For the purposes of targeting homelessness prevention activity, central government has emphasised the need to consider the main causes of homelessness locally.

2.22 Defining homelessness prevention priorities will also depend on the demographic profile of the local population and the homelessness caseload. In areas with significant ethnic minority populations there could be a case for targeting homelessness prevention measures accordingly. This might be achieved through delivering services under an ‘outreach’ framework or employing homelessness prevention staff with appropriate cultural backgrounds and/or linguistic skills. The case for targeting services in this way would be particularly strong where the groups concerned are culturally isolated by language or other barriers, or where they are simply over-represented among the statutory homeless population. ODPM (now DCLG) recently published a guide on the provision of homelessness services to ethnic minority groups (ODPM Tackling homelessness amongst ethnic minority households: A development guide, 2005).
Defining homelessness prevention priorities is also about understanding the structure of local housing markets. For example, in an area like Bournemouth where the private rented sector is twice the size of the social rented sector, there is clearly potential for facilitating homeless households’ access to (or retention of) private tenancies. Similarly, the scope for (cost) effective liaison with private landlords to help prevent homelessness via evictions from the private rented sector is arguably much greater in areas where the ownership of privately rented properties is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of landlords. Subject to Data Protection Act requirements, such information can be identified relatively easily from an authority’s Housing Benefit records.

Approaches to homelessness prevention might also differ in rural and urban areas. Where settlements are widely dispersed there may be a greater case for outreach style provision. The good practice handbook on homelessness strategies, published by ODPM, refers authorities to additional guidance on homelessness in rural areas produced by the Countryside Agency, and highlights some key issues faced in rural areas, for example:

- ensuring access to services for people in remote areas or where transport links are weak;
- providing solutions in the person’s own area wherever possible so that they can maintain links with family, friends and the community;
- considering joint commissioning with neighbouring authorities where demand is not sufficient to justify separate provision;
- working across local authority boundaries, for example where strategic plans are needed to decide whether to concentrate joint services in certain areas, or to set up smaller scale, scattered provision to allow people to stay in their home areas.

This might also apply in urban areas containing traditionally excluded groups such as particular minority ethnic communities. See Countryside Agency (2002) Preventing homelessness in the countryside… what works? A guide for local authorities and the voluntary sector demonstrating effective practice.

Preventing homelessness in a cost-effective way requires the development of appropriate referral systems. In identifying households to be referred to services such as family mediation, domestic violence victim support and assisted access to private tenancies, homelessness staff need to make accurate judgements as to:

- whether there is a reasonable prospect that the household concerned might benefit from the service,
- whether referral to the service might place the household at risk (e.g. because of the associated need to remain in their current accommodation in the interim)
whether, in the absence of assistance, the household is – in fact – likely to become homeless (and therefore has a strong claim on help to avoid this outcome).

2.26 For example, in determining whether to refer a young person to family mediation, a homelessness officer needs to assess whether the relationships between the client and their parent or host householder could be potentially reparable. If not, there is little point in wasting the time and resources of the mediator. If, on the other hand, the alleged ‘relationship breakdown’ is not in fact serious, it may be that the parties are reconcilable without further intervention. In this case, too, a mediation referral is unwarranted and could ‘crowd out’ appropriate referrals. The resources absorbed by such ‘unnecessary referrals’ could undermine the cost-effectiveness of the service as a whole. A homelessness officer also needs to be sure that in making a mediation referral the young person is not put at risk of violence or abuse by the expectation that they will return to the family home in the interim. The need for sensitive and careful judgement in this type of scenario is further discussed in Chapter 5.

2.27 DCLG does not advocate that homelessness prevention services are targeted exclusively on family households and vulnerable single people (i.e. households likely to meet the ‘priority need’ test within the homelessness legislation). Indeed, given its broad scope, the new ‘housing advice’ Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 213) indicates the opposite, as does the requirement for local authorities to produce homelessness strategies.

2.28 Housing options interviews and home visits are potentially very important mechanisms for collecting the information needed to reach appropriate decisions on such referrals. This places a premium on having capable, well-trained and responsible staff to undertake such roles. Establishing such a service will demand political commitment to invest the resources necessary to attract, train and retain such personnel (see also paragraph 2.16 and 2.18).

Procuring Homelessness Prevention Services

2.29 Research evidence shows that homelessness prevention services are provided by a range of organisations. Some activities (e.g. promoting tenancy sustainment) appear to be frequently provided in-house by local authorities and housing associations, whereas more specialist activities (e.g. family mediation) may be more commonly procured by Local Authorities from voluntary agencies.
2.30 Whilst there are no hard and fast rules on the appropriateness of out-sourcing, there is a general expectation that decisions on how services are provided are determined within a Best Value framework. This implies a need for an options appraisal considering all the possible ways that the service could be provided and weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of each option in a transparent and consistent way. For example, there might be reasons for arguing that an in-house operation could facilitate a quicker service and better communication between staff. On the other hand, an external agency might offer the advantages of:

- independence from the local authority
- enabling the local authority to draw on the particular expertise and wider support networks of other agencies. For instance, there may be both cost and quality benefits from outsourcing assessment, accommodation and support provision for 16/17 year olds.

Such procurement decisions should also be influenced by cost-effectiveness considerations and service user views (e.g. as recorded through satisfaction surveys of former clients).

2.31 Where it is decided to outsource a particular service it is essential that the contractor’s functions are clearly defined in an enforceable contract. Such contracts should also stipulate service standards, performance measures and performance targets. In specifying such arrangements, decisions will need to be taken as to the payment structures involved. For example, is the cost to the local authority determined on a per-case basis, or a flat annual fee?

2.32 Best Value principles also imply a need for periodic re-appraisals of the ways that services are being provided and a re-consideration of possible alternative options. Where a service has been outsourced the prospect of contract expiry will, in any case, provide a trigger for this, although flexibility to amend services mid-contract may have considerable benefits. Determining whether such contracts are extended or renewed should depend, at least in part, on the contractor organisation’s measured performance in relation to its defined targets. More broadly, Best Value service reviews should be undertaken within the framework of the ‘four Cs’ – challenge, compare, consult and compete. General guidance on carrying out such reviews is available on the DCLG website.

2.33 The framework described below has enabled Bristol City Council to ensure that voluntary sector providers deliver services in line with agreed specifications, and that grant assistance is put to good effect.
A framework for external procurement and review of homelessness prevention services

Bristol City Council is highly active on homelessness prevention. Many of the homeless prevention services being operated in the city are commissioned by the Council from external organisations. The Council has developed a structured monitoring and evaluation framework for these services. All contracts contain clearly specified service outcomes, performance measures and targets.

Service activity is routinely monitored through annual statistical returns. Services are also subject to periodic service review by Homelessness Policy Officers. The review process for each contract involves:

– collecting qualitative and quantitative evidence on service provision additional to routine monitoring statistics
– examining the nature and effectiveness of links made between the service agency and other relevant service providers
– identifying obstacles to more effective prevention.

The review process includes interviews with both service users and other key stakeholders relevant to each specific service.

Each service review aims to assess projects in terms of:

– economy, efficiency and effectiveness
– performance in relation to contractually specified targets
– whether service provision is sufficiently flexible to cater for varying levels of need among the target group
– future plans for service enhancements to maximise preventative impact
– the extent to which the service reflects the Council’s Supporting People priorities.

A Commissioning Advisory Panel has been set up to oversee the service review process and to receive review reports. Panel members are senior managers drawn from partner agencies with an informed view of the homelessness prevention field – e.g. Bristol Prison, Knightstone HA, Bristol City Council Youth Offending Team.
Performance Management and Monitoring

2.34 Preceding sections on service targeting (paragraphs 2.20-2.28) and procurement (paragraphs 2.29-2.33) have already touched on service monitoring issues. Local authorities are, in any case, obliged to comply with official monitoring requirements encompassed within the quarterly P1E homelessness return and the newly introduced Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) relating to housing advice and homelessness prevention, bringing the number of homelessness related BVPIs to five. Particularly given that these latter measures are being newly introduced in 2005/06 they are discussed below. This leads to a discussion of broader monitoring principles.

Homelessness Prevention BVPIs

2.35 A number of the official Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are directly relevant to homelessness prevention. These include two indicators included in the 2005/06 BVPI suite, on ‘housing advice’ (BV213) and ‘repeat homelessness’ (BV214). The official guidance on these indicators is reproduced in Annex 2 for ease of reference.

2.36 BV213 measures the impact of housing advice in averting actual or imminent homelessness. Specifically, the indicator counts:

*households who considered themselves as homeless, who approached the local authority's housing advice service(s) and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.*

2.37 Whilst the indicator refers to a local authority's 'housing advice services', the BVPI guidance states that councils should interpret this broadly as referring to any 'first point of contact' (whether with a housing advisor or with the homelessness team etc.) where a person at risk of or actually homeless is counselled on their housing options. ‘Housing advice casework intervention’ should also be interpreted broadly. This might involve information provision – e.g. explaining a private tenant’s legal rights. Alternatively, it might consist of more substantive assistance such as acting to enforce those rights, or referring a client to family mediation to enable the retention of existing accommodation or helping a client access a private tenancy through a rent deposit or similar payment.

2.38 ‘Households who considered themselves homeless’ are defined as including any applicant, irrespective of their priority need status. This means that ‘prevention cases’ recorded for the purposes of BV213 may extend beyond those where an authority has determined that there is ‘reason to believe’ that the household is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
2.39 In judging whether an intervention has resulted in a ‘solution’ which ‘is likely’ to prove durable for at least six months it is suggested that the local authority may wish to consider carrying out checks on a sample of cases six months after advice has been dispensed. The aim here would be to determine what proportion of the sample case households remained resident at the placement address at this time. This proportion could then be applied to the annual housing advice caseload to estimate the total number of ‘cases resolved’ for the year as a whole. This would be a better measure than the assumption that an intervention has been ‘successful’ on the basis that an ‘assisted household’ fails to re-present during the succeeding six months.

2.40 The second ‘homelessness prevention’ measure introduced in the 2005/06 BVPIs is BV214, which measures repeat homelessness. The establishment of this measure (already integrated within the P1E return) is consistent with the existing official aim of reducing repeat homelessness (see paragraph 2.4). BV214 focuses on ‘re-presenting’ households found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need on successive occasions (rather than enumerating all ‘repeat presenters’ irrespective of their previous or current ‘priority need’ status). Clearly, this maximises the indicator’s utility as a measure of tenancy sustainment. Monitoring repeat homelessness could be achieved through a standard question to homelessness applicants about any previous experience of having been rehoused as a priority homeless case. Rather than rely on households having accurate knowledge as to whether they had been accepted as homeless however, it is recommended that councils set up databases where new applicant names and dates of birth (or National Insurance numbers) can be matched against those of former applicants to enable the accurate identification of repeat presenters.

2.41 A third BVPI directly relevant to a specific aspect of homelessness prevention is BV225 – Actions Against Domestic Violence. This indicator takes the form of 11 questions to which the local authority may answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The PI ‘score’ is the percentage of the 11 with respect to which the LA can answer ‘yes’. Questions relevant to homelessness prevention include:

- Whether the LA contains a specified amount of refuge provision
- Whether the LA employs a domestic violence victim support coordinator
- Whether the LA makes available ‘sanctuary’ provision to prevent homelessness
- Whether the LA has recently reduced the proportion of homelessness acceptances resulting from domestic violence.

Further details of BV225 are set out in Annex 2.

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5 Although the BVPI guidance states that ‘the local authority is not obliged to go back over the six month period to check that homelessness is still being prevented, as this might be considered to be too time consuming’ (See Annex 2).
Broader Monitoring Principles of Homelessness Prevention

2.42 In measuring both the extent and effectiveness of homelessness prevention activities, it is important that local authorities monitor both ‘interventions’ to help homeless people, and their outcomes. Systems focusing exclusively on ‘workload’ measures (throughput of ‘cases assisted’) are inadequate.

2.43 Ideally, a record should be maintained of every instance where assistance to prevent homelessness is provided. Such case records might include:

- the date of the approach
- whether the client has made previous approaches (in which case records should be assigned a common reference number so that they can be linked if necessary)
- basic details about the client’s household (e.g. the client’s age, the number of adults and dependent children in the household)
- the immediate cause of the client’s loss of accommodation (or prospective loss of accommodation) – this could use the ‘main reason for loss of last settled home’ classification in the P1E return
- the assistance provided (e.g. advice, referral to a specialist agency etc).
- the immediate outcome
- the longer term outcome (for example, for a sample of cases, to be established through a periodic survey – see paragraph 2.39).

2.44 Drawing on such a database, the central measure of service effectiveness of, say, family mediation, should be the number of applicants referred to the service over a given period who, having attended mediation, remained in the family home (say) six months later, expressed as a proportion of all family mediation service referrals.

2.45 Minimising the number of households whose problems are not resolved before they become homeless and in need of emergency rehousing is an important objective of some homelessness prevention schemes. In this context, it may be appropriate for LAs to assess the impact of their prevention services partly by reference to changes in the numbers of cases where there is a full homelessness assessment and/or acceptance for rehousing. It is, however, essential that such measures are complemented by indicators which measure the direct impact of prevention services in assisting service users to avoid homelessness – as now required by BV213.
2.46 As well as being easily measurable, homelessness prevention service targets need to strike the right balance between being realistic and demanding. Such target setting probably needs to be informed by a sound information base detailing past performance by the organisation itself in the area concerned. Other than looking to achieve incremental year-on-year service output improvements, target setting may also be informed by benchmarking with other local authorities or by nationally specified objectives.

2.47 As well as recording the volume of activity and service user outcomes, monitoring systems need to encompass service quality. This may be measured in relation to specified targets such as the period elapsing between a referral being made and an initial appointment being fixed. For an ‘open door’ service the comparable measure might be the typical reception waiting time. Service user perceptions are an important component of service quality measures. These may be collected through routinely collected client feedback questionnaires – e.g. distributed at the point when, for the purposes of the service concerned, a case is ‘closed’. Other techniques which can shed useful light on service quality include:

- mystery shopping – where researchers pose as service clients to record the nature of the help provided
- peer review – where consortia of local authorities systematically inspect one another’s services to identify strengths and weaknesses
- application for service quality ‘kitemarks’ such as Chartermark – the process of chartermark assessment preparation is often found to be a useful vehicle for service review and improvement.

(Scottish Housing Best Value Network, 2005).

2.48 The principles outlined here inform comment on monitoring specific homelessness prevention services, as included Chapters 3-8. Some of the points are also relevant to the earlier discussion of staffing, training and related matters.

Maximising Cost-effectiveness of Homelessness Prevention

2.49 Homelessness gives rise to very significant costs to public services. These take the form of direct costs, such as the provision of accommodation, and indirect costs due for example, to the additional use of health services where homelessness has a negative impact on the health of homeless households. The exact cost of homelessness is not known, because most services do not keep precise records about the amount of resources dedicated to homeless service users. Furthermore, there is also not enough evidence to say conclusively that all of these costs are caused by homelessness rather than by other factors.
2.50 The National Audit Office estimated in 2005 that “the nation spends around £1 billion a year to prevent and deal with homelessness”. This estimate included spending by central and local government on administration, accommodation, and support to the homeless, but did not include any of the more indirect costs to government, arising from health or benefits expenditure, for example. DCLG analysis suggests that in 2004/5, local and central government expenditure on homelessness exceeded £850 million. Figures from the local authority RO4 return indicated that in 2004/5 approximately £779 million was spent by local and central government on homelessness administration and short term housing and support for homeless households. This excludes expenditure on local authority and RSL housing used as temporary accommodation, which was estimated at approximately £89 million.

2.51 In 2003, ODPM (now DCLG) commissioned the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) to develop a method for estimating the costs of homelessness to public services, including wider public services such as health, education, social services and the cost of failed tenancies. Data available on the costs of homelessness to wider public services was very limited, and not robust. Making cautious assumptions derived from the limited available research on the use of services by homeless people, IPF estimated the wider costs of homelessness as between £340-£352 million per year. Because of the lack of robust data, the conclusions to this analysis carry a large ‘health warning’. Even so, whatever the true costs of homelessness to public services, they are clearly very large indeed.

2.52 It does need to be noted however, that most homelessness prevention initiatives also involve expenditure on the part of local authorities, and so there is a need to assess the cost effectiveness of homelessness prevention at a local and service level as well. The research on which this guide is based included an analysis of cost effectiveness for many of the schemes involved. The conclusions of this analysis are supportive of investment in homelessness prevention, indicating that this investment can be highly cost effective, and result in subsequent savings for local authorities, which may include:

- charges for temporarily accommodating households while homelessness applications are assessed and/or while accepted households await a suitable settled tenancy

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6 “More than a roof: progress in tackling homelessness”, National Audit Office 2005
7 This includes approximately £596 million on temporary accommodation and £183 million on homelessness administration. Expenditure includes Housing Benefit subsidy – it should be noted that this is not all additional expenditure due to homelessness, since a proportion of homeless households would have claimed Housing Benefit before becoming homeless. A survey of homeless households is currently underway which will enable us to assess this more precisely. Some of the administrative expenditure will be expenditure on homelessness prevention. DCLG plans to publish a report of this analysis later in 2006.
8 Estimate based on usage and rents of local authority and RSL temporary accommodation.
9 This figure includes an estimate of unemployment costs, although it is likely that a proportion of homeless households were not in work before becoming homeless. Again, the current DCLG survey of homeless households will inform us about the extent to which this is the case. Without unemployment costs, the estimate of wider public service costs was £70-£93 million.
10 Although some of these costs may be borne by central government through Housing Benefit subsidy, the net outlay for a local authority may still be substantial. Temporary accommodation costs are often higher than market housing costs and, while largely subsidized by Housing Benefit, may often involve net additional costs for a local authority’s General Fund.
- staff costs involved in assessing and monitoring homelessness applications
- costs in rent arrears written off, legal fees, housing officer staff time, void reserving costs and void rent loss resulting from preventable evictions of social renters.

2.53 Effective preventative schemes offer the potential, therefore, to deliver not just a better quality of life for people at risk of homelessness, but also real cost benefits for general and council tax payers.

2.54 The approach that was used for this assessment weighed up the costs of providing these services against what would have been the direct costs of carrying out homelessness assessments and providing temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation if these services were not available.

2.55 Each chapter of the good practice guide includes a summary of the cost effectiveness assessment for each different type of prevention service. For some services, where data was not available, the assessment offers an indication of cost effectiveness. Where data was available, net savings per household assisted were estimated as averaging:

- £2,900 for the rent deposit scheme run by Bournemouth
- £2,900 for the Finder’s Fee (rent deposit) scheme run by Harrow
- £653 for the family mediation scheme run by Colchester
- £1,255 for the family mediation scheme run by Sheffield
- £2,927 for the landlord liaison scheme run by Harrow

(DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming)
As noted above, this analysis included only direct savings to local authorities from temporary accommodation use and carrying out homelessness assessments, whereas homelessness prevention may also result in indirect savings for public expenditure. It is not possible to attribute these wider savings to specific homelessness prevention services, but the analysis carried out by IPF for ODPM concluded that these wider costs are substantial. What this means is that the average savings quoted above should be regarded as minimum estimates. Wider cost savings include:

- The Housing Benefit subsidy cost of temporary accommodation placements.

- Prison, probation and social services costs avoided by reducing ex-offender reoffending, for example where ex-offenders are assisted to maintain and/or find stable accommodation post release from prison. Home Office figures suggest that having stable accommodation can reduce reconviction rates by over 20%.\(^\text{11}\)

- Social security benefits for the unemployed, where worklessness is prolonged or exacerbated by homelessness.

- Costs to health, education, and social services that can arise as a result of additional service use due to homelessness and living in temporary accommodation. Research has found that there is often disruption to children’s school attendance and educational performance as a result of becoming homeless, and that living in temporary accommodation can have a negative impact on their health and behaviour.

A summary of the limited evidence on the wider costs of homelessness, and how homelessness prevention may result in further savings, is attached at Annex 3.

In some cases, this analysis notes that it is easier to demonstrate savings where homelessness is prevented for households who would, if assessed as homeless, be considered in priority need. However, these conclusions are based only on direct measurable costs, whilst indirect costs may be substantial. Arguably, direct costs are more closely linked to those households likely to be owed the main homelessness duty, whilst wider costs may also be incurred by a wider population of homeless people. Homelessness prevention measures should be available to assist all households at risk of homelessness.

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2.59 As noted elsewhere in this chapter, delivering cost-effective prevention services depends on a number of other factors. Authorities also need to:

- Ensure that service procurement decisions are determined within the Best Value framework (see paragraphs 2.29-2.33)
- Construct monitoring frameworks which collect the service activity and outcomes data necessary to facilitate reliable assessment of service effectiveness (see paragraphs 2.34-2.48)
- Ensure that referrals to homelessness prevention services are made appropriately so that best use is made of necessarily limited resources

2.60 Savings from preventing homelessness benefit both local and central government. Local authorities will benefit in terms of reduced administration costs in assessing homelessness applications. They may also benefit from reductions in education and social services expenditure. Central government may benefit in terms of reduced Housing Benefit and possibly other social security benefit payments, and reduced need for health expenditure.

2.61 Further research and data improvements are underway to provide more robust evidence on the costs and impacts of homelessness, including a large scale survey of homeless families and 16-17 year olds. However, the existing evidence shows that the costs of homelessness to public services are very large.

2.62 Local authorities have to spend money up-front on setting up homelessness prevention schemes, but the analysis carried out for this evaluation does indicate that these costs can be outweighed by the benefits of prevention, even when only considering direct costs to local authorities, and disregarding the wider costs of homelessness.
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Chapter 3

Preventing Homelessness Through Housing Advice

Key Messages

- Develop an understanding of the ownership structure of private rented housing in the locality
- Designate homelessness or housing advice staff members to establish friendly working relations with:
  - Private landlords
  - Housing Benefit departments
- Encourage private landlords to make early contact with ‘landlord liaison’ staff in the event of problems which could lead to tenancy termination
- Consider the possibility of setting up an ‘introductory service’ to help match prospective tenants with private tenancies
- Ensure that advice and assistance is made available to vulnerable (and potentially homeless) people needing help in navigating choice-based lettings systems
- Develop close linkages between housing advice services and local voluntary agencies and caring professionals to maximize the prospects of early intervention where tenants are under threat of homelessness
- Review ‘housing advice officer’ job descriptions and training programmes in view of changing staff roles
- Adopt a Best Value approach to housing advice service procurement and take proper account of ‘conflict of interest’ considerations
- Set up service monitoring systems to record the nature of housing advice interventions and their outcomes (including some provision for assessing longer-term sustainability)
- Incorporate quality assurance measures within housing advice performance management frameworks such as service user feedback
Housing Advice Services and Homelessness Prevention

3.1 Advising a person at risk of homelessness on their housing options is a central feature of homelessness prevention. Housing advice can play a crucial role both in terms of helping tenants retain existing accommodation and in helping households to find new tenancies. A housing advice interview may also inform a local authority’s thinking on whether there is reason to believe that the household may be statutorily homeless or threatened with homelessness, hence triggering a duty to make inquiries and decide whether any duty is owed under the homelessness legislation. It may be standard practice for a housing advice interview to precede any such assessment. As noted in Chapter 2, however, such procedures should not replace or delay a statutory homelessness assessment where the authority has reason to believe that someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

3.2 In some local authorities advice functions are delivered mainly by a dedicated officer or team. In others, the role is integrated within the duties of homelessness staff, and in some authorities, advice is contracted out to independent agencies. Whether such activities are known locally as the ‘housing advice service’ is unimportant.

3.3 Unlike some other initiatives discussed in this guide, housing advice services are long established in most areas of England. The Housing Act 1996 created a specific local authority obligation to ‘secure free advice about homelessness and its prevention’ in the Local Authority area.

3.4 Some 80% of English local authorities identified the need for improved housing advice as a key element within their 2003 homelessness strategies (HQNS, 2004) and many authorities have invested additional resources in advice functions under this new regime.

3.5 The role of housing advice in preventing homelessness through ‘housing options’ interviews has already been discussed in Chapter 2 (see paragraphs 2.7-2.12). The following sections look at other ways that housing advice contributes to homelessness prevention. These draw on examples of good practice which could be beneficially replicated in other local authorities. Readers seeking good practice messages in relation to housing advice services, more generally, will find it useful to consult existing texts such as DoE (1996), Grant (1996) and Homepoint (2000) – see references at end of guide for full details.

Landlord Liaison (or ‘Mediation’) Schemes

3.6 A traditional housing advice role involves resolving conflicts between private tenants and their landlords. Typically, housing advice staff – often designated as Tenancy Relations Officers – use their specialist legal knowledge to help a tenant defend against attempts to have them evicted. DCLG’s approach to homelessness prevention stresses the need for such interventions to take place in a pro-active way, so that problems are addressed at a sufficiently early stage to improve the chances of their resolution, and, as a result, to avoid homelessness.
This thinking underpins what are now termed ‘landlord mediation’ or ‘landlord liaison’ schemes. For the avoidance of confusion we adopt the term ‘landlord liaison’ below. In two of the case study LAs included in our evaluation for example, council staff were tasked with developing close communication between the authority and private landlords (and housing associations) so that the council could be notified at an early stage by landlords considering the termination of a tenancy. Such ‘early referral’ can be crucial in facilitating the resolution of problems or disputes which, if left to escalate, could become irreparable.

In some authorities landlord liaison activities may be a well-established aspect of housing advice work. In others, however, such work may be something of a new departure. A first step for authorities new to such work with landlords may be to research the local private rented sector ownership structure – e.g. through a data download from the Housing Benefits system, subject to data protection requirements. The priority will then be to make contact with identified commercial landlords owning multiple properties. The aim here is to set up agreed procedures whereby the landlord notifies the landlord liaison officer as an early warning of problems which might place an established tenancy at risk.

In terms of their ‘referral route’, some landlord mediation cases arise from contacts made by the tenant with the council’s housing advice or homelessness staff. Importantly, however, cases are also initiated through contacts with the local authority by landlords with whom housing advice staff have developed friendly relations. Such ‘landlord notification’ is greatly to be encouraged since it may be expected that this will result in the council becoming aware of a problem at an earlier stage than would be the case if it relied solely on a tenant making contact. A ‘case’ having been initiated, housing advice/landlord liaison officers would then step in and either (a) try to resolve problems between landlord and tenant, or (b) help tenants liable to displacement to find alternative accommodation so that homelessness is prevented.

In practice, the majority of landlord: tenant problems triggering landlord liaison intervention involve non-payment of rent, often resulting from Housing Benefit delays or other problems. Occasionally, however, other issues – e.g. anti-social behaviour – might be involved.

A significant contrast with traditional tenancy relations activities can probably be drawn in terms of the content of landlord liaison work. Nowadays, most tenancies in the private sector are of the Assured Shorthold type where the occupier has little security of tenure beyond the term agreed (usually six months). Hence, landlord liaison work tends to focus on negotiation and conflict resolution rather than assertion of legal rights to continued occupation. So, while it remains important that housing advice staff tasked with these activities have a sound knowledge of tenancy law, other skills are also essential in equipping them to work effectively.
Chapter 3: Preventing Homelessness Through Housing Advice

3.12 Given that landlord/tenant disputes are often connected with Housing Benefit (HB) problems, it is essential that staff tasked with landlord liaison duties develop a sound understanding of HB rules and procedures, as well as close relations with HB staff. Liaison depends not only on the size of the private rented sector in a locality, but also on its structure. In a housing market like Bournemouth’s for example, the concentration of property ownership in the hands of a relatively small number of landlords greatly enhances the potential impact of a relatively small staff time resource input.

3.13 Closely connected with their landlord liaison (or mediation) work some local authorities have developed more active approaches akin to lettings agency functions.

‘Spend to save’ under landlord liaison

Landlord liaison work in Bournemouth BC and Harrow LBC is targeted mainly at cases where the tenant at risk of eviction is a family household likely to qualify as being ‘in priority need’ should they become homeless. Hence, the cost of the scheme generates easily identifiable savings by enabling the authority to avoid incurring the substantial expense involved in rehousing a homeless household. The Harrow scheme, for example, is estimated as saving £2,927 (net) for each household assisted (DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming).

In tackling landlord-tenant disputes, landlord liaison staff in both Bournemouth and Harrow have access to ‘Fixit Funds’ from which they can make small payments to prevent homelessness. In Bournemouth for example, such expenses often involve payment of rent arrears or compensation for damage caused by the tenant. In resolving landlord-tenant disputes, landlord liaison staff in both councils also benefited from being able to refer Housing Benefit problems to dedicated Housing Benefit officers seconded to their own teams.

Introductory service for landlords

Bristol City Council for example, has marketed an ‘introductory service’ for landlords. Here, a landlord with a property to let approaches the Council seeking a tenant nomination. The property is inspected and – once confirmed as compliant on a number of specified criteria – accredited. The Council then nominates a suitable tenant, assuming the landlord’s willingness to grant a term of at least 12 months.

Landlords participating in Bristol’s introductory service benefit through receiving:
- 12 months free contents insurance
- 12 months guaranteed rent
- a deposit payment
- fast-tracked Housing Benefit processing
- professional advice made available to both landlord and tenant.
**Targeted Housing Advice**

3.14 Research evidence suggests that housing advice provision is increasingly targeted towards defined groups. This partly reflects a view that generalist advice services may not adequately cater for the needs of groups such as minority ethnic households or households fleeing domestic violence and that specific recruitment and training may be necessary to achieve this. Part of the thinking here is that in gaining the confidence of certain service user groups it is important for advice to be delivered by appropriately selected staff – e.g. female staff in the case of clients who are women fleeing domestic violence. Targeted advice may be delivered in the context of a structured advice package or programme (see example below).

**Targeted Housing Advice – Sutton LBC ‘Route to Rent’ programme**

The ‘Route to Rent’ scheme run by Sutton LBC aims to help young people facing likely homelessness. The scheme, designed to help clients access private renting, centres on weekly self-help sessions run by the Council. Referral to these ‘Route to Rent’ sessions is via an initial housing options interview, though eligibility does not depend on being assessed as potentially in ‘priority need’ under the legislation. Indeed, the scheme was commended by the local CAB as demonstrating an ‘impressive’ Council commitment to assisting mainly non-priority households.

Route to Rent participants – mainly young single men – are provided with advice on housing options and recommendations on specific landlords. Whilst the Council’s professed aim here is to ‘empower’ rather than to advocate, clients are helped directly where necessary – e.g. staff phone calls to landlords to negotiate on a tenant’s behalf. This might involve bargaining for a lower rent, convincing the landlord to accept a paper rent guarantee rather than a hefty up-front payment. Applicants are also coached on their own presentation skills to improve their ability to undertake such negotiations on their own account.

Staff also help clients by providing pre-tenancy determinations on the likely level of Housing Benefit payable for a specific tenancy. Clients are, in this way, made aware of likely shortfalls between HB payable and rent to be charged. Additionally, Sutton’s housing options staff liaise directly with Housing Benefit department colleagues on clients’ behalf.
Advising Public Sector Tenants

Choice-based lettings

3.15 Traditionally, housing advice services have tended to focus on assisting people to secure or retain private tenancies. However, recent policy developments are resulting in an increased targeting of housing advice towards social renters. For example, choice-based lettings systems place more onus on housing applicants and, in this way, generate advice needs. Some participants will require little more than an explanation of how the system works (e.g. how to interpret published ‘feedback’ information in determining the relative popularity of particular property types or areas). Others, however, will need more substantial – and possibly ongoing – assistance (e.g. in helping them to interpret vacancy advertisements or to place bids for suitable homes).

3.16 Ongoing research on choice-based lettings shows that some CBL landlords are establishing customer support posts to assist would-be bidders. As well as assisting applicants directly, the role of these staff sometimes includes liaison with external agencies able to provide such help to their existing clients.¹²

Assisting applicants to navigate choice-based lettings systems

Sheffield City Council has established a Homefinders Support Service, which is now run by Sheffield Homes. This is an initiative specifically designed to assist vulnerable homeless people in accessing council tenancies through the City’s choice-based lettings system.

One aspect of the service is directly targeted at ethnic minority households.¹³ The main trigger here was the rising number of refugees applying for housing in 2002/03.¹⁴ It was recognised that widespread lack of English as a first language, alongside unfamiliarity with the local area could disadvantage this group in navigating the Choice Based Lettings system.

¹² Such posts may, in some cases, involve redirection of existing staffing budgets, taking advantage of administrative savings potentially generated through the CBL process (especially in relation to the elimination of the staff-intensive process of matching applicants and vacancies under traditional allocations systems).

¹³ Such action must not contravene the Race Relations Act. If in doubt, guidance should be sought from the Commission for Racial Equality.

¹⁴ That is, persons granted refugee status by the Secretary of State.
Another approach common to growing numbers of CBL landlords is the provision of specified services to applicants included on an ‘assisted list’. This is a subset of registered CBL applicants identified as requiring a degree of extra assistance in securing a tenancy. At a minimum, ‘assisted list’ applicants usually receive vacancy listings by direct mail rather than being expected to consult a newspaper ‘to let’ section or CBL website. Some landlords also make periodic contact with high priority non-bidders to offer direct assistance. To the extent that some ‘assisted list’ members may be vulnerable people at risk of homelessness, such activities can help to prevent homelessness.

Minimising evictions from social sector tenancies

The strong official emphasis on minimising social landlord re-possessions has also led growing numbers of local authorities and housing associations to set up or commission services specifically designated to assist tenants at risk of eviction. Two distinct forms of advice are involved here:

- Welfare benefits advice – mainly concerned with ensuring that tenants receive the range of state benefits to which they are entitled
- Debt counselling services – advice on how to manage rent arrears and other debts.

Such services should be built into social landlords’ routine rent recovery processes. And, as other recently issued government guidance emphasizes, landlords should be adopting a highly pro-active stance towards tackling arrears. Crucially, there should be a strong presumption in favour of making direct contact with debtor tenants at the earliest opportunity, rather than placing excessive reliance on postal communication (Flint, Pawson and Scott, 2005).

Social landlords are expected to address this anyway.
Given that it is targeted mainly towards tenants with heavy (and often competing) debts, debt advice is generally the more crucial in preventing homelessness because such debts often place the household at serious risk of eviction for rent arrears. As well as helping a client to prioritise repayments, debt counselling services sometimes involve the counsellor in actual negotiation with creditors on the client’s behalf. Such services can also be appropriate for private sector tenants facing the loss of their tenancy for rent arrears.

### Housing advice targeted towards tenants at risk of eviction

In some cases, advice services targeted towards social sector tenants at risk of eviction encompasses legal advice and/or representation in court, as well as debt counselling. Telford & Wrekin BC and Harrow LBC, for example, have established specific services to help social renters avoid repossession. The kinds of assistance made available to service users include specialist debt counselling, advocacy with creditors and (in the Telford & Wrekin BC case) representation in court. Telford & Wrekin’s scheme is reported to result in the prevention of eviction (an arrears repayment schedule being agreed) for over a third of cases referred to the service (DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming). NB: local authorities should avoid any conflict of interest brought about by representing clients in actions brought against another part of the same organisation.

### The Organisation of Housing Advice Work

#### Inter-linkage Between Housing Advice and Homelessness Work

3.20 In some local authorities the increased profile of homelessness prevention has resulted in housing advice and homelessness assessment work becoming more closely interlinked and/or overlapping. At Bournemouth BC, for example, the landlord liaison service described above is run by homelessness officers as an activity running alongside the assessment of homelessness applications.

3.21 In another case study authority, Leicester, there has recently been a complete integration of the previously distinct housing advice and homelessness roles. In other authorities the housing advice/homelessness assessment roles – whilst remaining separate – have become more integrated (as in the case of Bournemouth cited above). Sometimes this has involved co-locating previously remote teams. In Colchester the housing advice and homelessness team leaders did a job swap to promote mutual understanding of their respective roles.

3.22 Many of the specific initiatives set up to facilitate better access to private tenancies on the part of homeless households have been located within housing advice teams. Hence, housing advice team leaders have – in many instances – taken on responsibility for rent deposit schemes and similar initiatives. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
3.23 Partly connected with an aspiration to target advice towards ‘hard to reach’ groups, many local authorities have been developing innovative approaches to housing advice service delivery. For some this has involved outreach into rural areas. For others, it has taken the form of surgery-form provision sited in facilities used by ‘high risk’ groups. In Bristol, for example, Shelter has been commissioned to run advice surgery sessions at a local health centre serving an area where there is a relatively large concentration of people affected by substance misuse and related problems. Harrow’s advice service plans to stage sessions in Jobcentre Plus offices in an effort to target people at risk of homelessness due to loss of employment. Another important example of the outreach approach – that involving ex-offenders – is discussed separately in Chapter 7.

Service Procurement and Review

3.24 Recently expanded housing advice activity in support of homelessness prevention typically involves a mixture of local authority in-house provision (sometimes delivered by ‘homelessness’ staff) and services procured by LAs from external agencies. Voluntary agency involvement in this area is argued to be potentially beneficial as they may be able to:

- offer a more independent source of advice than would be possible for the local authority itself (given a local authority’s other responsibilities of homelessness assessment and – in some cases – housing management)
• prevent any conflict of interest within a landlord organisation

• enable the local authority to draw on the organisation’s particular expertise and wider support networks of other agencies.

(Goodlad and Rosengard, 1998; Flint, Pawson and Scott, 2005).

3.25 However, while local authority procurement of advice services from voluntary agencies may be capable of facilitating high standard service provision, this model can potentially lead to tensions between provider and commissioner. Because of the difficulty of distinguishing ‘advice’ from ‘advocacy’, an independent service provider may find itself in an awkward position where assisting a client is seen as necessitating lobbying the council itself. This might arise, for example, in instances where there is believed to be a case for challenging a council’s homelessness assessment decision – or a decision not to undertake a formal homelessness assessment. Councils out-sourcing advice provision in this way need to recognise that such conflicts can occur, and clearly define ‘acceptable activity’ in service contracts.

3.26 Advice services run in-house by local authorities may be seen as highly effective. Such an arrangement maximises the control of the commissioning body. However, as indicated above, local authorities should avoid conflict of interest brought about by representing clients in actions where the authority is the opposing party (e.g. contested homelessness assessment decisions). Similarly, providing court representation for social sector tenants at risk of eviction (see above) would be virtually untenable for a housing advice service run in-house by a landlord local authority. One way of dealing with such ‘conflict of interest’ problems could be to refer such cases to third party advice providers.

3.27 There is no ‘right answer’ to solving the tension identified above in relation to in-house versus outsourced housing advice provision. As noted in Chapter 2, it is recommended that such procurement decisions are determined within a Best Value framework. Hence, where a local authority enhances existing housing advice provision (e.g. by committing additional resources so that advice can be targeted on a specific group) the authority should not simply build on the existing pattern of provision without properly considering alternative options. Clearly, in any instance where a local authority is looking at the possibility of out-sourcing such work it will be relevant to consider the extent to which a potential contractor can demonstrate its commitment to the homelessness prevention ethos as described in the previous chapter.

3.28 Irrespective of initial procurement decisions it is important that services are periodically subject to thorough review. Guidance on Best Value service review was published by ODPM (2003d).
Performance Management and Monitoring

**Monitoring Homelessness Prevention Through Housing Advice**

3.29 Whether in house or contracted out, housing advice services need to be run within a framework setting out service objectives, service standards, performance indicators and targets.

3.30 In keeping with the principles set out in Chapter 2, the monitoring of housing advice activity to prevent homelessness should measure:

- the numbers of interventions (caseload volume)
- the housing circumstances of clients assisted (e.g. existing tenure, imminence of homelessness)
- the nature of interventions (e.g. advice only as opposed to advocacy)
- the immediate outcome of the intervention – robust outcome measurement is crucial to underpin any assessment of housing advice cost-effectiveness (see paragraphs 3.39-3.40 below).

3.31 Both because it represents ‘good practice’ and because it is now required under Best Value Performance Indicator 213 (see paragraphs 2.35-2.39), authorities also need to develop methods for estimating the longer term sustainability of housing advice-assisted ‘solutions’.

3.32 As suggested in Chapter 2, such monitoring might be undertaken on a ‘sample survey’ basis to inform estimates of ‘solution sustainment’ across the broader caseload.

3.33 Some housing advice monitoring systems already attempt to distinguish between potentially homeless clients in terms of whether the household falls within the definition of priority need. This shows a commendable concern for assessing the impact of advice in cost-effectiveness terms. The assumption here is that averting homelessness for a household potentially in priority need generates more easily definable savings thanks to the avoidance of temporary accommodation and other expenditure. Providing they do not skew services away from households likely to fall outside the ‘probable priority homeless’ group, systems of this kind are to be encouraged.
A monitoring framework for housing advice

Shelter’s Bournemouth Housing Advice Service monitoring framework is seen as a ‘good practice’ example in that it involves the collection of a range of key data items in respect of each new case including:

– client household details – household type, ethnic origin, client age
– existing housing tenure, ‘primary (housing) problem’ and inward referral route
– homelessness and housing register status
– actions taken and known outcome.

The resulting BHAS database facilitates a wide range of analyses of interest to both service provider from an operational perspective and to the local authority from a strategic perspective.

Monitoring outputs on landlord liaison service user outcomes

The facility of Harrow LBC’s monitoring system to break down case outcomes in relation to the Council’s landlord liaison (known locally as ‘landlord mediation’) service is a good practice example.

Harrow LBC Landlord Liaison Service: Case Outcomes in 2004/05:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicant remained at the property/eviction cancelled following intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant moved before becoming homeless using Harrow ‘Finders Fee’ premium for landlords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-move into alternative private sector accommodation – no ‘Finders Fee’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful application for permanent tenancy through LOCATA choice-based lettings system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed as ‘not homeless’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed as ‘intentionally homeless’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed as ‘non-priority homeless’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with applicant lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining under investigation at end of period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted as homeless and in priority need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring service quality

3.34 Service monitoring systems need to be designed in keeping with defined service standards. Such standards might, for example, specify a target maximum waiting time for clients without appointments presenting within advertised public opening hours. This would imply the need for some system to measure the proportion of cases where the standard was not met. Similarly, where a service aspires to set appointments for incoming referrals within a specified timeframe (say, five working days from the date of the case being notified), a system is needed to monitor the extent to which this is achieved in practice.

3.35 Examples of potentially relevant advice service performance targets might include:

- the number of households assisted to secure an extension of a private tenancy
- the numbers helped to access tenancies
- the gross amounts of unclaimed benefits identified and recovered.

3.36 Measuring performance against defined service standards helps to give some indication of service quality. However, monitoring of this kind says little about clients’ experience of the service, nor about the appropriateness of staff decisions (e.g. on advice proffered or referrals made).

3.37 Housing advice service monitoring frameworks should include some component of service user feedback. This might be achieved through, for example, periodic customer surveys involving focus groups, structured telephone interviews or self-completion returns. Staff management practices to promote improved service quality might involve periodic one-to-one meetings where manager and staff members review a randomly selected cohort of casefiles to discuss how issues have been handled, and possible scope for improvement.

3.38 Other ‘quality assurance’ techniques relevant to housing advice services may include participating in peer reviews organised through local authority ‘benchmarking clubs’ or seeking external ‘kitemark’ accreditation. Whilst this might involve an application under a framework such as Chartermark, the kitemarking system most directly relevant to housing advice is the Community Legal Services Quality Mark.
Cost-effectiveness

3.39 The research undertaken in conjunction with this guide found that few local authorities were able to provide the data necessary to assess housing advice service cost-effectiveness. However, it was possible to carry out analysis for both Shelter’s Bournemouth Housing Advice Service (BHAS), and Harrow’s landlord liaison service. Our analysis suggested that BHAS was probably highly cost-effective. That is, the significant costs of providing the service were more than outweighed by estimated savings in ‘downstream expenditure’ which would otherwise have been incurred in respect of statutory homeless households. Cost effectiveness analysis of Harrow’s landlord liaison scheme suggested that it saves an average £2,927 (in temporary accommodation and administration costs) per household (DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming).

3.40 Our calculations on the cost-effectiveness of housing advice were necessarily based on two important assumptions. Firstly, it was assumed that households ‘assisted to retain tenancies’ were ‘appropriately selected’ in the sense that the impact of the assistance may well have been decisive in helping them to avoid homelessness. And, secondly, it was assumed that outcomes of housing advice intervention were sustained (for a year) rather than being followed rapidly by a renewed threat of homelessness. In maximising the cost-effectiveness of housing advice, both these conditions must be met.
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Rent Deposit and Related Schemes

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Chapter 4
Rent Deposit and Related Schemes

Key Messages

- In realising the full potential of rent deposit initiatives scheme-lead organisations can usefully offer a package of ‘add-on services’ directed at both tenants and landlords (e.g. Housing Benefit advice and property insurance)

- Particularly where Local Authority financial assistance is made available in the form of straightforward cash deposits, or grants (rather than deposit guarantees), Local Authorities should use the resulting leverage to secure acceptable property conditions and tenancy terms beyond the six month legal minimum

- Consider whether outright grant payments (a.k.a. Finder’s Fees) might be effective in securing better tenancy and property conditions for clients assisted

- Ensure that ‘open access’ rent deposit schemes (i.e. those not restricted to households referred by homelessness staff) are well-publicised

- Private tenancies with rent deposit assistance could be attractive to some households already accepted as homeless and in priority need. As part of routine procedure, Local Authorities should offer ‘accepted’ applicants the opportunity to be assisted in accessing a private tenancy as a ‘qualifying offer’ which ends the LA’s duty (on a purely voluntary basis)

- Ensure that assistance in seeking a suitable property is available to scheme customers needing such help

- Assess whether rent deposit scheme customers are likely to require support to maintain a tenancy and develop appropriate procedures to match

- Wherever feasible, Local Authorities should seek to agree rents no higher than the relevant Housing Benefit limit. If this is not the case, Local Authorities should obtain pre-tenancy determinations on behalf of clients and ensure that clients are fully aware of the implications of taking on a tenancy where there is likely to be a shortfall between Housing Benefit received and rent charged

- Local authorities should also consider making Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments (DHPs) to make up the difference between rent and Housing Benefit payable

- Develop close links between rent deposit staff and Housing Benefit Department colleagues so that participating landlords’ queries can be speedily resolved and arrears avoided
4.1 Local authorities and housing associations are increasingly looking to the private sector as a means of meeting housing needs. This is in part because of shrinking social rented stock but also because of the recent expansion of the private rented sector. Privately owned housing has also become a very important source of temporary accommodation for households accepted as homeless and in priority need while they await settled housing. Local authorities may also end their full rehousing duties by placing a homeless household in a privately rented property as a qualifying offer.\(^{16}\)

4.2 This chapter mainly concerns the way that local authorities help people to access privately rented housing to avert homelessness. It draws on evidence from rent deposit and similar schemes operated in Bournemouth, Bristol, Colchester, Harrow and Sutton. It links with Chapter 3 in that securing access to private tenancies has traditionally been seen as a ‘housing advice’ activity concerned with brokering agreement between house-seeker and landlord.

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\(^{16}\) Such arrangements can be put in place only on a voluntary basis however. A statutory homeless household is entitled to refuse such a tenancy offer, and consequently the numbers of cases resolved in this way has been relatively small to date.
The Nature of Rent Deposit Schemes

4.3 The need for rent deposit schemes arises from the fact that many landlords require new tenants to pay some form of bond as a security against the possibility of damage to the landlord’s property or the abandonment of the property with rent unpaid. An associated problem is that private landlords are often reluctant to let properties to people on Housing Benefit.

4.4 For many prospective tenants, rent deposit charges – typically equivalent to a month’s rent – present a serious barrier to accessing a tenancy. Rent deposit schemes aim to overcome this by accepting liability for the payment on a tenant’s behalf.

4.5 Studies of rent deposit schemes (e.g. Rugg, 1996; 2003) have found them to be potentially effective in preventing homelessness, providing that they are:

- Well-publicised so that households at risk of homelessness were made well aware of a rent deposit scheme’s existence before actually losing their accommodation
- Operated in the context of efficient Housing Benefit administration.

4.6 Rugg’s research also demonstrated the importance of ensuring that individuals helped to access tenancies were not faced with ongoing rental charges in excess of Housing Benefit (HB) limits or otherwise high enough to present a disincentive to take up low paid employment. Benefit eligible households are, in some areas, assisted through Discretionary Housing Payments (topping up HB entitlement to help bridge the gap between actual rent charged and the standard HB ceiling – see text box at paragraph 4.20).

How the Schemes Work

Scheme models

4.7 In practice, there are several slightly different versions of ‘rent deposit-type’ schemes. Not all involve an up-front payment to the landlord. More accurately, schemes of this type are termed ‘rent deposit guarantee’ schemes, since they involve the local authority (or its agent) making a formal commitment to deposit a specified sum which will be made available to the landlord in part or in full if the tenancy fails. In some cases, the local authority makes a ‘rent in advance’ payment (for, say, the first month’s rent) alongside the rent deposit guarantee. A third variant is where the local authority pays a simple non-refundable premium to the landlord. Harrow LBC, which has popularised this approach, uses the term ‘Finder’s Fee’.
4.8 Schemes also vary in terms of the target client group. In many areas, rent deposit schemes targeted mainly at potentially ‘non-priority’ homeless households – i.e. single, non-vulnerable people – are long-established. In the past few years, however, growing numbers of authorities have stepped up their activities in this area – in particular, focusing efforts on facilitating private sector solutions for families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as for single people. Some authorities operate distinct rent deposit-type schemes targeted at single people and at family households in parallel with one another. Single person schemes tend to involve relatively modest payments compared to those targeted at families.

4.9 Part of the reason for the typically larger unit costs associated with family rent deposit schemes is that the households concerned require larger – and therefore more expensive – properties. Another factor is that recipients may qualify for assistance over and above deposit payments – e.g. help with rent in advance and letting agent fees.

4.10 Rent deposit projects on the traditional model are intended to be largely self-financing, in that deposits returned at the end of a tenancy can be recycled. In one of our case study LAs the deposit was treated as a loan to the house-seeker, with the applicant being expected to repay the amount in instalments. This was seen as constituting a form of enforced saving, since tenants who had repaid the full amount would stand to receive the deposit from the landlord as repaid at the end of the tenancy (e.g. as a deposit for the house-seeker's next tenancy).

4.11 In practice, however, the objective of running rent deposit schemes at nil net cost is not necessarily realised. Recognition of this problem is one factor underlying the new ‘Finder’s Fee’ variant of rent deposit scheme.

Harrow LBC ‘Finder’s Fee’ scheme

Under the Harrow LBC initiative landlords can receive payments of up to £1,500. The exact value of the Fee depends on the size of the property concerned and whether the landlord opts to take up the offer of free insurance against loss of rent, legal expenses and (limited) property contents. Payments on an explicit ‘grant’ basis are argued to be simpler and more attractive to landlords than deposit guarantees, and can provide the local authority with more leverage with landlords in relation to the terms of the tenancy (see paragraphs 4.17-4.18).
Rent Deposit scheme menu in Colchester

Colchester BC operates two distinct rent deposit schemes. One, the Family Bond Scheme (FBS), was set up in 1995 to facilitate access to private tenancies as temporary accommodation for households accepted as homeless and awaiting permanent rehousing. Here, landlords are expected to agree a tenancy of 11-12 months, with the informal understanding that the client will be allowed to remain until receiving a suitable (Council) tenancy offer.

The second Colchester scheme variant – its Homefinder initiative – is targeted on households already accepted as homeless and where the referral constitutes a discharge of the Council’s rehousing duty. As noted above, tenancy offers made in this way cannot be enforced – the applicant is free to reject such offers in favour of direct rehousing in the social rented sector (or a ‘better’ private tenancy offer). In Colchester’s experience, however, significant numbers of accepted applicants see such referrals as attractive when compared with the alternative: a probably lengthy stay in temporary accommodation followed by a fairly restricted choice of tenancy in the social rented sector. In 2003/04, 57 households were assisted into private tenancies under the scheme.

It could be argued that these schemes are somewhat different from most rent deposit schemes because they assist with the relief of homelessness rather than its prevention. Nevertheless, given their apparent effectiveness in meeting such objectives it is seen as relevant to describe them here and the approaches adopted are replicable in a preventative context.

Access to services: referral to rent deposit schemes

4.12 Referrals to single person rent deposit schemes sometimes come from the local authority but are more likely to originate from voluntary organisations or from word-of-mouth recommendation. Schemes targeted towards families tend to be restricted to households referred by the local authority’s homelessness team, having been identified – perhaps through a housing options interview – as potentially priority homeless (but in advance of being formally assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness).

4.13 As well as being targeted on the ‘potentially priority homeless’ group, the Harrow Finder’s Fee scheme is also open to:

- (already accepted) homeless households living in temporary accommodation awaiting a social rented tenancy, and

- existing Harrow Council tenants (e.g. tenants living in moderately overcrowded conditions but appreciating that the likely wait for a transfer to a larger social rented property may be a very long one)\(^\text{17}\)

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17 Whilst this is not directly linked to homelessness prevention, there is an indirect connection in that most Harrow LBC vacancies released by moves of this kind are likely to be taken up by statutory homeless households.
**Scheme processes**

4.14 The first step in the process under the rent deposit-type schemes examined in our research usually involves the house-seeker making contact with the local authority (or contractor agency) to ask for assistance. This often involves being assessed as potentially priority homeless – probably through a housing options type interview rather than a formal homelessness assessment. Step two is the identification of a possibly suitable tenancy. Here, the onus is generally on the house-seeker, though it can involve the local authority making a referral to a known landlord or agent.

4.15 Other recent research found that service users’ ability to choose a property was a key factor in the popularity of rent deposit schemes. Relying on service users to find their own tenancies may help to filter out individuals who might be unable to sustain tenancies, once accessed. Some local authorities have reported success in recruiting rent deposit scheme staff from estate agency-type backgrounds (Rugg, 2003; Association of London Government, 2005).

4.16 Step three in the rent deposit schemes examined by this research involved pre-tenancy determinations and property inspections by the Council or by a third party agency on its behalf. A pre-tenancy determination provides the house-seeker with an indication of the likely amount of Housing Benefit payable. Under the Harrow model the property inspection verifies that the dwelling is ‘in a safe and lettable condition’. Harrow also requires that Finders Fee properties are centrally heated and have a valid gas safety certificate.

**Conditions and incentives**

4.17 Like other London boroughs, Harrow requires landlords to grant a tenancy well in excess of the standard six month Assured Shorthold term. The Association of London Government reports that some London councils stipulate tenancies of at least two years duration (Association of London Government, 2005). The ALG also notes that, in some Local Authorities, rent deposit staff duties include ‘hard negotiations with landlords to reduce the rent’ (p11).

4.18 Wherever feasible, Local Authorities should seek to agree rents no higher than the relevant Housing Benefit limit. Where this proves impossible in respect of a household entitled to Housing Benefit, authorities should consider making Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to make up the difference between the rent and the Housing Benefit payable (see below). Local Authorities should also ensure that clients are aware of the implications of taking on a tenancy where the Housing Benefit received is likely to be less than the rent charged.

4.19 An additional condition imposed on participating landlords by some deposit/fee paying LAs is to require notification wherever a tenancy is proving problematic and consequently in danger of termination. In Colchester, for example, landlords are obliged to inform the council of tenant departures or circumstances where the landlord wants the tenant to leave. This early warning system fits in with the landlord liaison (or mediation) approach, as described in Chapter 3.
4.20 To encourage landlords to sign up to the Finders Fee scheme, Harrow offers additional incentives. These include ‘fast track’ Housing Benefit processing, as well as a ready supply of potential tenants. This links to the wider question of what factors help in maximising the effectiveness of rent deposit schemes. The evidence from our case studies here was consistent with Rugg’s (2003) recommendations that schemes need to be:

- well-integrated with other local housing and homelessness services (so that their existence can be made known to potential service users when they first approach a homelessness service provider agency) and

- operated in close consultation with Housing Benefit services so that landlords can be assured of HB payments being speedily processed and, where necessary, Discretionary Housing Payments authorised (see below).

**Discretionary housing payments** can be paid to Housing Benefit claimants having difficulty in meeting a shortfall between their HB payment and their rent. There are no rigid rules about exactly who is entitled to such payments. Each Housing Benefit department is given a pot of money and they are allowed to decide who should be given the payments. They will usually take into account any special circumstances that contribute to the applicant’s financial difficulties. Examples might include the applicant’s need to pay:

- child maintenance
- legal costs
- extra heating costs because of the applicant’s need to spend a lot of time at home due to sickness or disability
- additional travel costs because of the applicant’s need to travel to a doctor or hospital or to provide care for a relative or friend.

*Authorised under Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 1167*


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**Service Procurement and Review**

4.21 Most of the rent deposit-type schemes examined in our research were run in-house by the local authorities concerned. These arrangements tended to be longstanding.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) i.e. reflecting decisions taken when single persons rent deposit schemes were first established in the 1990s.
4.22 In making procurement decisions about rent deposit and similar schemes local authorities are recommended to take account of the general principles set out in Chapter 2 paragraphs 2.29-2.33. In summary, a Best Value approach should be adopted where there is some form of options appraisal process to weigh up the pros and cons of the various possible models. Specific factors which might be relevant in relation to this form of homelessness prevention could include:

- the likelihood that a housing association with existing experience of procuring properties for a private sector leasing scheme might be able to offer added value compared to a local authority in-house option

- the possibility that rent deposit scheme staff within a local authority might be able to maintain closer relations with Housing Benefit department colleagues than would be possible for an external provider.

Irrespective of initial procurement decisions it is important that services are subject to periodic review compliant with Best Value principles (See paragraphs 2.35-2.41 and ODPM (2005d)).

Performance Management and Monitoring

4.23 Like any other homelessness prevention scheme, rent deposit or similar services need to be run within a framework setting out service objectives, service standards, performance indicators and targets. Such frameworks are very likely to be formalised with out-sourced contracts, but may be less well-developed where services are run in-house.

4.24 In keeping with the principles set out in Chapter 2, the monitoring of rent deposit service activity to prevent homelessness should measure:

- caseload throughput in terms of both:
  - ‘inward referrals’
  - numbers assisted to access tenancies over a given time period

- annual (or other periodic) scheme costs – both in total and per household assisted.

4.25 Recording the numbers of ‘inward referrals’ (i.e. households referred for consideration), alongside the numbers of tenancies actually accessed as a result would enable LAs to calculate the referral ‘fallout rate’. A high fallout rate might, for example, reflect inappropriate referral judgements, insufficient practical assistance made available to referred households or a simple lack of affordable tenancies. A rising ‘fallout rate’ from one year to the next might trigger more in-depth investigation into the factors involved.
4.26 In monitoring the effectiveness of any form of homelessness prevention it is ‘good practice’ to measure the longer-term outcomes of interventions as well as numbers assisted. As from 2005/06 local authorities are in any case obliged to record the number of cases where a ‘housing advice’ intervention prevents homelessness in a sustained way – i.e. where the ‘solution’ arranged remains intact for at least six months. This arises from the requirements of Best Value Performance Indicator 213 (see paragraphs 2.35-2.39 and Annex 2).

4.27 It is recommended (by the BVPI guidance – see Annex 2), that for the purposes of BV213, authorities define ‘housing advice’ broadly so that it encompasses actions such as assisting a potentially homeless household to access a private tenancy with the help of a rent deposit payment or similar. The more broadly ‘housing advice’ is defined for these purposes, the better will be a local authority’s BV213 ‘score’. Monitoring the numbers of rent deposit scheme-accessed tenancies remaining intact for more than six months should be achievable by requiring a commitment on the part of benefitting landlords to notify the council (both before and) when such a tenancy is terminated. Alternatively, by keeping landlords’ contact details on file it should be a straightforward matter to get in touch with landlords to establish whether a tenancy created six months earlier is being maintained.

Cost-effectiveness

4.28 The research on which this guide is based included a detailed comparison of the costs and benefits of rent deposit-type schemes targeted mainly on families at risk of homelessness. The conclusion was that such schemes (whether or not they involve ‘returnable’ deposits) can be highly cost effective. In relation to the schemes run by Bournemouth BC and Harrow LBC, for example, it was estimated that net savings per household assisted averaged £2,900 (DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming). This mainly reflects the comparison between rents charged to tenants housed in this way and those which would otherwise need to be paid by local authorities in providing temporary housing for households accepted as homeless and in priority need. Whilst costs incurred under both types of arrangement may fall largely on the public purse because of being funded through Housing Benefit, procurement through leasing is likely to be more expensive because of the typically substantial management fee needing to be rolled into the charge.
4.29 Nevertheless, our assessment that rent deposit-type schemes can be highly cost-effective depends on a number of assumptions, namely that:

- there is relatively plentiful supply of appropriate private rented accommodation
- the local authority’s referral process is accurate in selecting ‘nominees’ who would otherwise have been likely to become statutory homeless cases19
- tenancies accessed with rent deposit or Finder’s Fee assistance are sustained for a reasonable period.

4.30 Meeting these conditions (particularly the second and third) have direct implications for the way that rent deposit schemes are run, emphasizing the need for appropriate referrals and the attachment of conditions maximising the chances of longer term tenancy sustainment.

4.31 The research did not assess the extent to which rent deposit schemes targeted at single people (assessed as unlikely to be potentially priority homeless) were cost-effective. Whilst such schemes tend to be relatively cheap to run because of the typically smaller payments made to single people, there is unlikely to be a saving in temporary accommodation expenditure. Nevertheless, it might be argued that assisting such households may be cost-effective in that it can help avoid the need for (non-housing) public spending which would result from the people concerned becoming homeless – for instance, costs associated with loss of employment, rough sleeping, offending, substance misuse etc.

19 Whilst this was the basis for the analysis, and thus the conclusion has to hinge on this, there are likely to be wider cost savings – perhaps less easily quantified – that arise from preventing homelessness amongst non-priority need groups – see DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming, and Annex 3 of this guide.
Chapter 5

Family Mediation

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Family Mediation

Key Messages

- Mediation services can help support young people to remain at home or return home, where this is appropriate, thus avoiding homelessness.

- Mediation services can also help potentially homeless households by creating a period of respite during which a planned move can be made.

- Even where it does not enable them to return home, mediator intervention can reduce a young person’s vulnerability to homelessness in the medium and long term through reconciling them with family and/or friends.

- An appropriate balance must be struck between (a) ensuring that false claims of homelessness or abuse are not made to secure a tenancy and (b) the need to respond appropriately where young people are genuinely either homeless or at risk of homelessness. Particular consideration must be given to whether a young person might be at risk of violence or abuse in their current or former household.

- In setting up mediation services, consider the pros and cons of in-house versus outsourced provision. An in-house service provision may facilitate better co-ordination with other LA staff. Out-sourcing, on the other hand, may enable the authority to draw on existing specialist expertise, and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

- Consider whether services are equally accessible to ethnic minority communities and that any specific needs are taken into account in the planning and delivery of services.

- Ensure that staff involved at the initial stages of contact with young homeless applicants have the appropriate expertise and level of responsibility to determine the potential suitability of mediation as an option. Staff may require training in empathic listening and in responding sensitively to young people.

- Train up mediation staff to enable them to fully understand the homelessness process. Ensure that homelessness officers fully understand the mediation process and the mediator’s role. Joint training programmes for mediation officers and homelessness officers may facilitate this.
5.1 People asked to leave the homes of parents, other relatives or friends ('family/friend exclusions') now account for well over a third of all homelessness acceptances. One of the most commonly identified actions envisaged by the majority of local authority homelessness strategies was the establishment of mediation services aimed at reconciling young people and their parents or other host householders (HQNS, 2004). By 2003, at least 80 authorities were reportedly operating schemes of this type (ODPM, 2003b). Family mediation initiatives formed an important element within homelessness prevention work in almost all of the case study local authorities in the research on which this guide is based (see DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention* forthcoming).

5.2 According to the dictionary definition, ‘mediation’ involves a process of intervention (by an intermediate agency) between parties in a dispute to produce agreement or reconciliation. Shelter sees mediation as ‘a … process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution’ (Shelter, 2004). It is, however, important to recognise that there are differing views on exactly what is involved in ‘family mediation’ as a homelessness prevention technique, and different approaches are used in practice. There is, for example, no consensus as to whether this is a ‘formal service’, or on the connection between mediation activities and homelessness assessment processes. Mediation may take place informally during home visits, or as part of housing advice, or be provided as a separate service.

5.3 However, there is some consensus on key elements of mediation as identified by a study by Lemos (2001) on mediation services in Scotland and a good practice guide produced by Shelter (2004), namely:

- Those in dispute being willing to take part
- Openness and honesty on the part of all parties
- Commitment to working cooperatively with the other party to find a solution
- Clients feeling that they are in a safe atmosphere and that confidentiality will be respected.
5.4 This chapter focuses on mediation activity which is formally delivered as a distinctive service to prevent homelessness, and considers key issues arising from recently emerging applications of mediation services for this purpose, in order to promote understanding and consensus of ‘good practice’ in this area.

The Nature of Family Mediation Services

5.5 The mediation services examined in the research underpinning this guide suggest that such services might be used to reduce or prevent homelessness both in the immediate, short and long term. Additionally, mediation was also used to ensure ongoing family support for young people leaving home, to improve their chances of sustaining their subsequent tenancy.

5.6 As part of their overall goal of reducing homelessness due to ‘family/friend exclusions’, LA mediation service objectives include:

- Considering a broader range of solutions to homelessness
- Reducing the potential for collusive collaboration between households and young people (‘I’d like my own place, mum, can you put me out’)
- Reducing the isolation experienced by young homeless people in temporary accommodation, without the support of family and friends.

5.7 Generally, the strengths of family mediation for young people are perceived by practitioners to be those associated with mediation services more broadly; namely, that it is non-judgemental, impartial and empowering for clients. Other relevant strengths include mediation’s role in paving the way for a young person to return home without ‘losing face’ and to ensure that their needs are taken seriously by host householders. In some cases the return home might be only a short to medium term response, but this can be important in providing time and respite during which a planned and sustainable move can be arranged. Even where the young person is unable to remain or return to the family home, improving relationships with the family are viewed positively as a means of improving the chances of subsequent tenancy sustainment.

Target Groups

5.8 The target client group for family mediation schemes is typically young people aged 16-24, threatened with exclusion from the homes of parents, other relatives, or friends. In some local authorities services are largely or exclusively focused on households who, if they became homeless, would be considered to be in priority need.
5.9 Sutton operated formal monitoring of service user ethnicity. Other service providers did not keep such records, and it was reported that their users were predominantly White British, even in areas where ethnic minority communities constituted a significant presence. This may raise issues related to the accessibility and appropriateness of current mediation services for BME communities, particularly given the generally younger age structure of these communities and their considerable over-representation among homeless households more generally. This connects with a recent research finding that local authorities have traditionally made ‘little or no effort’ at targeting homelessness prevention services towards ethnic minority groups (ODPM, 2005, p99).

5.10 This supports the need to consider how family mediation services can be made more accessible to people from BME communities. Recommendations for improved practice in this area include the need for active promotion of the service to these communities, and the need to examine whether effective referral mechanisms exist between agencies working primarily with BME young people and mediation services.

**Targeting mediation services**

Harrow’s experience is that mediation is most effective where threatened homelessness is due to routine teenage/parent arguments and tensions, and with potential exclusions where homelessness has been ‘contrived’, perhaps due to a lack of perceived housing options (see also Harrow LBC, 2003). Conversely, in Harrow’s view, mediation is least likely to be effective for applicants leading chaotic lives (e.g. involving drug abuse) or people with a history of youth offending and who have only had intermittent contact with their family (Harrow LBC, 2003, p40).

Mediation can also be effective in situations where applicants have been staying with relatives and friends for a short time and are seeking to be reconciled with parents, or where relatives and friends are given information on how long the applicant has to wait for an alternative housing option (Harrow LBC, 2003).

5.11 As a rule, referrals to family mediation services originate from local authority homelessness officers or housing needs/options officers. Referrals may be made by a homelessness officer following a visit to the home of an applicant facing possible exclusion by parents, friends or relatives. In the course of such visits the staff member will typically explore options available to the applicant, also involving the host householder in discussions. Such contacts, in themselves, are reported as often constituting a form of mediation, as well as sometimes leading to a referral to an independent mediator.

**Referral Processes**
5.12 Good practice messages here relate to the need to balance considerations about the actual (as opposed to the reported) threat of homelessness for the young person involved, with the need to consider the young person's best interests, particularly their vulnerability to abuse. Accordingly, it is important that staff involved at the initial stages of contact with the applicant (including those undertaking home visits) have the appropriate expertise and level of responsibility to determine the potential suitability of mediation as an option. Staff need to be trained in empathic listening and responding skills to build up trust and rapport with young people and enable them to talk openly about their situation. It is also essential that there are established screening procedures and protocols for removing the young person from the threat or actual experience of abuse, where this is required.

5.13 Once a referral to family mediation has been made the next concern is whether the young person and their host householder will engage with the service. This can be problematic. Research evidence suggests the chances of success are greater where:

- referrals are made at the earliest possible stage – e.g. in the context of an initial ‘housing options’ interview (see below)

- referral arrangements are made through face-to-face contacts (e.g. a homelessness officer home visit) rather than by phone or letter.

### Early intervention

Consistent with the recognised value of early intervention in homelessness prevention generally, **Ealing LBC** modified its mediation referral procedures as initially operated. Under the new approach, cases potentially suitable for family mediation were assessed by the Housing Advice Centre rather than the Homeless Persons Unit, thus enabling the possibility of mediation being raised in the initial stages of contact. This was found to be effective in countering the tendency for host households to ‘limit expectations’ once a homelessness application had been made (i.e. a homelessness assessment process tends to lead to a narrow response; a housing advice process looks to broaden options).

### Inter-relatedness of Mediation and Homelessness Assessment Processes

5.14 Local authority processes vary in the extent to which mediation services are integrated with the homelessness assessment process and how services are offered. Where the two processes are closely related and mediation is out-sourced, the contractor agency generally submits a post-interview report to the local authority which informs the authority’s decision as to whether the applicant is legally homeless or threatened with homelessness.
5.15 In these circumstances a mediator’s judgement about the scope for reconciliation between applicant and host household is likely to be used as a key piece of evidence informing a local authority ‘homelessness or threatened homelessness’ decision and the help it can offer that is likely to be most effective.

5.16 Local authorities will, in advance, need to agree with mediation services what details of the case, if any, the mediation service should share with the authority. In addition, before mediation takes place, service users should be informed about how the mediation service reports back to the local authority, including any information they might share with the authority. Good practice here would include such mediator reports being routinely shared with clients to check their accuracy before submission to the council.

5.17 It is important to recognise that a young person’s awareness of the mediation service role as part of the homelessness assessment may influence their willingness to engage with the service. Good practice messages here include the importance of ensuring that the service is focused on the needs of the young person, irrespective of the outcome of the intervention. For instance, this may mean that assistance continues to be provided to the young person where reconciliation has not proved possible.

5.18 Some case study local authorities emphasised the importance of mediation services operating entirely separately from the homelessness assessment process and believed it was fundamental to service effectiveness. A similar view is expounded by other agencies (e.g. Shelter, 2004). Such an approach is more consistent with the elements of mediation as traditionally practiced (as set out in paragraph 5.3).

5.19 The overriding issue here is the critical importance of balancing the need to assess homelessness or threatened homelessness accurately and to avoid pressurising young people to remain in potentially unsuitable or dangerous living arrangements against the need to make a positive option accessible and to ensure that false claims of exclusion or abuse are not made to bolster an applicant’s chances of securing a social sector tenancy.

**Mediation Process and Support**

5.20 Ideally, family mediation should involve both the young person and their parent or other host householder. Under procedures used in many authorities, however, mediators are willing to work with only one of the estranged parties (strictly speaking, such sessions might be described as involving ‘counselling’ rather than ‘mediation’20). In Harrow, for example most initial sessions involve only the young person though there are sometimes follow-up sessions involving both applicant and excluder. It would appear that flexibility of this nature should be encouraged, since contact even with only one of the two parties involved:

- might be useful in developing problem-solving strategies which may preclude the need for the young person to leave home

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20 The term ‘counselling’ indicates here an empathic listening and/or advising role, which can be utilised to facilitate or empower the party concerned to deal with the situation, as opposed to counselling in its strict sense (i.e. a service delivered by professionals specifically trained in counselling skills).
removes the possibility that one of the parties can effectively ‘sabotage’ the process by refusing to participate.

5.21 Family mediation services vary in terms of the duration and nature of support offered. In some cases, the mediator’s contact with the estranged parties is limited to a single meeting. In others it typically involves a series of sessions. An example of the staged process of mediation is illustrated through the Colchester model detailed below.

**Staged process of mediation offered by Colchester BC Family Mediation Process (as delivered by Essex Mediation)**

Stage 1

At the initial meeting, the young person and the mediator discuss the purpose and nature of mediation. The process is confidential, apart from when child protection issues arise. The young person signs a mediation agreement. If the circumstances of the young person are fraught, this initial stage may require more than one visit. The history of the situation is discussed and a rough agenda of aims for the mediation agreed. If the young person is staying with friends, the discussion may cover how the young person could be enabled to return to the parental home.

Stage 2

The mediator seeks the young person’s agreement to contact the parent or carer, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of this. Where this is agreed, the mediator contacts the parent(s) and invites them to a meeting to gain their perspective. Again, this is confidential between the mediator and the parent.

Stage 3

A meeting is convened involving both the young person and the parent(s). The parties agree on an agenda covering the issues needing to be resolved. If there is agreement for the young person to return home, the ground rules for this are discussed and agreed.

The focus of the meeting is on the future rather than the past; blaming and fault-finding are avoided. This is described as an emotional time for both parties. The role of the mediator is to remain neutral and to facilitate communication between the young person and the parent. There are ground rules for facilitating the discussion, for example, neither party is allowed to interrupt the other person.
Stage 4

Further help may be needed, for example, referral for drugs counselling or coping with issues at home. This may involve several sessions with the parents.

This staged process is illustrative of good practice in initially focusing on the needs of the young person, and then considering the perspective of the parent/host householder before convening a meeting involving all three parties. The staged process also allows for complex issues to be raised which might require work with the young person alone at the initial stages. Following discussion involving three parties, the staged process also allows for further support to be provided to the young person to enable him or her to cope with any ongoing difficulties. Neutrality on the part of the mediator ensures that the process takes into account the needs of both the young person and the parent/host householder.

5.22 As discussed earlier, in some cases mediators see their role as extending beyond simply attempting to reconcile the estranged parties. This can include a broader ‘housing education’ role – e.g. raising young people’s awareness of the possible consequences of leaving home such as the difficulties of living in temporary accommodation or managing to keep up rent payments whilst on a low income. Consistent with the ‘housing options’ approach, some externally sourced mediation service providers are trained to give advice on the range of accommodation possibilities available in their locality.

5.23 Mediation can also help to enable young people re-establish ties with their family at a later date – the general view being that family support is essential in ensuring that the young person manages to sustain his/her own independent tenancy, thus helping to prevent repeat homelessness. This is illustrative of good practice in terms of focusing the service on the homelessness prevention agenda in the long term as well as the immediate and short term.

5.24 Training for mediation officers to enable them to more fully understand the homelessness process is recognised as crucial. Likewise, it is important that homelessness officers understand the mediation process and the mediator’s proper role. As suggested by Harrow, good practice here might involve a joint training programme being developed between housing and mediation staff (Harrow LBC, 2003). Networking between mediators working in different areas is another useful means of sharing information on good practice.
Service Procurement and Review

5.25 The mediation schemes examined included both services which were provided in-house as well as those externally procured by the local authority. Mediation staff in externally procured services were expected to provide a specialist service for housing department clients, underpinned by a code of ethics and expertise.

5.26 As with housing advice services, it is suggested that voluntary agency involvement in this area might be potentially beneficial as such agencies may be able to:

- offer a more independent source of support than would be possible for the local authority itself (given a local authority’s other responsibilities of homelessness assessment)

- enable the local authority to draw on the organisation’s particular expertise and wider support networks of other agencies.

- provide a specialist service for housing department clients, underpinned by a code of ethics and expertise.

5.27 On the other hand, mediation services run in-house by local authorities may in many cases be seen as highly effective since they offer the potential for close links with other local authority services. For instance, home visits carried out by local authority staff offer the potential for referrals to be made at an early stage. Mediation services can also be offered at the council premises where homelessness applications are made, making the service more easily accessible. It is important that staff engaged in delivering the service internally are formally trained to do so and adequately supported and supervised, with access to specialist advice from established mediation providers, where required.

5.28 As highlighted in chapter 2, if there is reason to believe a household is homeless, a formal homelessness assessment should not be delayed until after mediation has taken place, or be dependent upon mediation having taken place.

5.29 While it is not possible to categorically assert that one form of procurement is better than the other, as noted in Chapter 2, it is recommended that procurement decisions are determined and reviewed within a Best Value framework.

5.30 Where it is decided to outsource a particular service it is essential that the contractor’s functions are clearly defined in an enforceable contract. Such contracts should also stipulate service standards, performance measures and performance targets. The examples given below clearly embody somewhat contrasting expectations of the kind of service to be provided.
Specifying Services

Harrow LBC’s contract with Central Middlesex Mediation Services stipulates that mediation interviews will be offered in respect of up to 200 clients annually. Of these, it is assumed that 25% will ‘drop out’ and that 25% of ‘excluding’ parents, relatives, or friends will attend a subsequent two-way session with the applicant. Overall, it is assumed that up to 200 hourly mediation sessions will be provided (150 interviews with homeless applicants and 50 interviews with excluder and applicant).

In contrast, the Service Level Agreements of other mediation providers (e.g. Bradford Community Mediation Team at Bradford and Kent Community Housing Trust at Canterbury) stipulate a greater number of sessions per client, since much smaller numbers of clients are seen. In part, at least, this difference reflects an expectation that mediators will convene a number of sessions with the young person. For example, Kent Community Housing Trust is expected to provide mediation and support for up to 24 young people and their families during a 12-month period.

While there is no evidence to suggest that one approach is better than the other, a greater number of contact hours for young people allows trust and rapport to be gradually built up between the young person and the mediator, with complex issues being addressed over several sessions. Conversely, for some young people, one or two sessions may be all that is required to discuss and overcome relationship difficulties with the parent/host householder. Accordingly, Service Level Agreements should allow for a certain degree of flexibility in the amount of contact hours to be spent with young people and/or their host householders.

As an example of innovative practice in this area, one case study local authority had recently altered the terms of its contract with an external mediation provider so that referrals were operated within a ‘pay as you go’ arrangement. This was seen as providing a more flexible service in eliminating the need for a contract and fee based on the estimate of the likely caseload projected in advance.

Performance Management and Monitoring

5.31 Again, the general principles relating to the monitoring of homelessness prevention activities as set out in Chapter 2 are also relevant here. Such principles include the need to track outcomes as well as throughputs, and the need for ‘service quality’ measures – including those derived from service user feedback.
5.32 Research reveals that, in practice, approaches to monitoring family mediation activity and effectiveness vary considerably. One identified distinction was between ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’ impact measures. ‘Direct measures’ focus on the outcomes of mediation intervention in relation to the caseload of referrals – e.g. the proportion of applicants referred to the service and recorded as being reconciled with their host household. Some authorities, on the other hand, focus primarily on trends in the numbers of ‘family/friend exclusion’ cases of homelessness, seeing this as an impact indicator (albeit indirect) of the family mediation service.

5.33 It is clearly appropriate that local authorities take a keen interest in monitoring ongoing changes in the numbers of households who become unintentionally homeless and in priority need as a result of specific ‘immediate reasons’ (e.g. family/friend exclusions). However, it is also vital that the outcomes of specific homelessness prevention activities (such as family mediation) are monitored directly. In this way positive outcomes of such interventions can be evidenced unambiguously rather than simply implied from changes in ‘headline figures’, which may come about for different reasons. This is the main reasoning behind the new Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 213) on homelessness prevention.

5.34 Good practice can be seen in the recording of mediation outcomes by Sheffield, and in the suite of mediation service performance measures and targets adopted by Canterbury. In addition to monitoring whether the service enables the young person to remain at home or return home, Sheffield’s monitoring framework specifically considers the impact of the service on the relationship between the young person and the parent/host householder. Positive outcomes are seen as including those classed as:

- no return home, but relationship improved
- remained at home, relationship improved
- returned home as relationship improved

The thinking here is that the improvement in family relationships can help to prevent homelessness in the long term, even if a return to the family home is not achieved in the short term. A temporary return home followed by a planned move (see text box below, row (c)) is also viewed as positive since it helps to reduce the need for placements in temporary accommodation. Finally, negotiated temporary moves to stay with friends and relatives are also viewed as ‘mildly positive’ since this might be helpful to the young person concerned as well as generating temporary accommodation savings for the local authority.
5.35 Sheffield’s approach also makes a useful distinction between ‘engagement rates’ and ‘positive outcome’ rates. The specific focus on the former enables the Council to monitor the impact of procedural changes designed to encourage applicants to accept mediation assistance.

| Family Mediation Service Performance Measures and Targets: Canterbury CC |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Performance measure                                      | Target |
| Number of young people receiving the service, annually | 24      |
| % of referrals where homelessness was prevented, initially | 90      |
| % of referrals still living at host household address after six months | 80      |
| Average number of staff hours per case                  | 25      |
| % of young people referred to the service expressing satisfaction | 80      |
| Average no. of working days from referral until initial contact established | 2       |

5.36 The Canterbury framework (above) stands out as an example of good practice in monitoring the sustainment of mediation-assisted family reconciliations in the medium or longer term. Not only are such mechanisms recommended as desirable, they can also be seen as relevant to Best Value Performance Indicator 213 (see Chapter 2) in that a mediation referral could properly be classed as a form of housing advice.

5.37 Ideally, however, such a framework should also take account of planned/positive moves, i.e. where homelessness is prevented and the solution is regarded as sustainable, at least in the short term, as well as situations where the young person has simply remained at the host household address since mediator intervention.
It would be worthwhile for mediation services to monitor the extent to which young people are enabled to make planned or positive moves where relationship difficulties make it no longer possible for the young person to remain at home or return home. Such planned moves can reduce time spent in temporary accommodation, and ensure that adequate support is provided for the move and in the resettlement period.

Service User Perspectives

Systematic evaluation of client views by mediation service providers is important to supplement service providers' views of what works and what doesn't work, and to identify mismatches between services delivered and clients' needs or expectations.

In addition to systematic analysis of clients' views, the development of mediation services can benefit from analysis of the views of those referred for appointments but who fail to engage with the service, in order to consider means of encouraging the uptake of mediation services. This should include both young people threatened with homelessness, and their host householders, where both parties are intended to participate.

Cost-effectiveness

The research on which this guide is based found that family mediation services have the potential to be highly cost-effective. This conclusion was based on an analysis of services operated by (or on behalf of) three local authorities.

In Colchester, for example, net savings per household assisted were estimated as averaging £653, whilst the comparable figure for Sheffield was £1,255 (DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming). Significantly, the three services concerned were configured in fairly contrasting ways in terms of their relationship with the homelessness assessment process – see above. All three services were, however, mainly targeted at young people judged as otherwise likely to qualify as homeless and in priority need. The cost-effectiveness of these schemes resulted from the fact that they were relatively inexpensive to run compared to the cost of providing temporary accommodation for young people accepted as homeless.

As with other services, the value of the savings generated through family mediation interventions is crucially dependent on (a) the appropriateness of referrals, and (b) the extent to which mediator-brokered reconciliations are sustained in the medium and longer term (again pointing to the value of monitoring outcomes over this period).
Chapter 6

Domestic Violence Support

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Chapter 6
Domestic Violence Support

Background

6.1 Domestic violence is defined by the Housing Act 1996 as:

‘violence from a person with whom he is associated, or threats of violence from such a person which are likely to be carried out’

Domestic violence is not just physical violence or the threat of physical violence, but includes any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between persons who are or have been intimate partners, family members, or members of the same household, regardless of gender or sexuality.

6.2 Although such abuse is perpetrated against men as well as against women, evidence shows that women are more likely to suffer repeat victimisation, to suffer physical injury and emotional harm as a result of domestic violence, and to report domestic violence to external agencies. Women victims are also more likely to have responsibility for dependent children.

6.3 Relationship breakdown was the main cause of homelessness for 20% of households accepted as homeless and in priority need in 2004/05 and of these cases, two thirds (13% of all homelessness acceptances) involved violence.

6.4 The recent evaluation of homelessness strategies commissioned by ODPM found that 220 of them contained proposals on addressing homelessness arising from domestic violence (HQNS, 2004).

6.5 The range of activities relevant to the prevention of homelessness for households experiencing domestic violence is varied, and this evaluation was only able to focus on a small part of this provision, including a sanctuary scheme to help victims of domestic violence to remain in their homes, as well as a domestic violence tenancy support service, which is referred to in the tenancy sustainment chapter (chapter 8).

6.6 The findings from the projects included in the evaluation will inform future DCLG work in this area, which will include:

- good practice on implementing sanctuary schemes to help households experiencing domestic violence to remain in their own homes

- Frequently Asked Questions on implementing measures included in Best Value Performance Indicator 225 (see below)
6.7 This brief section aims to set out the context within which homelessness prevention initiatives to assist households at risk of homelessness due to domestic violence are currently implemented, and to highlight some good practice principles identified by the evaluation that are relevant to domestic violence provision in general.

Domestic violence and homelessness prevention

6.8 Traditionally, support services for households experiencing domestic violence have focused on the provision of temporary accommodation that can be accessed when victims have to leave their homes in a crisis or emergency. Such provision includes refuges for example, which have confidential addresses, secure properties, and specialist support. Access to such provision can occur once a victim has been accepted as homeless by a local authority but households experiencing domestic violence often approach refuge providers directly.

6.9 Given that victims often leave their homes under such circumstances, and may have already done so by the time of their first contact with a local authority, such a scenario means that homelessness prevention presents particular challenges in relation to this client group.

6.10 However, whilst there is always likely to be a need for refuge and safe temporary accommodation provision, a key aspect of homelessness prevention where there is domestic violence is the provision of support and advice to help victims remain safely in their own homes, where this is their choice. This includes the provision of ‘sanctuary’ schemes, which improve security of the home and assist with the implementation of legal measures for the removal of violent perpetrators.

6.11 To the extent that victims of domestic violence may need to leave their homes, homelessness prevention might also include measures to assist households to leave their homes in a safe and planned way, and much of the work of local multi-agency partnerships on domestic violence is geared towards this.

6.12 Households who have left their homes due to domestic violence often need to be supported in making a transition towards independence. They may face emotional, financial and legal problems. The provision of support in temporary accommodation is important, but access to ongoing outreach or resettlement support, once they move on to more independent or settled housing, can play an important role in tenancy sustainment and preventing repeat homelessness, as well as helping to prevent victims from returning to violent relationships. Such support may include help with budgeting, accessing benefits and, if they have moved into a new area, settling their children into a new school, and assisting their entry into employment.
Good practice in service delivery

6.13 Consistent with recognised good practice, support for the victims of domestic violence should be considered within a strategic and coordinated multi-agency approach. This is often organised at local level through domestic violence fora involving key agencies such as the police, housing departments, social services, education services, health services, domestic violence projects, and the courts. Such fora have an important role to play in developing plans for these agencies to work together to improve policies and procedures, and working practice, to achieve more consistent and coordinated responses, and therefore better outcomes, for those affected by domestic violence. This includes the prevention of homelessness.

6.14 Of crucial importance in determining the appropriate homelessness prevention support for households at risk of domestic violence is their safety, and their preferences in terms of actions taken. Good practice involves supporting victims to make the most appropriate choice to ensure their safety.

6.15 Government guidance on the provision of domestic violence support services noted that women who have experienced domestic violence value:

- a ‘one-stop service’ which provides a range of services (including advocacy, ongoing support and negotiation with all other agencies)
- a holistic approach within which all options are carefully explained and the risks and consequences explored
- a believing, respectful and non-judgemental service, which includes contact with other survivors for peer support
- timely and pro-active intervention, including daily contact at initial stages of making contact or leaving a violent relationship
- support to cope with the impact of violence on children

(ODPM, 2002)

6.16 This strongly suggests the need for homelessness prevention activities to be planned and delivered within a coordinated approach, both at the operational and strategic level. It also highlights the need for specialist support and trained staff who are aware of the specific impacts of domestic violence on women and children and of the effective means of supporting them.
Assessing Local Authority Action Against Domestic Violence

**Best Value Performance Indicator 225**

6.17 In 2005/6, a new performance indicator was introduced to help local authorities tackle domestic violence more effectively, and homelessness prevention interventions should be implemented within this context.

6.18 BV225 asks local authorities a number of questions about local measures to address domestic violence. The performance indicator is replicated in full in Annex 2 of this guide, but key aspects of the indicator in relation to homelessness prevention include whether:

- The authority has produced a directory of local services that can help victims of domestic violence.
- The authority has produced and adopted a multi-agency strategy to tackle domestic violence developed in partnership with other agencies.
- The authority has developed an information-sharing protocol and had it agreed between key statutory partners.
- The authority has developed, launched and promoted a ‘sanctuary’ type scheme to enable victims and their children to remain in their own home, where they choose to do so and where safety can be guaranteed.
- There has been a reduction in the percentage of cases of priority need unintentional homelessness due to domestic violence that had previously been re-housed in the last two years by that local authority as a result of domestic violence.
- The council’s tenancy agreement, or that of the LSVT organization, where the housing stock has been transferred, have a specific clause stating that perpetration of domestic violence by a tenant can be considered grounds for eviction.

**BV213 and BV214**

6.19 As well as monitoring performance against the measures set out by BV225, authorities need to be mindful of the role of initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness for households at risk of domestic violence, in relation to performance against BV213.

6.20 As with good practice in monitoring other homelessness prevention activities, it is recommended that the impact of homelessness prevention is directly monitored rather than relying upon a reduction in homelessness due to domestic violence (indicated via P1E monitoring) to indicate successful outcomes.
6.21 As discussed in Chapter 2, good practice in monitoring homelessness prevention also includes monitoring service outcomes. Under Best Value Performance Indicator 213 (see paragraphs 2.35-2.39 and Annex 2), authorities need to develop methods for identifying and recording the longer term sustainability of housing advice-assisted solutions.

6.22 BV225 indicates a need to measure the extent of repeat homelessness due to domestic violence. This is in line with the requirements of BV214, which measures repeat homelessness. Chapter 2, paragraph 2.40, suggests how authorities might record levels of repeat homelessness.

**Additional Good Practice in Monitoring Services**

6.23 The evaluation identified additional good practice principles in monitoring the effectiveness of services in preventing homelessness for households at risk of domestic violence. Such monitoring will be facilitated by:

- Actions taken to support women to remain in their own homes, to make planned moves, and other interventions
- The extent to which women are enabled to remain in their existing accommodation or enabled to make planned moves
- The flow of referrals to services over time
- Service user satisfaction with the actions taken to prevent homelessness, including women's continued sense of safety
- Longer term outcomes, including the continued safety of women and children in their own homes or in new accommodation upon resettlement.

6.24 In the case of crisis intervention services, it is also important to monitor the speed with which services are able to respond, for example, by installing initial security measures.

6.25 In keeping with the general homelessness prevention monitoring principles set out in Chapter 2, good practice is to seek service user views. Suggested approaches include focus groups, consultation meetings, questionnaires and surveys.
## Chapter 7

Assisting Ex-offenders: Prison Based Housing Advice and Support Initiatives

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Chapter 7
Assisting Ex-offenders: Prison Based Housing Advice and Support Initiatives

Key Messages

- It is important that housing-related initiatives enjoy high-level support and ‘sponsorship’ within prison management

- There is a premium on prison-based homelessness prevention action at key stages, including reception into custody (i.e. early intervention) and immediately pre- and post-release

- Prison based homelessness prevention schemes need to develop strong links with relevant external agencies – particularly local authorities and other housing providers, probation services and support provider organisations

- Prison based homelessness prevention schemes need to be open to the recruiting or seconding of staff from relevant backgrounds (including local authority and other social landlord staff)

- It is vital that prison based schemes operate within performance management frameworks designed to facilitate collection of data consistent with specified service standards and targets. As well as recording immediate post-custodial housing outcomes, such systems need to monitor longer-term outcomes (at least on a sample basis)

- A ‘housing options’ approach can be applicable within the prison context, just as in mainstream housing advice. Associated with its use in these circumstances, however, action is also needed to address barriers arising for prisoners as a result of being in custody

- Prison based schemes should ensure that prisoners are involved and engaged with actions undertaken with, not for, individuals. Such a philosophy is important in empowering individuals and achieving sustainable accommodation outcomes
Peer-led or peer-involving homelessness prevention projects within the prison context can pay dividends, for example in terms of:
- capacity building which can help boost a prisoner’s future employability
- grounding the service to ensure it addresses relevant issues
- value for money

Background

7.1 Research evidence shows that ex-offenders leaving prison are at relatively high risk of homelessness but in the past have typically received only limited support to reduce this risk. One study found that fewer than half of prisoners were able to return to their previous home upon discharge (Carlisle, 1996).

7.2 Homelessness is a key factor associated with re-offending. The Government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) reported evidence that having stable accommodation reduces the risk of re-offending by a fifth.

7.3 The SEU also illustrated the links between lack of accommodation and offending in that 32% of offenders subject to imprisonment were homeless prior to sentence, in contrast to homelessness in the general population of less than one per cent (SEU, 2002).

7.4 The SEU report also emphasised the link between employment and accommodation post-release, with evidence suggesting that ex-prisoners with an address on release were three times more likely to have employment than those who were NFA (no fixed abode).

7.5 In response to such findings, recent years have seen increased provision of housing advice and assistance targeted at ex-offenders due for release. This chapter looks at some of the ways that such prison-based homelessness prevention services can be delivered.

7.6 Initiatives of this kind are mainly provided by agencies other than local authorities. As well as the Prison Service itself, such agencies include Probation Services, NACRO and voluntary groups (sometimes with Prison Service funding). Nevertheless, local authorities have an increasingly significant role in this area through the provision or procurement of outreach services delivered within institutions. As well as the Bristol City Council scheme described below, several other case study local authorities covered in our research (e.g. Leicester CC and Sheffield MBC) had developed some form of specific provision linked to local penal establishments.
The chapter draws on case study evidence from three schemes selected to explore contrasting models of homelessness prevention for ex-offenders:

- Bristol Prison Homelessness Prevention Service (PHPS), a service commissioned by Bristol City Council, and provided by English Churches Housing Group (ECHG). The Service focuses on former rough sleepers admitted to HMP Bristol, a local prison. It aims to help clients break out of the cycle of rough sleeping and re-offending.

- BETA (Benefits, Employment, Training and Accommodation), HM Prison Winchester. HMP Winchester is a local male closed establishment including remand and sentenced prisoners. BETA aims to address the accommodation needs of prisoners within a package of advice also covering training and welfare benefits. The initiative is provided by the Prison Service.

- The VISION Project, HM Prison/Youth Offender Institution, East Sutton Park. HMP/YOI East Sutton Park is an open female establishment in Kent. The project is a prisoner-led initiative offering support and guidance on a range of resettlement issues including housing, benefits and employment. It forms part of the overall resettlement provision within the establishment.

In seeking to draw out wider lessons for schemes aimed at averting homelessness among ex-prisoners this chapter looks at the various forms of intervention that can assist this group. First, however, it discusses some of the specific housing problems affecting ex-prisoners, and the challenges faced in attempting to resolve them.

The Challenges of Assisting Ex-prisoners to Avoid Homelessness

Ex-prisoners face a number of key housing difficulties. Approximately one third of prisoners lose their home whilst in prison (SEU, 2002), not least due to loss of entitlement to Housing Benefit (i.e. where a tenancy is terminated by the landlord after Housing Benefit payments cease). Over two-thirds of prisoners lose contact with their family, or experience a breakdown of family relationships when they go into prison.

Accommodation is widely accepted as being key to the resettlement of prisoners and in reducing re-offending. Research evidence identifies a number of particularly critical periods for prisoners in terms of preventing post-release homelessness:

- early action to address housing issues on entering custody
- finding accommodation for release
- post-release support.

21 Housing Benefit can continue to be paid in respect of tenancies where the tenant is imprisoned for short custodial sentences of up to 13 weeks or imprisonment on remand for up to 52 weeks.
A number of challenges face housing advisers working on behalf of prisoners. These include the ‘highly specialised and complex’ nature of provision required, difficulties in finalising arrangements for post release accommodation prior to release, and problems associated with addressing housing needs too late in the custodial period (i.e. last weeks prior to release).

This research found that the shifting population within the prisons system acts as a major impediment to working with prisoners to help them secure local opportunities for housing and support. HMP Bristol, for example, as a ‘local prison’, receives a daily influx of prisoners from local courts for whom it needs to find longer term prison accommodation. This often requires the onward transfer of inmates to other prisons outside the local area. During their imprisonment, an estimated 70-80% of inmates initially admitted to Bristol Prison are moved in this way.

By necessity, many such moves take place in an unplanned way and at short notice. They also often result in inmates being incarcerated remotely during their immediate pre-release period. Whilst a specialist housing advisor may be able to travel to remote institutions if essential, such trips are clearly an inefficient use of staff time resources. These factors seriously complicate the work of staff working with Bristol-origin prisoners to prepare them for release and also mean relying on professionals at other institutions being able to find accommodation in or near the Bristol area. It would seem that such problems are likely to be faced by staff working to prevent post-release homelessness in prisons across the country.

Other practical difficulties in delivering homelessness prevention services within a prison context include:

- Constraints stemming from restrictions on prison homelessness prevention staff access and mobility within prison establishments – the Bristol PHPS project worker’s effectiveness was greatly enhanced through being issued with internal prison keys

- The difficulty of matching offender release dates and accommodation availability.

More broadly, the generally limited availability of interim supported housing potentially appropriate for many newly released prisoners (e.g. re-settlement hostels) is a problem. This also means that securing a stable transition if settled accommodation isn’t available, is difficult.
The Nature of Prison Homelessness 
Prevention Services 

7.16 Much of the prison homelessness prevention worker’s activities are a targeted form of 
housing advice. However, the range of activities and complexities involved (as 
highlighted above) means that this role is more specialised than that of a typical 
housing adviser. 

Saving Existing Tenancies 

7.17 Case study evidence suggests that prison homelessness prevention projects place great 
emphasis on making contact with incoming prisoners as part of their initial ‘induction’ 
into the establishment concerned. 

7.18 Prison homelessness prevention staff report that many of those entering the system 
lack awareness of the potential options that exist to save former tenancies. These might 
include, for example, agreeing to pay rent while in prison or arranging an authorised 
sub-let. 

7.19 Particularly for those recently admitted to the prisons system (rather than transferred 
within it) the first priority is to develop an understanding of the client’s recent housing 
history. This will include assessing the prospects that any previous accommodation 
might remain available to the prisoner upon release. In particular, prison homelessness 
prevention staff seek to identify instances where intervention by a project staff member 
might help to ensure that a former landlord keeps open a prisoner’s former tenancy. 

7.20 After initial assessments, the prison staff member may – in consultation with the 
prisoner – draw up a plan of action to try to retain the existing tenancy. This may 
include a range of actions, such as arranging for a prisoner’s property to be let out or 
liason with Housing Benefit departments – for example, to arrange continued payment 
of benefit, or to set up a Discretionary Housing Payment (see Chapter 4 for further 
explanation).
Identifying actions required to save a tenancy upon reception into prison

Under BETA’s (Benefits, Employment, Training and Accommodation) procedures, the housing assessment of recently-admitted prisoners informs a Housing Retention Action Plan drawn up by the housing adviser and setting out action appropriate to the individual’s circumstances and support needs.

BETA action at the post-reception stage includes addressing clients’ immediate needs (e.g. arranging to secure a property, or disposal or storage of belongings), liaison with Housing Benefit departments, and action to maintain accommodation through liaison with mortgage lenders, housing associations, local authorities, private landlords or family relations.

The BETA project also hosted a weekly outreach session run by Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

Bristol Prison Homelessness Prevention Project actions to save pre-conviction accommodation early in a custodial period include:

- Petitioning for suspension of possession actions
- Arranging lodgers or renting out of property
- Negotiating rent arrears repayment
- Advocating for clients with local authority Housing Benefit departments
- Seeking Discretionary Housing Payments

Resolving ID uncertainties necessary to pursue Housing Benefit claims

7.21 Resolving a prisoner’s Housing Benefit problems may involve addressing the client’s lack of acceptable identification documents when s/he enters prison. BETA has developed a procedure to develop ID Proofs acceptable to Housing Benefit departments to enable Housing Benefit applications (change of circumstances or new applications) to be made from the prison. Negotiating for a prisoner to pay existing rent arrears may also be necessary at this stage.
In common with other measures aimed at saving existing tenancies, schemes of this kind are mainly relevant to recently imprisoned offenders rather than incomers who are being transferred from other institutions. However, such a mechanism can be useful for prisoners with rent arrears from a terminated tenancy and who might be consequently ineligible for rehousing with that provider upon release. Demonstrating a willingness to begin repaying such arrears whilst incarcerated could be crucial in securing a landlord’s agreement to authorise their eligibility for a tenancy.

Supporting prisoners to renew or maintain family relationships is another form of action which can contribute to preventing post-release homelessness. In this, the activities of prison homelessness prevention schemes are closely related to family mediation (see Chapter 5). In one of our case studies, BETA, a role was played here by the counselling agency, Relate.

Except in cases where a prisoner can return to the family home or where a tenancy has been kept open during their custodial stay, the prison homelessness prevention service objective is to help clients access new tenancies established upon release.

The BETA service at HMP Winchester, has developed a ‘housing options’ approach modelled on local authority practice (see Chapter 2).
Operating a ‘housing options’ approach within prison-based homelessness prevention context: BETA, HMP Winchester

Here, ‘housing options’ refers to a discussion covering the full range of rehousing solutions potentially open to the client, rather than making any assumption that a formal homelessness application is the most appropriate way forward. **BETA** view the housing options model as beneficial in terms of empowering clients and encouraging them to take responsibility for their futures.

A Housing Officer is employed by the Probation Service to work on finding accommodation for short-term (under a year) prisoners who would otherwise be NFA (no fixed abode) upon release.

Typical activities undertaken by the housing officer include:

- Referrals to hostels and interviews
- Arranging private rented accommodation
- Liaison with local authority rent deposit schemes
- Shared ownership applications
- Assisting applications for social housing, where appropriate

Prisoners serving more than six months are encouraged to join a local authority housing waiting list.

7.26 As well as liaising with social landlords, prison-based homelessness prevention services can also seek to assist clients to access private tenancies. This may involve acting as a prisoner’s advocate to access a local authority-operated rent deposit scheme. As well as providing such assistance, **BETA** envisages operating its own rent deposit scheme. This will provide a fund to finance rent deposits or payments to enable a prisoner to maintain existing accommodation for a short period of time (a maximum of eight weekly rent payments per prisoner). Payments through the scheme will constitute loans repayable over a two year period, making the scheme financially self-sustainable over time.

Helping ex-prisoners make a fresh start

7.27 Upon release, some ex-prisoners may wish to find settled housing in a different area to the one in which they lived before imprisonment. To the extent that such a ‘fresh start’ may help reduce an ex-prisoner’s risk of becoming homeless in the future, such action can help prevent future homelessness.
Many prisoners facing release will be people with support needs meaning that assistance limited to enabling access to a mainstream tenancy would be far from sufficient to avert subsequent homelessness. For a service such as the Bristol Prison Homeless Prevention Service, focused solely on former rough sleepers, this is true of virtually all clients. At least initially, members of this client group require a package of accommodation with intensive support of a kind that cannot generally be provided in the context of a private tenancy. Hence, liaison with housing associations and other supported housing providers is likely to form a major activity for all prison homelessness prevention services.

As part of the Partnership agreement, each participating local authority nominates a prison liaison officer within their homelessness section in order to deal with reciprocal scheme moves. These staff are tasked with co-ordinating the resettlement process for ex-prisoners. It is anticipated that in time the Partnership will be extended to other local authorities and prisons outside the region.

Post-Release Support

As noted above, many ex-prisoners are likely to need support in the medium to longer term in order to enable them to retain tenancies. At least initially, this may take the form of intensive rehabilitation or, where appropriate, detoxification or other substance dependency treatment. Some ex-prisoners may need medical help to tackle mental ill-health as part of their rehabilitation. As well as facilitating access to supported accommodation some prison homelessness prevention projects operate linked post-release support services.
## Post-release floating support provision

**BETA** (Benefits, Employment, Training and Accommodation), HM Prison Winchester offers post-release floating support via a team of five support workers funded by Supporting People, and refers clients to other support services and providers (e.g. Community Mental Health Teams, Substance Misuse Teams, Social Services). **Bristol’s Prison Homelessness Prevention Service** point of release and post-release provision includes escorting released prisoners to pre-arranged post-release accommodation, and was perceived by the service as one of the most vital practical tasks performed within the contract. For the Prison Homelessness Prevention Co-ordinator (PHPC), working with prisoners who had substance misuse issues, the concern that released offenders would immediately resume drug use on release was addressed in this way.

### 7.30
Whilst some will have more severe problems needing intensive and/or specialist help, other ex-prisoners’ support needs will be more modest – more in keeping with the sorts of assistance provided by many tenancy sustainment services of the kind described in Chapter 8 – for example budgeting, welfare benefits advice and help with debt management. Hence, whilst it may not be possible or appropriate for a single agency to provide assistance both inside and outside prison, the research suggested the importance of developing appropriate links with external support providers where they exist.

### Involving Prisoners in Delivering Prison-based Homelessness Prevention Services

#### 7.31
The case studies in the evaluation included a range of different staffing set ups, including the direct involvement of prisoners in the delivery of these services. There appear to be a range of benefits associated with peer-led and peer-involving models of housing support within prisons, although such models are not necessarily appropriate for every prison-based service of this kind.

#### 7.32
The recruitment of Resettlement Reps from the prison population at HMP Winchester, to provide a range of support and assistance for the BETA project, is very different from the peer-led model developed by the VISION Project at HMP/YOI East Sutton Park. In BETA, the Resettlement Reps’ focus was on forming a link between prisoners and staff, whilst at VISION, the peers were the project.
7.33 In common with mainstream housing advice services, prison homelessness prevention projects initiated by local authorities are operated on both an in-house and outsourced basis. Similarly, the Prisons Service itself both operates and contracts out such activities. Procurement arrangements among the case study initiatives were as follows:

- Bristol PHPS for former rough sleepers – commissioned by Bristol City Council from English Churches Housing Group
- BETA (Benefits, Employment, Training and Accommodation), HM Prison Winchester – in-house team managed by the Prisons Service
- VISION Project, HM Prison/Youth Offender Institution East Sutton Park – in-house team managed by the Prisons Service.

7.34 Two of the three case study projects – Bristol PHPS and BETA – had received substantial financial backing from central government. The Bristol project had been funded through ODPM (now DCLG) Homelessness Directorate grant. Thanks to its status as a Custody to Work Initiative pilot, BETA had substantial ring-fenced funding for its initial two-year period, though funding was subsequently mainstreamed within the overall HMP Winchester budget. In contrast, the VISION Project was initially established as a result of fundraising effort by HMP/YOI East Sutton Park, and subsequently provided through existing prison resources on a largely self-funding basis.
Many of the procurement considerations outlined in paras 3.24-3.28 (on housing advice services) also apply to schemes focusing on ex-prisoners. Hence, the ability to access specialist expertise can be a strong argument for contracting out. In the Bristol example, for instance, commissioning the service from ECHG reflected the fact that the organisation was already providing rough sleeper accommodation and carrying out rough sleeper outreach work in the city. Even where the service is led by an in-house team it can be advantageous to buy in specialist help – as in BETA’s commissioning of Relate to provide family mediation workshops (see above). In-house operations may benefit from closer co-ordination and liaison with colleagues engaged in more mainstream functions (e.g. prison warders).

Irrespective of initial procurement decisions it is important that services are periodically subject to thorough review. Guidance on Best Value service review is published by ODPM (2003d). (See also Bristol City Council’s framework for evaluating and reviewing outsourced homelessness prevention services as set out in Chapter 2 – text box at paragraph 2.33).

Performance Management and Monitoring

Many of the observations about how to measure and monitor housing advice service performance are relevant to prison-based prevention initiatives:

- whether in house or contracted out, housing advice services need to be run within a framework setting out service objectives, service standards, and performance indicators and targets.

- monitoring systems need to measure:
  - the number of interventions (caseload volume)
  - the housing circumstances of clients assisted (e.g. existing tenure, imminence of homelessness)
  - the nature of interventions (e.g. advice only as opposed to advocacy)
  - the immediate outcome of the intervention.

- authorities need to develop methods for estimating the longer term sustainability of housing advice-assisted ‘solutions’

See also Chapter 3 – paragraphs 3.29-3.38.
7.38 Similarly, for initiatives (such as BETA) incorporating floating support provision targeted on former inmates, points made in Chapter 8 about performance management and monitoring of tenancy sustainment services are relevant. Examples include the need to measure:

- the proportion of those referred for floating support who engage with the service
- the proportion of referrals whose needs have been assessed within the specified target time
- (assuming that this is a recognised service objective) the proportion of supported tenants engaged in ‘meaningful occupation’ at a specific point in time (e.g. six months after referral).

For further details see Chapter 8.

7.39 In this field, part of the framework for any local project derives from the national key performance indicators (KPIs) and key performance targets (KPTs). Perhaps the single most important KPT for the Prison Service stipulates that 75% of ex-prisoners should have accommodation on their first night of release. Under its contract with the City Council, Bristol PHPS was charged with securing post-release accommodation – temporary or permanent (including residential treatment) – for 80% of the caseload. In common with other forms of homelessness prevention, however, it is essential to develop monitoring systems focusing on longer term as well as immediate accommodation outcomes.

7.40 As noted in Chapter 2, Best Value principles emphasize the importance of service user and stakeholder involvement in public services. This is relevant to procurement and service review activities described above. Collecting and analyzing service user views is another area where such principles need to be observed. In keeping with this code the BETA and VISION projects had involved prisoner peer supporters/workers. Other groups or agencies whose views might be relevant here could include the Probation Service, mainstream housing advice agencies (because they might be approached by former clients of prison based homelessness prevention services), and social landlords in the locality.

7.41 Where prison based homelessness prevention activities are provided by (or on behalf of) a local authority it would be open to the authority to treat the provision of assistance as ‘housing advice’ for the purposes of Best Value Performance Indicator 213 (see Chapter 2 paragraphs 2.35-2.39 and Annex 2). This would specifically require the monitoring of longer-term outcomes in instances where an advisor helps an otherwise homeless ex-prisoner to access a tenancy. As suggested in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.39, a practical approach to monitoring of this kind might involve ‘tracking’ a sample of clients for a six month period following release.
Cost-effectiveness

7.42 There is little doubt that prison based homelessness prevention services benefit many ex-prisoners upon their release. Precisely defining the added value of such schemes is, however, difficult. Part of the problem is the typical absence of information on longer-term housing outcomes. Even if such information was available it would ideally need to be compared with the counter-factual scenario – i.e. the outcomes resulting from a situation where no assistance in accessing or retaining post-release housing was provided. Defining such a scenario is not at all easy.

7.43 Further, in contrast with many other forms of homelessness prevention, prison homelessness prevention schemes are targeted, by and large, on individuals who would not qualify as ‘in priority need’ under the homelessness legislation. Hence, their cost-effectiveness cannot be measured in terms of notional savings on local authority temporary accommodation expenditure. Indeed, much of the cost-effectiveness case for schemes of this kind must rest on the predicted savings in downstream custodial and associated costs to the extent that such intervention disrupts an ongoing cycle of homelessness, offending and imprisonment.

7.44 Substantial additional research would be necessary to demonstrate the precise cost-effectiveness of prison-based homelessness prevention schemes. However, the existing evidence that provision of stable accommodation reduces re-offending by a fifth gives good grounds for arguing that preventing homelessness among ex-prisoners is highly beneficial. There are, in any case, good practice messages on maximising value for money in the operation of prison homelessness prevention. As noted in Chapter 2, these include:

- ensuring that service procurement decisions are determined within the Best Value framework (see above)

- ensuring that referrals to homelessness prevention services are made appropriately so that best use is made of necessarily limited resources.

See also Annex 3 of this guide.
Chapter 8

Tenancy Sustainment

Key Messages

- Tenancy sustainment services need to be effectively targeted through early assessment of the needs of potentially vulnerable tenants by social landlords and housing advice agencies, e.g. where support is needed in the private rented sector.

- Tenancy sustainment services should be actively promoted among relevant agencies and to tenants where the service is available to existing tenants who may need support.

- Services need to be flexible and client-centred.

- Effective provision demands highly committed and experienced staff.

- Effective multi-agency working is vital, particularly the liaison between social landlords and external tenancy support service provider agencies.

- The prospects of successful intervention are boosted by timely action, and the facility for the continued accessibility of the service even after a case is ‘closed’.

- Tenancy sustainment services should be rigorously monitored in terms of incoming referrals, client engagement with the service and outcomes achieved for those assisted.

- The effectiveness of tenancy sustainment should be directly monitored by measuring the proportion of tenancies created during a given time period (e.g. a financial year) and which remain intact for a given duration (e.g. six or 12 months).

- There is a need for further development of qualitative indicators to assess the effectiveness of tenancy sustainment services.

- Service users need to be supported in engaging in the planning and development of services through the employment of a number of approaches.
Background

8.1 Tenancy sustainment services provide support to help households retain their tenancies. They can play an important role in reducing repeat homelessness (ODPM, 2003a).

8.2 ODPM’s recent evaluation of local authority homelessness strategies reported that many authorities planned to use floating support to help vulnerable households retain their tenancies (HQNS, 2004).

8.3 Tenancy sustainment often refers to activities designed to assist newly rehoused households but they can be targeted at existing tenants. Referrals may have been assessed as being at risk of being unable to manage independently, and thus at greater risk of homelessness if no support is available.

8.4 Sometimes, ‘tenancy sustainment’ takes the form of ‘tenancy rescue’, involving homelessness applicants, or households with an identified risk of homelessness. Here, support is provided to help them retain their tenancies.

8.5 The provision of tenancy sustainment may also help vulnerable households who might otherwise be at risk of homelessness to access tenancies in the social rented sector. This addresses the problem of housing associations rejecting potential new tenants nominated or referred to them without an assurance that support needs as identified by the association will be met, where those needs are considered to put the tenant at risk of tenancy failure (Pawson and Mullins, 2003).

8.6 Activities typically provided by tenancy sustainment services include help with moving and settling into a new home, assistance in arranging utilities, help with budgeting and applying for benefits, and help to access other support services, such as health services. It may also involve help dealing with rent arrears. Activities are all geared towards enabling people to sustain their tenancies. Personal care is usually not included in the support provided.

8.7 This chapter focuses on both generic tenancy sustainment services and initiatives targeted at specific client groups. A number of studies have shown that these services can be effective in homelessness prevention, including for those with high levels of support needs (DCLG, Evaluating homelessness prevention, forthcoming).
Access to Services

Targeting Services

8.8 Early identification of tenants at risk of losing their accommodation is key to preventing homelessness. This requires effective procedures for referrals among key agencies, early needs assessments and support plans identifying key problems, and estimation of the level and nature of support the tenant is likely to require. Social landlords can do this by developing systems to monitor households moving into newly created tenancies to assess whether support is required.

8.9 It is important that such assessments identify and redirect inappropriate referrals to tenancy sustainment services at an early stage, for example, where the client requires a high degree of nursing care and cannot be supported by a tenancy sustainment service.

8.10 Where tenancy support is put in place to facilitate access to social rented housing, there needs to be an agreed procedure between the social landlord and the referring agency.

Facilitating Access to Social Housing

Canterbury CC has granted East Kent Cyrenians direct nomination rights (up to 30 per year) to local authority vacancies. Support workers identifying an existing client believed able to manage an independent tenancy – even where this entails the provision of ongoing support – can nominate such individuals directly. This arrangement ensures vulnerable tenants are able to access Canterbury’s stock and that their support needs are addressed.

8.11 Where tenancy sustainment services are designed to target established social renters and/or private tenants, there is a need for close working relationships between the local authority (or contracted tenancy support service provider) and agencies that refer clients. Such agencies (e.g. those specialising in helping people with drug, alcohol or debt problems) need to be well briefed on the scope and remit of the tenancy sustainment service and on how to make appropriate referrals.

8.12 Active promotion of tenancy sustainment services is important in raising awareness of the service and support available to potential users and relevant professionals (e.g. social workers) who might refer such people. Such information needs to make it clear how potential clients can make contact with the service, if they need to.

8.13 Given the over-representation of ethnic minority households among the statutory homeless population, it is important that tenancy sustainment services are appropriately promoted to diverse communities.
### Targeting services at specific groups

**Leicester City Council’s STAR** tenancy sustainment project has a multi-ethnic team with the resources to communicate in thirteen languages. The team publicises its services through promotional leaflets translated into community languages.

An example of specialised support provided by tenancy sustainment services is the **Thames Reach Bondway tenancy sustainment team** which provides support to former rough sleepers by dedicated ‘meaningful occupation’ workers. The service helps clients to access training, education, volunteering and employment.

### Timely Intervention

8.14 Research indicates that timely intervention is critical in supporting tenants at risk of homelessness to maintain their tenancies. This can be facilitated by the following measures:

- Active promotion of tenancy support services to other agencies and groups such as tenants associations and service providers
- Early contact with the client on referral
- Prompt access to crisis intervention support.

### Nature of Tenancy Sustainment Services

8.15 Tenancy sustainment services can deliver a wide range of support functions, although research suggests that help is most commonly needed with budgeting, repaying rent arrears and claiming welfare benefits. Typically, support provided by tenancy sustainment services includes:

- Budgeting and debt management
- Claiming benefits
- Accessing health services
- Accessing specialist services – e.g. related to drug or alcohol abuse or mental ill-health
- Establishing social contact with family and friends and forming new social networks
- Accessing and maintaining meaningful occupation (education, volunteering, employment and leisure).
8.16 Tenancy sustainment services emphasise the importance of non-judgemental and friendly service provision in which clients are respected and empowered (DCLG, *Evaluating homelessness prevention*, forthcoming).

8.17 Generally, the initial level of support that may be required for tenants moving into new accommodation may be greater, particularly where the service is targeted on vulnerable tenants, such as former rough sleepers (DCLG, *Evaluating homelessness prevention*, forthcoming).

8.18 It is important to ensure that tenancies get off to a good start. Planning the process of offer and sign-up, equipping vulnerable tenants with basic essentials such as furniture, and helping them resolve any difficulties with arranging utilities can all be helpful in this respect.

8.19 It is also important that both clients and tenancy sustainment workers are in agreement on priorities that need to be addressed, and work systematically to address these. The support provided by tenancy sustainment services should be flexible and tailored to the needs of the client, varying in terms of its nature, level and duration as necessary.

### Focusing service delivery according to client needs

**Leicester CC**’s RISE Resettlement and Tenancy Support supports single people and couples without children over the age of 16 years, who have experience of being homeless or who are threatened with homelessness. The approach is client-centred and holistic; it is needs-led, based on individual assessment and the use of individual support plans, with each client being allocated a support worker.

A key element of service delivery involves drawing up a support plan in agreement with the service user, based on relevant information gathered from other agencies and the landlord. The support worker then visits the service user on a regular basis and provides support according to the client’s needs.

Contact time with clients is approximately one to two hours per week but depends on the needs of individual clients. Cases are reviewed after three months.

8.20 Some clients will need only initial resettlement support to help them learn how to manage independently, for instance young people whose support needs stem largely from inexperience in managing a tenancy. On the other hand, clients with complex needs, such as severe or enduring mental health or substance misuse problems, may require relatively frequent contact with tenancy sustainment services over a relatively long period.
8.21 Once a client is assessed as having met specified goals indicating ‘independence’, support may become ‘dormant’. Good practice involves a regular review of support needs, or some subsequent contact with the client to ensure that no further support is needed, with the possibility of accessing further assistance if it is needed.

8.22 This facility for some ongoing monitoring of ‘former clients’ alludes to the need to allow support to be reactivated at times of crisis in order to avoid loss of tenancy.

**Multi-Agency Working**

8.23 Close liaison with partner agencies has been identified as key to supporting tenants who may be at risk of homelessness, especially those with complex needs, who may require support from a range of services. Many approaches might be taken to support this, including:

(i) Coordination of services by a key worker

(ii) Developing effective referral protocols

(iii) Organising case conferences

(iv) Developing service protocols, including for the sharing of information.

**Information sharing**

Information sharing protocols are particularly important for ensuring effective multi-agency working. As an example, the service specification for the tenancy sustainment team run by **Look Ahead Housing and Care Ltd** which works with former rough sleepers, identifies the following elements to be shared between housing associations and the team:

– Any incident, complaint or breach of tenancy which might put the tenancy in jeopardy

– Any information about the potential risk(s) posed by, or to, the tenant. For example, if the tenant is experiencing harassment from neighbours

– Any housing management action to be taken, which could affect the tenancy
Multi-agency working

The ‘About Turn’ project was developed by Bradford West City Housing Trust and Bradford MBC. It was set up to provide a specialist support service to households subject to repeat homelessness or at risk of homelessness as a direct result of anti-social behaviour. Recognising that clients often have a range of support needs, the project works to facilitate joined-up working. It provides a single point of reference for a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies with whom the client has been in contact over the years. As well as working with the client directly, About Turn’s Tenancy Compliance Officer (TCO) encourages other agencies to continue to provide specialist forms of help.

The TCO builds up a case file of partnering agencies committed to fulfilling aims and objectives of the project (e.g. Tenancy Enforcement Team, Police, Youth Offending Team, Probation Services, Education, Sure Start) and coordinates and overviews access to these agencies. Prior to tenancy sign up, case conferences are held in order to evaluate the client’s presenting problems and needs. Agencies exchange information, presenting an opportunity for all interested parties to map out the client’s support needs and develop ongoing constructive action plans.

This approach co-ordinates the efforts of a range of services involved with clients, helping to ensure that there are no gaps, overlaps or mismatches in the support provided, which might impact on tenancy sustainability.

8.24 It is particularly important that there are good working relations and effective liaison between tenancy sustainment services and the landlords of properties in which supported tenants are living. An evaluation of tenancy sustainment teams (TSTs) targeted at former rough sleepers in London (DCLG, Evaluation of Tenancy Sustainment Teams, forthcoming) found that building sound working relationships between TSTs and Registered Social Landlords, notably through the development of service protocols, increased service effectiveness.

Active Involvement in the Lettings Process

8.25 Research on tenancy sustainment provided to former rough sleepers (DCLG, Evaluation of Tenancy Sustainment Teams, forthcoming) suggested that an element of choice in the allocation of accommodation may help tenancy sustainment, since tenants who have exercised some degree of ‘active choice’ may be more committed to sustaining tenancies accessed through the process. This is consistent with the wider case for social landlords to adopt choice-based lettings approaches.
Service Procurement and Review

8.26 Examination of case study tenancy sustainment services found that some projects were managed externally by voluntary organisations or housing associations while others were provided directly by social landlords. Some agencies appeared particularly well-placed to set up tenancy sustainment services within part of a wider package of services.

External procurement of tenancy sustainment services

Canterbury’s outreach and resettlement service had been originally established as part of the Rough Sleepers Initiative. The resettlement and tenancy sustainment work carried out by the SCRINE Foundation in the area was facilitated by the Foundation’s location within a facility incorporating a drop-in night shelter as well as a day centre.

8.27 Another advantage of externally procured tenancy sustainment services is that they may be viewed by clients as independent and playing a befriending and advocacy role, as opposed to a housing management or landlord role.

8.28 Regardless of who provides tenancy sustainment services, it is important that a detailed service specification is drawn up.

Service specification for Look Ahead Housing and Care

East London Tenancy Sustainment Service

The service specification defines three main strands of service provision:

- Generic support services to help tenants manage their accommodation
- Specialist support which includes support to deal with substance misuse, and mental health support
- Assistance to secure meaningful occupation – which includes a continuum of activities from social/leisure pursuits, through to life skills courses, training, vocational guidance, and employment.

8.29 As noted in Chapter 2, it is recommended that procurement decisions are determined within a Best Value framework where all possible options are systematically appraised (see paragraphs 2.29-2.33).

8.30 Irrespective of initial procurement decisions it is important that services are periodically subject to thorough review. Guidance on Best Value service review is published by ODPM (2003d).
Performance Management and Monitoring

8.31 In keeping with the principles set out in Chapter 2, the monitoring of the effectiveness of tenancy sustainment services to prevent homelessness is facilitated by recording:

(i) The number of cases referred to and taken on by the service (caseload volume)

(ii) The nature of casework interventions, including the type of actions taken and referrals made

(iii) The immediate and longer term outcome of interventions.

8.32 Some agencies included in this research collected very detailed data on current caseloads, including:

- date engaged with the service
- age, gender, ethnicity
- presenting problems
- previous tenancies and rent payment record
- agencies involved
- neighbour complaints history
- level of agency support.

8.33 In order to help ensure timely intervention, service performance targets can be useful. For example, Leicester City Council’s RISE project has a target for providing initial appointments within five days, and completing a full assessment of a client’s needs within 28 days.

8.34 Good practice also includes monitoring tenancy sustainment ‘rates’. That is, the proportion of lettings made during a given time period (say, a financial year) remaining intact for a given duration (say, six or 12 months). A few agencies included in the evaluation carried out such monitoring.
Monitoring tenancy sustainment rates: Leicester RISE project

Leicester’s RISE project monitored the number of clients who had sustained tenancies for more than three months and more than six months. Over the period September 2002-April 2003, new clients totalled 175, including 132 open cases and 13 closed cases. The agency reported that:

- 99% of clients had sustained tenancies for more than three months (of 75 clients)
- Twelve out of thirteen clients had sustained tenancies for more than six months.

8.35 Whether or not required to do so within the statutory performance indicators framework, other social landlords would be well-advised to monitor tenancy sustainment rates. We would recommend that such systems are further developed to separately identify tenancy sustainment rates for specific groups of new tenants. In addition to households provided with some form of tenancy support, we would envisage this as identifying groups who may be at particular risk of homelessness, and new tenants aged under 20.

8.36 Another element of good practice is the setting of performance indicators and targets in relation to tenancy sustainment rates.

Tenancy sustainment targets

ODPM’s Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate funds Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TSTs) to work with former rough sleepers. Established targets for tenancy sustainment rates stipulate that TSTs should aim to ensure that:

- 100% of tenancies are sustained for six months
- 98% of tenancies are sustained for 12 months
- 95% of tenancies are sustained for two years.

8.37 In addition to monitoring tenancy sustainment rates, our research suggests that there is further scope for improved routine statistical monitoring to demonstrate service effectiveness, including:

- The number of tenants engaging with the service (at initial stages, after 6 months, and after 12 months)
- The number of tenants making planned moves
- Whether tenants engage in meaningful occupation (e.g. pursuing educational courses or job-related training, volunteering, and entry into the workforce).
8.38 Research evidence suggests that more work is needed to develop qualitative measures to monitor the effectiveness of tenancy sustainment services. The RISE service in Leicester is in the process of developing a new database which will improve the collection of qualitative data, for example, the reasons for any change in circumstance (such as accommodation change) or positive outcomes such as achieving meaningful occupation.

8.39 Evaluations of tenancy sustainment services use a number of qualitative criteria to assess service effectiveness. Common criteria include the extent to which services are judged to result in:

- clients’ increased ability to manage money, and avoid or reduce rent arrears and debt
- improved confidence, tenancy management and coping skills on the part of clients
- client satisfaction.

8.40 Specialist services may use other criteria to assess progress in other areas relevant to tenancy sustainment. For example, the Leicester Substance Misuse Project assesses the extent to which the project has reduced drug or alcohol addiction through entry and commitment to treatment programmes and reduced numbers of children taken into care. The Dundee Families Project which supports those at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour assesses the extent to which the service has resulted in reduced numbers of children taken into care and incidents involving neighbourhood dispute, while the About Turn project assesses the effectiveness of multi-agency working in supporting clients with complex needs.22

8.41 The new ‘repeat homelessness’ Best Value Performance Indicator (see Chapter 2, paragraph 2.40) will help to measure the impact of tenancy sustainment schemes in that authorities recording lower rates of repeat homelessness may be able to attribute this partly to the effectiveness of such services.

Service User Perspectives

Our research suggested that monitoring service user feedback needs further development given the importance of customer perspectives in shaping service development, although there may be barriers to service user involvement that need to be overcome to encourage participation. Such barriers include the reluctance of service users to engage due to issues of stigma, the complexity of a client’s own needs in sustaining their tenancy, and the desire to move on once they have completed a programme of support.

Facilitating service user involvement in service development

Leicester Substance Misuse Project has delegated an officer to consider service user involvement, set aside funding for this, and plans to create a service user forum.

One tenancy sustainment service in Leicester had commissioned an external evaluation which interviewed twenty parents about their experience of the project. The evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with the service.

8.42 Service users are likely to have diverse needs and preferences for engaging with services, and are likely to be at different stages of being able to independently cope with managing their tenancies. It is recommended that service providers consider a number of means for gauging their views, which may include:

- structured customer surveys
- open days
- focus group discussions
- one-to-one meetings in both formal and informal settings.

Different ways to involve service users

The community-based projects involved in delivering the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Floating Support Service are developing a user involvement strategy for their clients. Projects reported carrying out internal service user consultation in a range of formats, including:

- A suggestion box
- User-drop in sessions
- Post activity evaluation
- Exit questionnaire
- 6 monthly questionnaire

See DCLG, *Evaluating Homelessness Prevention*, forthcoming

8.43 Service providers should also critically consider the extent to which service users may be involved in service development. This may include:

- providing feedback on ongoing activities or support services
- inclusion in the planning of future activities.
- representation in decision-making mechanisms, such as management committees.
Cost-effectiveness

8.44 The research on which this guide is based concluded that tenancy sustainment projects have the potential to be highly cost-effective. This judgement drew partly on case study evidence suggesting that the establishment of such a service by Leicester CC had helped in achieving a major reduction in council evictions in the year following scheme launch. Not only are evictions expensive in themselves (due to legal costs, void rent losses etc), but some of those dispossessed as a result may be the local authority’s statutory responsibility (at least under the Children Act, if not the homelessness legislation). Any intervention which significantly reduces evictions has the potential to generate substantial savings. Annual net savings realised under the Leicester scheme are estimating as having totalled up to £1 million (DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming).

8.45 As in relation to other homelessness prevention services, the extent to which tenancy sustainment services are cost-effective will depend in part on the process for identifying households potentially at risk of statutory homelessness, although, as highlighted by chapter 2, there may be substantial wider public costs of not preventing homelessness amongst those unlikely to be owed a main homelessness duty.
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ODPM commissioned a research study to underpin this good practice guide. Undertaken by Heriot-Watt University, the main objectives of the study were to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to preventing homelessness
- provide evidence on value for money of homelessness prevention work
- produce guidance on good practice in homelessness prevention
- make recommendations on the future monitoring of homelessness prevention work by local authorities and central government.

The research focused mainly on activities launched under local authorities’ homelessness strategies, some (but not all) of which were funded through ODPM (now DCLG) grants.

The case study local authorities, chosen partly in recognition that they were ‘relatively active’ in homelessness prevention, were:

- Bournemouth BC
- Bradford MBC
- Bristol CC
- Canterbury CC
- Colchester DC
- Harrow LBC
- Leicester CC
- Sheffield MBC
- Sutton LBC
- Telford & Wrekin BC
In linking this guide to recently undertaken research, it is intended that the guide’s recommendations are firmly founded. That is, they are based on evidence demonstrating the practicality and effectiveness of the approaches advocated. The guide also draws on existing good practice advice on homelessness services (see paragraph 1.10).

It should, however, be acknowledged that this study was limited to ten case study areas and, due to the need to consider a range of different types of homelessness prevention services, was not able to examine each individual service in great depth. Most of the services concerned were examined in only 3-5 case study areas.
Annex 2

Best Value Performance Indicators Relevant to Homelessness Prevention

BV 213 – Housing Advice

Summary definition

The number of households who considered themselves as homeless, who approached the local housing authority’s housing advice service(s), and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.

This document offers guidance to local housing authorities reporting against BV213. It expands upon the main BVPI (2005/06) guidance and offers examples for authorities to consider.

Purpose

The purpose of this indicator is to measure the effectiveness of housing advice in preventing homelessness or the threat of homelessness. Under section 179(1) of the Housing Act 1996 part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, housing authorities have a duty to ensure that advice and information about homelessness and prevention of homelessness are available free of charge to anyone in their district. The provision of comprehensive advice will play an important part in delivering the housing authority’s strategy for preventing homelessness in their district. This statutory advice service may be provided directly by the housing authority or on behalf of the authority by a third party such as a Citizens’ Advice Bureau or Shelter. Please note that the indicator applies to all local housing authorities in England, including those that no longer own, or manage social housing.

Description

The indicator is not restricted to households who are statutorily homeless, or to households who are threatened with homelessness within 28 days as defined by section 175(4) of the 1996 Housing Act. The key element here is that the household considers themselves to be homeless or threatened with homelessness. All cases where a household’s housing problem has been resolved through advice casework intervention should be recorded for the purposes of this indicator. This will include cases where:
a) no enquiries are required under section 184 of the Act as the household’s problem was resolved before they were formally threatened with homelessness within 28 days; or

b) cases where formal enquiries into a household’s homelessness or threat of homelessness had commenced under section 184 of the 1996 Housing Act, and where successful housing advice casework intervention had resolved the problem. This will be a resolution before the Local Authority had finished its enquiries and accepted a main housing duty under either section 193 or 195 of the Act.

**Detailed definitions**

‘Households’ should include both single person households and families. It is not restricted only to households that a local authority would normally consider as having a priority need under homelessness legislation.

‘Housing Advice’ is defined as advice given under Section 179(1) of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. It is advice provided through a dedicated Housing Advice service funded by a local authority, or in-house housing advice service, to fulfil the authority’s statutory duties under section 179(1) of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Homelessness prevention might be being carried out by:

- generic advice and homelessness assessment team
- a dedicated in house advice team under section 179(1)
- an independent housing advice team funded under section 179(1)

or all three of the above.

If prevention is being provided by more than one service results can be combined in calculating the correct figure. The definition excludes generic information or advice services provided by a council or external partners even if they provide some housing advice. It also excludes independent housing advice services where no local authority grant funding has been provided, since the BVPI is designed to measure the performance of local authority services funded or provided to meet the section 179 duty. Chapter 2 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities gives further explanation of local authorities’ statutory duties to provide advice services.

‘Casework’ is defined as detailed file based case recording, the outcome of which is subject to a system of quality checking and control. One-off telephone advice provided through, for example, an advice line is not included in the definition. The CLS Quality Mark represents good practice in advice casework and local authorities may wish to have regard to this but this does not mean that your statutory housing advice service has to have the CLS quality mark. Further information on the CLS quality mark for Housing Advice casework can be found on their website (www.legalservices.gov.uk/qmark).
‘Resolution’, through housing advice casework intervention is defined as an outcome where casework intervention has resolved the immediate homelessness or threat of homelessness and it is likely that this will be sustainable for a period of at least 6 months.

This should be measured through a system of objectively checking and verifying the case outcome. A senior officer or another advisor who was not directly involved in the case intervention should undertake these checks. Quality checking processes are recognised as good practice and are a requirement of any Community Legal Services quality mark. Once the case has been checked and signed off, the local authority is not obliged to go back over the six month period to check that homelessness is still being prevented, as this might be considered to be too time consuming.

Resolving a household’s homelessness or the threat of homelessness through housing advice casework intervention is defined as:

a) actions which resulted in the household not having to make an application for homelessness assistance under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act;

or

b) actions which resulted in the household no longer needing to pursue an application for homelessness assistance. Only cases resolved through Housing advice casework intervention should be recorded.

**Examples**

The following are some examples of the many different types of casework intervention actions that meet the definition. The list is not exhaustive.

a) Casework leading to reinstatement, where a household has been illegally evicted.

b) Preventing homelessness through helping a household find and secure alternative private sector accommodation, including hostel accommodation, which has a reasonable prospect of being available for at least a 6-month period.

c) Casework leading to resolution of any issues including Housing Benefit problems where a private or public sector landlord has issued a notice determining the household’s tenancy or licence.

d) Negotiation and agreement with a mortgage company or creditor where title is held as security against any default, and legal action has commenced to gain possession of the property.

e) Intervention to tackle disrepair or poor housing conditions where the household is at risk of homelessness as it may be unreasonable for them to continue to occupy that accommodation.
f) Casework assistance in helping a household successfully access a social housing tenancy or shared ownership property, which removes the threat of homelessness.

g) Cases where there is a household member at risk of homelessness through domestic violence and where housing advice casework intervention assisted the person to remain in their home. This could be through the provision of security measures, or through helping the household to instigate legal action to protect their right to remain safely within the home.

h) Casework intervention where the control of the case and its outcome remains with the advice service even if the ultimate action to prevent homelessness were carried out by a third party such as CAB money and debt advice. In such cases the advice service would have carried out the checks, provided all casework and liaised directly with debt advice, followed up the advice and options provided by a third party to ensure that it did prevent homelessness from occurring.

i) Casework intervention through negotiations with a landlord, agent, legal representative, friend or family member, benefits agency or other third party which resulted in homelessness being prevented. This may be by telephone or in writing. Excluded is general advice to the household on what they may or should do themselves.

j) Home visits where the direct intervention has prevented the homelessness for a period of six months minimum and has not merely delayed it for a short period of time. It might also include casework interventions that ensure that a household can return to a home following a period of homelessness.

k) Intervention where an applicant faces homelessness as they cannot afford to pay an increased rent. Casework intervention either helps the applicant to negotiate a lower rent or increases the applicant’s income through benefits or a discretionary housing payment, or charity payment, and removes the threat of homelessness.

l) Court representation where the case is struck out, dismissed or adjourned and as a result the homelessness is prevented for at least six months.

Cases where the housing advice service has done no more than signpost or refer to a third party, who are then responsible for the successful intervention should not be included. Although signposting or referral is important, it is not an indication of the effectiveness of the local authority’s statutory housing advice services.

**Examples that should not be included (again this list is not exhaustive)**

a) Casework intervention where the homelessness has only been delayed for a short period or less than six months. Although such action is important, it does not meet the definition of ensuring that homelessness is prevented for at least six months.
b) Helping the person to complete a homelessness application leading to the council providing temporary accommodation. This does not constitute prevention.

c) One-off telephone advice with no face to face interview or follow up direct casework intervention.

d) Where the only action is referral to a third party agency that carries out the prevention such as a referral to CAB money advice or a referral to mediation. Contrast this with point (h) in the examples of what can be included above.

e) A letter to a client to give to a landlord or third party. There is no direct contact with the landlord or third party and the client is expected to take any action themselves to achieve a prevention outcome.

f) Advice that merely informs the landlord that s/he has issued an invalid notice. There is clearly no guarantee that this will prevent the homelessness from occurring as the landlord is likely to issue a correct notice and gain possession within six months.

**Measurement**

The indicator is calculated by recording the number of cases assisted through successful casework intervention and dividing this figure by the number of households in the local authority area to produce a figure per thousand households. The number of households in the local authority area is calculated by using the current mid year population estimates, available on the ODPM web-site at www.odpm.gov.uk.

**BV 214 – Repeat Homelessness**

**Description**

Proportion of households accepted as statutorily homeless who were accepted as statutorily homeless by the same Authority within the last two years.

**Purpose/aim**

A number of Local Authorities have indicated to ODPM that a significant proportion of homeless households are repeat homelessness cases. This may be indicative of problems that are not being resolved with re-housing alone.

As well as the damage to individuals which can be caused by repeat episodes of homelessness, the cost of a tenancy failure to local authorities should be an incentive to address the problem. The Audit Commission have estimated that each tenancy failure could cost the local authority just over £2,000, including unrecoverable arrears, legal costs, cleaning and redecoration, not including the cost of temporary accommodation. Thus the lower the number of repeat homelessness cases the better.
**Definition**

‘A repeat homelessness case’ is one which the local authority accepts as:

- eligible,
- unintentionally homeless, and
- in priority need,

and where the authority has a record that the applicant has been so within the last two years.

A ‘homelessness acceptance’ means a household who has made an application for homelessness assistance under s184 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, and for whom the housing authority has accepted a main housing duty.

P1E returns to the ODPM record numbers of households accepted as eligible, homeless and in priority need at the end of each quarter, together with the number of cases of repeat homelessness (section E1a). For the purposes of measurement against this BVPI, authorities should take the number of repeat acceptances over the year, i.e. the sum of four end of quarter figures divided by the total number of acceptances, i.e. the sum of the four end quarter figures. This will provide a percentage of repeat homeless cases.

**Formula/worked example**

\[ N = \left( \frac{a}{b} \right) \times 100 \]

Where:

- \( a \) = sum of the repeat cases during the four quarters
- \( b \) = Total number of homelessness acceptances

**BV 225 – Actions Against Domestic Violence**

**Purpose/aim**

The purpose of this BVPI is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victims of domestic violence and prevent further domestic violence.
Description

The percentage of the following questions to which a local authority can answer ‘yes’. [To answer ‘yes’ the local authority must have fully achieved the goal described; it is not enough that the authority is working towards the goal.]

1. Has the local authority produced a directory of local services that can help victims of domestic violence?

2. Is there within the local authority area a minimum of 1 refuge place per ten thousand population?

3. Does the local authority employ directly or fund a voluntary sector-based domestic violence co-ordinator? (For District Councils of fewer than 35,000 households, the responsibility for co-ordinating domestic violence can be designated within the job description of an existing senior officer. For District Councils that contribute to a county-wide co-ordinator, see definition)

4. Has the local authority produced and adopted a multi-agency strategy to tackle domestic violence developed in partnership with other agencies?

5. Does the local authority support and facilitate a local multi-agency domestic violence forum that meets at least 4 times a year?

6. Has the local authority developed an information-sharing protocol and had it agreed between key statutory partners?

7. Has the local authority developed, launched and promoted a ‘sanctuary’ type scheme to enable victims and their children to remain in their own home, where they choose to do so and where safety can be guaranteed? (For smaller district authorities, of fewer than 35,000 households this can be arranged in partnership with neighbouring authorities.)

8. Has there been a reduction in the percentage of cases accepted as homeless due to domestic violence that had previously been re-housed in the last two years by that local authority as a result of domestic violence?

9. Does the council’s tenancy agreement have a specific clause stating that perpetration of domestic violence by a tenant can be considered grounds for eviction? (For local authorities that have transferred their housing stock, the clause should be contained in the LSVT organisations’ tenancy agreement.)

10. Has the local authority funded and developed a domestic violence education pack in consultation with the wider domestic violence forum?

11. Has the authority carried out a programme of multi-agency training in the last twelve months covering front line and managerial staff in at least two of the following groups: housing staff, social services staff providing services in the local authority area; education staff; health staff; and front line police officers?
Definitions

1. The directory must list both statutory and voluntary agencies that can provide emergency housing, advice (welfare, housing and legal), counselling and support, and include any local women’s aid contact details and the National Domestic Violence Helpline. It must be widely distributed and updated at least every 2 years. A directory should be available for each district and not just at a county level, as a minimum it should be available on the local authority’s web-site. A directory for services that work with victims of domestic violence can be provided separately from the Directory for Victims of Domestic Violence.

2. ‘Places’ means the number of rooms providing bedspaces for a woman and her children. Rooms not normally designated as bedrooms should not be counted towards the total. ‘Refuge’ means emergency accommodation for women and children who have been referred for help having experienced threats to their physical safety. It must provide help, advice and advocacy support as well as being part of an integrated local approach involving partnership with other local and statutory bodies. Calculate ‘Local Authority population’ using the latest ONS mid-year estimates.

3. The co-ordinator should be employed at a local authority level (see exemption below) and have responsibility for strategically co-ordinating domestic violence issues throughout the local authority area. Where funding has been provided to the voluntary sector or local partnership to employ a co-ordinator this will meet the definition as long as their role remains to co-ordinate work in both the statutory and voluntary sectors across the area covered by the local authority. Exemption – In cases where District Councils fund a county-wide co-ordinator the District Council will meet the requirements of this BVPI if the responsibility for ensuring that any county-wide work is implemented at a district level is included in the job description of an existing senior officer for that district.

4. The strategy should have been developed in partnership with all relevant statutory and voluntary partners. It should be supportive of, and aligned with, the authority’s Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy (CDRP). The strategy should cover a 3-year period with an action plan reviewed annually. The action plan should contain at least 50% outcomes that are SMART and include a section on how the needs of BME communities will be addressed. A Chief Officer and an Executive member in the authority should have been allocated responsibility for its implementation.

5. The forum should have a mix of statutory and voluntary sector representatives at a senior enough level to aid the implementation of decisions and the strategy action plan. The forum should be formalised as part of the Crime and Disorder Partnership.
6. The information-sharing protocol must facilitate the exchange of information to enable domestic violence to be effectively tackled across all statutory agencies. Key statutory agencies are defined as the Police, Health, Housing, Social Services and Education. The protocol will also provide an opportunity to implement Homicide Reviews where appropriate. It must ensure that confidentiality and victims safety is protected.

7. A sanctuary type scheme must provide security measures to allow the woman to remain in her home where she chooses to do so, where safety can be guaranteed and the violent partner no longer lives within the home. It must be available across tenures where the landlord of a property has given permission for the work to be carried out. It must consist of additional security to any main entrance doors to the accommodation and locks to any vulnerable windows. Wherever possible it must provide a safe room in the home secured with a solid core door and additional locks. It is essential that this service is only provided where it is the clear choice of the victim. The scheme should be implemented through partnership with the police and/or the voluntary sector that could provide supplementary support. It may be provided directly by the local authority or through a third party funded as part of the local authority’s homelessness prevention work through grants that may be available for crime reduction initiatives.

8. The indicator is met if there is a percentage reduction in homelessness acceptances due to domestic violence. Acceptances who were previously homeless in another local authority area should not be included. Reductions achieved in preventing repeat homelessness should be clearly linked to positive measures adopted to provide genuine alternatives for women to either remain in their own home or be placed in alternative accommodation, removing the need to become homeless. Alternative accommodation may be secured by arranging a reciprocal property with another social landlord, or a safe management transfer. Any options or measures to prevent repeat homelessness must only be taken with the full consent of the victim of domestic violence.

9. Any clause should make clear that evidence of domestic violence for eviction purposes does not need to rely on a criminal charge. Evidence may be based on a possession action using civil evidence.

10. The domestic violence education pack must have been specifically designed for use in schools and with youth groups. It must aim to challenge attitudes of tolerance to violence and help young people to achieve positive relationships based on mutuality and respect. Schools and youth groups cannot be forced to run a programme on domestic violence but the pack must be easily available and actively promoted. Schools should be encouraged to use the material as part of their PSHE or Citizenship curriculum.
11. The training programme must cover domestic violence awareness training, the legal framework, information sharing, and who provides what services to victims of domestic violence with referral and contact points. The programme should be developed in consultation with the Domestic Violence Forum and reviewed by the forum annually.

Formula/Worked example

\[ N = \left( \frac{a}{11} \right) \times 100 \]

Where:

\( a \) = number of the questions to which an authority can answer ‘yes’

Measurement Period

Current Financial Year

Further Guidance

For more information on sanctuary schemes see the Homelessness and Housing Support pages on the ODPM website at www.odpm.gov.uk
The wider costs of homelessness

Preventing homelessness can result in savings to public services by reducing the wider social impacts of homelessness. As well as considering direct costs such as the cost of providing temporary accommodation, these wider costs are important in assessing the cost effectiveness of homelessness prevention investment. This section identifies the different types of social costs that can arise from homelessness.

In general, there is a lack of robust evidence on these costs, and they were not included in the evaluation calculations for this study. However, there are a number of small-scale studies which offer evidence on how homelessness can lead to additional public sector costs.

There are for example, some studies that suggest that living in temporary accommodation has a negative impact on the health and education of children, which may result in the need for additional healthcare or educational interventions with homeless families. Preventing homelessness may therefore result in savings to these services. This is one example, but research has identified other areas where homelessness may result in social costs, for instance due to poor mental health, or re-offending.

In order to show how preventing homelessness can help reduce such costs, good evidence on how homelessness is associated with these costs is needed. As noted above however, this evidence is limited, and not always robust. Many studies demonstrate at best an association between homelessness and particular problems, rather than proof that homelessness causes them. Some of the evidence highlighted below, for example, shows that some problems or support needs which may result in additional service costs, exist before homelessness occurs. Therefore it is not possible to be certain that homelessness prevention prevents these problems from arising at all.

However, it is reasonable to assume that in some such instances, homelessness can exacerbate existing problems or support needs, and that an appropriate alternative solution might prevent this from happening. This section summarizes key evidence on the wider social costs of homelessness and identifies potential savings that might be made from homelessness prevention.
The health costs of homelessness

Physical health

Research on how homelessness affects physical health has focused on the impact of living in poor quality, often communal, temporary accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast (B&B) hotels and hostels. Although evidence sometimes suggests that particular health problems predate homelessness, it is widely accepted that living in poor standard temporary accommodation is likely to exacerbate or contribute to health problems. Problems may be associated with sharing cooking facilities in temporary accommodation: families in B&B hotels have been found to rely more upon take away food, and studies have found malnourishment amongst those living in B&B hotels. Research has also found a greater prevalence of physical health problems amongst single homeless people and in particular, people who sleep rough.

Research has not necessarily shown greater use of GP services by homeless families. This may be due to difficulty accessing a GP whilst homeless, although research findings have been inconclusive as to whether usage is different from the general population. Research has found that most single homeless people were registered with a GP, although rough sleepers were less likely to be registered. Some research has found that homeless households access accident and emergency services (A&E) more than the general population, possibly due to difficulty accessing a GP, or to an increase in the rate of accidents and poor health due to living in poor quality temporary accommodation, but there is no conclusive evidence that inpatient admissions are greater amongst homeless households than in low income families, and research studies offer conflicting evidence on whether homeless families make greater use of health visitor services.


Mental health

Research consistently shows a relatively high prevalence of mental health problems amongst homeless households, particularly single homeless people and rough sleepers. However, it also suggests that mental health problems often pre-date and can contribute to causing homelessness, for example when people with mental ill health are unable to maintain independent living. It is however, reasonable to assume that stress and difficulties associated with homelessness may exacerbate existing problems. For families, again it is unclear whether mental health problems tend to predate or result from homelessness. One study in Birmingham found that homeless mothers and children had a greater prevalence of mental health problems than mothers and children in low-income families, both upon becoming homeless, and a year later. However, mothers and children in homeless families had both experienced higher rates of abuse before becoming homeless. Lack of social support was found to be relevant in predicting poor mental health amongst homeless mothers, as well as the number of times she had had to move, factors which may often be associated with an experience of homelessness and living in temporary accommodation.

Another study found a high prevalence of behavioural problems amongst homeless children compared to comparison groups.

There is little evidence on the use of mental health services by homeless households. Some of it points to difficulties experienced by single homeless people – especially rough sleepers – in accessing these services. However, for homeless families, the Birmingham study cited above found that contact with mental health services increased amongst homeless families.

29 Fitzpatrick et al (2000) op. cit.; Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental health and social exclusion*. Approximately 3000 households per quarter are accepted as homeless by local housing authorities in England who are in priority need due to vulnerability due to their mental health.
32 Fitzpatrick et al (2000) op. cit.; See also SEU (2004), op. cit.
33 Vostanis (1999) op. cit.
Alcohol and substance misuse

There is evidence of high levels of drug and alcohol misuse among homeless people, but this focuses on single homeless people and rough sleepers rather than families. One study in Scotland found that 33% of homeless families include someone with either a drug or alcohol problem. Whilst drug or alcohol problems may predate and increase the risk of homelessness, homelessness can exacerbate them. Social costs due to alcohol and drug misuse arise for both health services and the criminal justice system (see below), although there is little evidence on the use of drug and alcohol services by homeless households. One study found that single homeless people had low levels of health service use in dealing with drug misuse problems.

Social services contact

Research studies indicate a relatively high incidence of contact for homeless families with Social Services, which may be higher than amongst non-homeless families. The Birmingham study cited above found that in the year since becoming homeless, the extent of contact with social workers increased from 31% to 45% amongst homeless parents, and from 22% to 36% for children of homeless families. It is unclear whether increased contact is a consequence of homelessness, since families who become homeless may already have a greater need for social services involvement, and a period of statutory homelessness may also mean they are prone to greater contact with statutory services.

Education costs of homelessness

A number of small scale studies indicate that homelessness and living in poor standard or overcrowded temporary accommodation, has a detrimental impact on children’s education and development. However, these studies tend not to be representative, and problems may relate to factors predating homelessness, such as domestic violence.

Studies have found that when families move to temporary accommodation, children may need to change school and may face a gap in their education as a result. Accessing and settling into a new school can also be difficult. Research has also suggested that absenteeism and truancy may be issues for children in homeless families.

38 Cumella (1999) The impact of health and social services’ in Vostanis & Cumella (eds) (1999) op. cit. There was however also higher contact amongst homeless parents and children in the year preceding homelessness.
These impacts may present additional costs to services, which may be avoided if homelessness is prevented. One study found that of 103 homeless families in Birmingham, 4% of children had had contact with an educational psychologist, and 5% had had contact with an educational welfare officer. In contrast, none of the children of a small comparison group of non-homeless, low-income families had had contact with either of these services.40

**Employment costs of homelessness**

There is little robust research evidence on employment and homelessness, although it is widely understood that there are high levels of unemployment amongst both single homeless people and homeless families.41 There is no robust evidence to suggest this is due to homelessness rather than other factors. High levels of unemployment for homeless families are at least in part due to the prevalence of lone single parents with childcare responsibilities. High unemployment rates are sometimes attributed to high rent levels in temporary accommodation. Other contributing factors may be disruption and other problems associated with being homeless, but the evidence to support this is currently limited.

**Costs to policing, the prison service, and the criminal justice system**

Homelessness can result in increased costs to the policing, prison and criminal justice systems. This may in part be due to ex-offenders on discharge from prison returning to environments that encourage them to re-offend, but some evidence has also suggested that homeless people may engage in criminal behaviour, such as drug abuse, theft, prostitution, begging, burglary and robbery, as a means of surviving.42 For ex-offenders, the lack of a stable home environment is a key factor in re-offending rates.43 Research by the Home Office suggests that having stable accommodation can reduce reconviction rates by over 20%.44 A reduction in crime can mean significant savings to the public sector.

**Domestic violence**

Domestic violence is a common cause of homelessness, and is associated with a range of wider social costs – for instance, to health and Social Services, the police, and the criminal justice system. Domestic violence has a high rate of repeat victimization, and local authorities cite domestic violence as a main cause of repeat homelessness.45

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40 Cumella (1999) op. cit.
43 For prisoners discharged in the first two quarters of 2001, overall reconviction rates were 61%. Recomittal rates were 39% for adult males, and 32% for adult females. Home Office (2005) *Offender Management Caseload Statistics* 2004.
Homelessness prevention for households at risk of domestic violence focuses on providing a safe and sustainable housing solution that reduces the risk of future harm. This may include provision of a sanctuary scheme, improving interagency collaboration and support, help with making a planned move away from the home rather than having to flee in an emergency, and resettlement or tenancy support to assist a household to sustain alternative housing.

Wider cost savings may arise from helping a household sustain a safe solution in the longer term, if this means the household is supported to maintain independence. There may be a reduced risk of an incident of domestic violence occurring, with associated savings to health, police, and criminal justice services. Tenancy sustainment and resettlement services can also foster independence amongst households who have experienced domestic violence, which may protect against future risk of domestic violence or repeat homelessness.

Costs to social landlords of failed tenancies

Homelessness prevention can also result in savings to the public sector from helping to prevent tenancy failure for local authority tenants. The costs of tenancy failure include rent arrears, legal costs, repairs, and the cost of processing homelessness applications. In 1998, the Audit Commission estimated the cost of a failed tenancy to a housing authority as approximately £2,100.46 Crisis drew on this study to estimate the cost at between £1,600 and £4,210.47 Shelter estimated that it costs local authorities between £1,913 and £3,190 to evict a tenant for rent arrears.48 In 2003, Leicester city council carried out a study to estimate the costs of evictions from social tenancies. The analysis suggested that, excluding any rent arrears and the cost of repairs to property, the cost of an eviction was at least £1,700.49

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49 DCLG, Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, forthcoming.
This good practice guide provides information on the design, procurement, and implementation of a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness. The guide is based on an evaluation of homelessness prevention activity across ten local authorities. It provides good practice examples, and offers suggestions on how to improve the monitoring of homelessness prevention services.