



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY FOR WALES 2006 – 2008

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Extra Copies

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1. Introduction

This Strategy sets out how the Welsh Assembly Government intends to tackle homelessness in Wales. It has been developed in the light of extensive consultation.

It succeeds and builds on the Strategy first published in April 2003. It is produced as a statement of our aims and intentions, and is supported by an Action Plan contained in Annex 1.

Homelessness can only be tackled by a partnership approach at local and national level. This Strategy sets out how we intend to work with other public, voluntary and private agencies, and homeless people themselves, to prevent homelessness and alleviate it where it cannot be avoided.

The Assembly Government is developing its policies within the framework of 'Making the Connections'. This landmark document published in 2004 sets out our agenda for improving public services across Wales, with emphasis on joined-up policy making, efficiency, and participation.

This Homelessness Strategy reflects these priorities. In particular, it is intended as a truly national Strategy requiring constructive engagement from other policy sectors, including health, social services, and education. This is why our Action Plan states the expectations we have of other agencies and sectors.

Services must be planned to connect so that they address these other problems alongside meeting their housing need. Homelessness is very often linked to other aspects of social disadvantage. We need to become much smarter at working jointly across boundaries to intervene to help people address these problems and break the cycle of deprivation.

2. Vision

Welsh Assembly Government believes that homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion. There will always be instances of homelessness which result from crises such as fire or flood. More commonly, structural factors such as the housing market and poverty affect the ability of individuals to avoid homelessness and to find their own solutions to overcome it. Homelessness is also very often linked to some other aspect of personal crisis. In all cases it has wide-ranging ramifications for personal wellbeing. There are many facets to homelessness which require a response from services tailored to individual need. Persistent and repeated homelessness is not only a failure of policy, it also indicates a failure to address chronic social problems. It is both a symptom and a cause of social exclusion.

Running through the Strategy are the following fundamental themes; priority should be given to prevention wherever possible; services must be designed in accordance with the equality and diversity needs of the community; homelessness services must be planned strategically, whilst focusing on the housing and support needs of the individual; and partnership and joined-up working within the spirit of 'Making the Connections' is essential.

We believe that homelessness must be prevented wherever possible, and we will work with our partners to achieve this. Everything must be done to avoid an unplanned move from adequate accommodation, and to ensure people can act in a planned way to improve their housing circumstances. People must have access to the widest possible housing options, enabling them to secure their own accommodation before they become homeless wherever possible, or as soon as possible after losing their home where not.

This requires a proactive approach by local authorities and their partners. The risk of homelessness must be identified as early as possible, and service users and providers must work together to secure this. It also requires the empowerment of service users, so that they have the information on their housing situation, alternative options, and rights, so that they can make informed decisions.

Access to housing options must be improved across Wales. This includes access to private and social rented housing. Improving access to housing for all those in need, not just homeless people, will enable them to find their own solutions and reduce the likelihood of them becoming homeless. We need to raise the level of prevention advice and support so that the statutory safety net is only used where there is no realistic alternative.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, statutory and voluntary services should work in partnership to secure appropriate temporary accommodation, and a permanent home as quickly as possible. Services need to be accessible, informed, efficient and user-friendly.

Agencies must work together to identify the need to intervene before a

homelessness crisis occurs, and then to prevent it. We must also ensure that interventions to prevent homelessness identify the underlying reasons why people lose their homes, including their support, health and welfare needs.

We will strive to ensure our other policies and strategies complement the aims and objectives in this document. We will also expect this of our partners in the public and voluntary sectors. We will also maintain and strengthen our joint working and review arrangements to continuously enhance the Strategy, particularly with the respective equality Commissions.

'Making the Connections' provides the guiding principles for the delivery of services for people threatened or affected by homelessness. We must use our resources across sectors and agencies to identify and help those at risk, of homelessness and other areas of social exclusion, and work in partnership to help them secure and sustain settled accommodation and a broader fulfilment and wellbeing.

3. Context

Homelessness represents the most acute part of the spectrum of housing need. There is a statutory definition of homelessness, and a broader definition we recommend for strategic purposes: these are contained in annex 2.

'Better Homes for People in Wales' sets out our broad objectives for ensuring everyone has access to decent housing. Homelessness is part of a wider spectrum of housing need, and is affected by the housing market. It is more difficult for people to resolve their own homelessness when there is a shortage of affordable accommodation to meet demand. This reality creates homelessness, and reduces the impact of housing options services trying to prevent homelessness.

Unfortunately, recorded homelessness rose in Wales between 2001 and 2004, and there is every indication that non-statutory homelessness and housing need rose as well. The cause of this trend is not entirely clear which is why we are undertaking research to explore it. Changes to legislation will have increased the numbers of people who fall into the priority need definition, but this has not caused homelessness to increase. Evidence of homelessness in all groups suggests that changes to the housing market, with increased pressures in all parts of the housing market which in part arise from higher house prices, is likely to be one of the factors.

Figures for the last two quarters of 2004/5 indicate a levelling off in new cases, and this is probably partly due to the increasing implementation of the prevention agenda set out in this Strategy.

The number of households accepted by local authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need rose by 85 per cent between the September quarter 2001 and the same quarter 2004, to 2,614, but then fell to 2,403 in the first quarter of 2005. The rise in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation to house homeless people was even sharper (over 800%) between September 2001 and September 2004 to reach 875 households, but this also fell to 761 by March 2005. This is a very positive sign that the use of this form of accommodation is being tackled by local authorities.

The numbers of households in temporary accommodation also rose to 2004 in consequence of the above trends, but again the numbers fell from 3,619 at the end of September 2004 to 3,349 at the end of March 2005.

The Welsh Assembly Government can influence but not control the wider housing market within which homelessness occurs. We will work with partners to prevent and tackle homelessness, using our funding, legislation, policy and practice guidance, and relationships with others.

In 2003 we set our path for tackling this issue through the first National Homelessness Strategy for Wales. Progress has been made in many aspects of that Strategy, which improved the prospects for particular groups. However, the overall situation has not improved. In redrafting this Strategy we are

adopting clearer and more easily measurable targets for achieving a real improvement in homelessness across the board. We also recognise the need to back up our commitments with a programme of concerted action which delivers tangible results. This will require a higher level of joint working between partners and other sectors than has so far been achieved.

4. Objectives

The Welsh Assembly Government will aim to ensure that:

- Services are focused to prevent homelessness wherever possible. *More people are able to meet their basic housing need without becoming homeless.*
- People who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, are provided with the information and advice they need to minimise the risk of losing their home or to secure alternative housing. *Fewer people lose their home*
- Repeat homelessness is reduced through constructive interventions which support sustainable solutions. *The incidence of repeat homelessness is reduced.*
- Housing legislation is applied correctly and fairly in providing the statutory safety net for those who need it. *There are fewer incorrect decisions and grounds for challenge*
- Emergency accommodation is available as soon as possible, *so that no-one should have to sleep rough*
- Homeless people have access to suitable temporary accommodation. *The form and quality of the temporary accommodation meets the needs of the individual homeless person or family.*
- People have to spend as short a time as possible before being able to secure permanent accommodation, *and time in temporary accommodation is reduced*
- The main causes of homelessness are addressed through service planning at local and national level, *and plans are tailored to meet need.*
- Access to housing resources in the social and private sectors is maximised to prevent and resolve homelessness. *More people are housed before they become homeless*
- The support and other needs of homeless people are identified and provided for, and that agencies work together to aid their sustainable resettlement. *People do not become homeless as a result of their vulnerability.*

5. Targets

The Welsh Assembly intends to tackle homelessness across a broad spectrum of policy areas, as part of the wider agenda on social justice. We will develop the measuring and monitoring of homelessness with our local partners, including extending the indicators through the Performance Measurement Review process.

Targets for improving performance will be adopted at the local level for reducing homelessness. The Welsh Assembly Government will agree individual targets in some areas with local authorities, (using Policy Agreements if appropriate), and with voluntary bodies receiving homelessness grants.

We are setting a limited number of headline targets at the all Wales level to be achieved by April 2008.

These are as follows:

- Prevent homelessness among 50% of households who considered themselves as at risk of homelessness, who approached or are referred to the local authority and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.
- Reduce the number of homeless households found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need by 20% from 9856 in 2004/5.
- Reduce the numbers of households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation by 50% from 761 in 2004/5.
- Reduce the average length of time spent in temporary accommodation by 20% from 2004/5.

In addition we will be setting targets using 2006/07 baselines to:

- Reduce rough sleeping
- Reduce repeat homelessness.

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

**NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY
ACTION PLAN 2006 - 2008**

1. PREVENTION

1.1 Local Authority Housing Options and Advice

- 1.1.1 A new approach is required by local authorities in tackling the increasing pressures of homelessness in Wales. Too many authorities have until now concentrated their efforts on processing applications through the statutory duty process. Services should be focused toward preventing homelessness first, and then dealing with statutory homeless cases only when there is no alternative. Many authorities are already changing their practices in recognition of this new direction, but wholesale change is required involving all authorities.
- 1.1.2 Consultants Tarkitechnology have carried out a number of service reviews funded by the Welsh Assembly Government based on a methodology used by the ODPM in England. An overview report has been prepared for the Assembly Government and local authorities, with recommendations on how to take forward the prevention agenda. The report advises on actions to tackle the need for alternatives to Bed and Breakfast. This report will be published and will need to be considered by all authorities in planning their services.
- 1.1.3 The report contains a range of recommendations for local authorities which can enable them to better manage homelessness, and reduce the need for application of the full statutory duty. These include the need for a homelessness champion at political level; use of a 'spend to save' approach and a specific budget for prevention; better training for local authority staff on the law and its application; and the refocusing of homelessness teams on housing advice and options appraisal with clients. The aim should be to enable people, as early as possible, to locate their own solutions to their housing problem, which will very often be in the private rented sector.
- 1.1.4 Local authorities have a statutory duty to offer advice on homelessness. Good advice is a cornerstone of the prevention of homelessness. This advice must be accompanied by the appropriate assistance, and encompass information, advice, representation and advocacy where needed. Advice across a range of areas can prevent homelessness, but housing, benefits and debt advice are particularly relevant, as well as legal advice for people experiencing relationship breakdown. Referral to other services will form a significant element of this approach. The authority should ensure that the complementary services are available to help prevent homelessness, such as debt advice, supported housing, and family mediation services. It may be helpful to plan these services within strategic approaches to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

We will:

- Disseminate the Tarkitechnology report, and encourage authorities to review their services in the light of its recommendations by June 2006
- Revise the statutory guidance to local authorities to reflect a stronger housing options and advice approach by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Review their services in the light of the consultants' report, and in particular,
- Appoint homelessness champions
- Adopt a spend to save approach to homelessness, investing in the refocusing of services towards prevention and housing options advice

1.2 Independent Housing Advice

1.2.1 The Assembly Government is committed to enabling everyone in need to have access to independent housing advice. This is an essential component of a balanced framework of services which ensure that people in need can receive an independent assessment of their legal rights. These services should also offer additional advice on their housing needs, often before the client approaches the local authority and thus relieving it of an additional burden. The Legal Services Commission ("LSC") and the Welsh Assembly Government fund a network of independent housing advice services across Wales. These services are being augmented by a new service, Legal Services Direct, which can be accessed by telephone and correspondence.

1.2.2 The Assembly Government has initiated the all-Wales housing advice forum, comprising the LSC, Citizens Advice Cymru, Welsh Local Government Association and Shelter Cymru, which advises on the future development of policy and service planning.

1.2.3 The main provider of specialist housing advice services is Shelter Cymru, which is preparing a new strategy to promote its prevention work.

We will:

- Explore with the LSC the performance monitoring and review arrangements for independent advice services, in order to secure improved analysis of outcomes by December 2006

We will expect:

- Shelter Cymru to reflect an enhanced focus on prevention in its revised strategy
- The LSC to maintain funding support for the existing network of housing advice services in Wales
- Joint planning of local housing advice services between local authorities and voluntary providers

1.3 Local Implementation of the Homelessness Duty

- 1.3.1 Local services should be focused on the early prevention of homelessness, as set out in the opening section. This approach needs to be applied alongside the homelessness legislation, and in some cases, where prevention is not possible, these will run through to the discharge of the full duty.
- 1.3.2 Research by HACAS in 2003 showed the difficulties experienced by many authorities in carrying out their duties. These problems are mainly to do with the pressure on staff teams, the limited options for discharging the duty, and the lack of training for front-line staff. This can lead to incorrect application of the law, which can disadvantage individual applicants but also exacerbate pressures on the authority.
- 1.3.3 The recent report from Shelter Cymru, 'Return Call', indicates continuing failings in the response by some authorities in the way people are dealt with when they first try to contact the authority for help.
- 1.3.4 This strategy sets out how authorities should address housing pressures and improve access to temporary accommodation. It is vital that staff are trained in the proper application of the law, and staff teams are adequately resourced in prevention, assessment and discharge of duties.

We will:

- Revise our statutory guidance on the application of homelessness legislation by June 2006
- Foster access to training in homelessness legislation, particularly in changes to the law, and to case law updates by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to ensure:

- Their staff teams are adequately resourced to fulfil their statutory duties to homeless people
- Staff are provided with initial and continuing training on application of homelessness legislation.
- Procedures are in place on the administration of homelessness applications, which are properly monitored.

1.4 Legislation

1.4.1 The homelessness legislation provides a strong foundation of protection for vulnerable people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It is essential that the legislation is implemented on the basis of partnership with the client, with a focus on prevention where possible. The application of the law has to rely on the availability of suitable accommodation, and in many areas this is in very short supply in relation to the individual needs it has to meet.

1.4.2 The UK Government has announced that it is looking at the existing legislation to see if changes are needed to ensure a partnership approach is taken between the local authority and the client, and that all suitable options are pursued. We will be involved in that review.

We will:

- Ensure that any proposals to amend legislation are subject to full consultation in Wales by December 2007

We will expect:

- The UK Government to involve the Welsh Assembly Government in the drafting of any legislation which applies to Wales.

1.5 Housing Benefit

1.5.1 Housing Benefit underpins Government policy on enabling people on low incomes to access housing. Benefit policy and administration should support the objective that everyone should be able to access housing, and they should operate flexibly and efficiently to achieve this goal.

1.5.2 The performance of local authorities administering HB is inconsistent. Delays in processing applications for HB may lead to the risk of

increasing homelessness. Such delays also have a significant impact on rent arrears, which can lead to eviction. Delays also deter private landlords from offering housing to homeless people or others in need. Discretionary Housing Payments are being underused in many local authorities thus missing the opportunity to target these funds in an effort to help prevent homelessness. .

1.5.3 Proposed housing benefit reforms are being trialed in Conwy which is a Pathfinder authority, and now extended to Pembrokeshire which is introducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The simplicity of the new arrangements should bring benefits in respect of ease of administration, and certainty for applicants. It is too early to measure the impact from these pilots. There are however concerns that when the transitional benefit protection ends, the final application of the new scheme could leave some people more vulnerable. There are also major concerns about ending direct payments to landlords in the majority of cases, and where the local market rents may not reflect the rents for housing in the area where they need to live.

1.5.4 Good practice guidance on administering housing benefits has already been issued by the Audit Commission and the ODPM. We now need to focus our efforts locally and nationally on maximising the current and emerging systems to prevent homelessness. This will require better promotion of good practice, stronger partnership working with the private and voluntary sectors, and a recognition by local authorities at corporate level of the importance of a flexible and efficient service.

We will:

- Support an event to exchange good practice on working with the HB system and private rented sector by December 2006
- Seek to influence the development of the Local Housing Allowance in Wales in discussions with the DWP by December 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Identify how they will optimise the HB system to prevent homelessness within their local homelessness strategies, particularly in supporting partnerships with the private rented sector.
- Make full use of their Discretionary Housing Payment fund from the DWP
- Ensure they meet DWP performance requirements on speed and accuracy of settling claims and use the support of the DWP Support Unit as necessary to improve performance
- Adopt a partnership approach with the voluntary and private sectors to the delivery of housing benefit services, including clear commitments on service delivery.

We will expect Housing Associations and local authorities to:

- Implement the recommendations in the Audit Commission report on 'Tackling Rent Arrears and Housing Benefit'.

1.6 Repossessions and Evictions

1.6.1 Repossessions and evictions often directly lead to homelessness. It is vital that tenants have access to good housing and debt advice to address the reasons why legal action is being taken. In the social housing sector, rent arrears is the main reason for people losing their homes. Landlords should only have recourse to eviction as a last resort. Support also has a crucial role to play in enabling vulnerable people to sustain their homes.

1.6.2 The Welsh Assembly Government part funded research by the Audit Commission into rent arrears and housing benefit in the social rented sector in Wales. The outcome was contained in reports: a) 'Closing the gap – Working together to reduce rent arrears' and b) 'Rent arrears and Housing Benefit in the Welsh social rented sector'. Landlords should consider adopting the good practice contained in the reports as part of their strategies for continuous improvement across all service areas.

1.6.3 Another reason for people losing their homes is because of anti-social behaviour. Assembly guidance 'Anti-social Behaviour: Policies and Procedures – Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and Housing Associations' (2005) sets out the range of measures landlords can use to deal with anti-social behaviour. These are centred on 'prevention', 'enforcement' and 'rehabilitation and support'. The type of measure to be used will depend on the particular circumstances of each case.

1.6.4 The Assembly monitors the extent of and grounds for eviction by social landlords in Wales and has issued preliminary research into the reasons behind the figures.

1.6.5 The incidence of repossessions amongst home owners is rising, although still at relatively low levels. Every effort must be made to ensure home owners are appropriately insured and are able to negotiate repayment arrangements with the mortgagee.

We will:

- Work with advice agencies and local authorities to promote the tackling of illegal evictions in the private sector by December 2006
- Will consider with the Council of Mortgage Lenders what other measures are required to promote sustainable home ownership by December 2006

We will expect local authorities and housing associations to:

- Adopt good practice and implement the recommendations in the Audit Commission reports
- Ensure tenants have access to specialist housing and debt advice as early as possible and before they seek final possession for rent arrears.

1.7 Children and Young People

1.7.1 Local authorities are expected to involve Young Peoples Partnerships in their local homelessness strategy planning. More work needs to be done to make this joint working a reality.

Young Peoples Partnerships will be required to audit the housing needs of young people in their area by 2007/8. This will have to include a 2-year action plan, with built-in outcome measures, and this process will need to involve a high level of joint working with housing services. The advice resource for young people 'Clic' provides information on how they can avoid becoming homeless.

New initiatives are being promoted to develop skills in the Young Persons workforce, which will help the sector to address housing issues

The needs of children affected by homelessness has been recognised in the statutory guidance given to local authorities where families are deemed to be intentionally homeless.

The Welsh Assembly Government has consulted on proposals for legislation that will ensure the needs of children are taken account of in the allocation of temporary accommodation. The legislation will also ensure they are not placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation except for very short periods.

We will:

- Introduce legislation to provide better protection for children in homeless families
by June 2006
- Require YPPs to work with housing colleagues to identify the particular housing needs of young people
by December 2007
- Explore the development of a training package for youth workers on dealing with housing issues
by December 2007
- Establish a consultation mechanism on the National Homelessness Strategy to involve young people in its development
by December 2006
- Introduce the National Service Framework for Children to promote joint working to support successful transitions for families affected by homelessness
by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local Young Peoples Partnerships to audit the housing needs of young people and develop 2-year action plans with built-in outcome measures to address them.
- Local YPPs to work jointly with local authority housing services to identify and plan for the needs of homeless young people
- Local housing services and other organisations working with homeless children and young people establish guidelines for referring those at risk to social services.
- Local authorities ensure children in homeless families are linked to health and education services.

1.8 Education

1.8.1 The cycle of homelessness which some people fall into often begins in very early adulthood, and is usually a reflection of exclusion from the normal paths to successful adulthood. This may include exclusion from schooling and family support, as well as homelessness in childhood. Education and information are vital components in breaking and preventing this cycle, which often begins with exclusion from schools.

1.8.2 The Assembly Government has already recognised these links by funding the development of a learning pack for young people aimed at preventing homelessness, called 'Housemate'. We are now funding Shelter Cymru to network good practice in delivering education on homelessness to young people. The Assembly is also funding the 'Clic' project, which also provides young people with information on housing and homelessness.

1.8.3 Opportunities for pupils to consider homelessness issues can be taken as part of Personal and Social Education ("PSE") in schools. ACCAC have submitted advice to the Assembly on the curriculum and associated assessment arrangements. They are now working up detailed proposals for consultation. The PSE Framework, which offers opportunities to consider issues to do with housing and homelessness, is also being considered as part of this process.

We will:

- Ensure that good practice in educating young people on homelessness prevention is disseminated across Wales by December 2006
- Take account of the role that education on housing within the PSE can play in preventing homelessness, and ensure that continuing opportunities to teach this issue are promoted by December 2007

We will expect:

- Local education services to make use of 'Housemate' and other resources to promote awareness of homelessness amongst young people.

1.9 Mediation

1.9.1 Family mediation can be a vital tool in the range of prevention initiatives. It is particularly appropriate for young people, where they may be vulnerable on leaving home, and where they may need help to broker an understanding with their parents. Evidence indicates that in a high proportion of cases the young people can be enabled to return home and homelessness can be avoided. This is a very cost effective form of prevention and these services should be operating in all authority areas. There is the potential to extend this to other situations where households have been asked to leave by friends or relatives, and possibly in relationship breakdown cases.

We will:

- Encourage all local authorities and their partners to establish mediation schemes in their areas with the aim of preventing homelessness by December 2006
- Promote awareness of good practice in mediation for young people by December 2007
- Explore with Relate the possibilities for widening the scope of relationship counselling to address homelessness by December 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and their partners to facilitate access to mediation services, particularly for young people.
- Local authorities and partners to facilitate mediation between landlords and tenants where appropriate to prevent homelessness.

1.10 Rural Homelessness

1.10.1 There are particular problems in addressing homelessness in rural areas. The dispersal of the population and the remoteness from services, perhaps exacerbated by pressure of social expectations, means that homelessness can have a low profile and the issue becomes a hidden one. People may well have to move out of their home area to access housing and associated services. Local

authorities and other agencies may not be able to provide services in the same way as in urban areas as need is not concentrated geographically, and different solutions may be needed.

1.10.2 The Welsh Assembly Government is commissioning a major body of research into rural issues under the 'Rural Observatory', led by Cardiff University. This includes a project into rural homelessness, which will be completed by Spring 2006, and should provide greater insight into how the problem can best be tackled in rural areas.

The Welsh Assembly Government will:

- Publicise the research report into rural homelessness, and consider how the findings should influence policy and practice by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and partners to consider the findings of research into rural homelessness, and ensure their homelessness services are designed to address the particular needs of rural areas.

2. ACCESS TO HOUSING

2.1 Supply

- 2.1.1 An adequate supply of affordable housing is a prerequisite for tackling homelessness. Housing market pressures have increased dramatically since 2001, with the rise in house prices placing pressure down the housing ladder. Affordable rented housing has become more difficult to obtain for those in need, resulting for some, in homelessness.
- 2.1.2 In response to this the Welsh Assembly Government has allocated an increase of 62% in Social Housing Grant over the three year period beginning April 2005, to increase the supply of affordable social housing. The new arrangements we have introduced for housing procurement will also lead to more effective use of this funding.
- 2.1.3 In addition, have consulted on a comprehensive package of measures dealing with the provision of affordable housing, including the revision of Technical Advice Notes 1 & 2; the associated draft Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement; and the publication of our affordable housing toolkit. We are also publishing regional household projections, and local housing assessment guidance to improve the planning of provision. Under our proposals local authorities will be required to carry out housing market assessments, which will provide the broader context for planning provision of adequate housing supply.
- 2.1.4 It is essential that the maximum use is made of the both social and private housing stock to alleviate homelessness and housing need. Authorities should have comprehensive strategies for tackling empty homes.

We will:

- Issue revised guidance and associated documents to facilitate the planning of affordable housing supply by June 2006
- Implement new arrangements for procurement of social housing to enable longer term programming to meet needs by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Take full account of their local homelessness strategies and forthcoming legislation on temporary accommodation in setting priorities for their social housing grant programme.
- Adopt empty homes strategies which link to local homelessness strategies

2.2 Access to Social Housing

- 2.2.1 The Assembly Government is currently undertaking a review how choice is given to applicants for housing. The outcome of this review will be reflected in the revised Code of Guidance for local authorities and new guidance to be issued under the new regulatory framework for housing associations. The primary purpose of social housing is to provide decent accommodation for people who could not otherwise afford it. It remains an objective of the Assembly Government to make high quality affordable housing available to everyone who needs it .
- 2.2.2 Homeless people generally are most in need of access to this resource, and social housing must be readily accessible to them if the objective is to be met.
- 2.2.3 The provision of housing can have a major beneficial impact on social disadvantage by giving priority to people in need. Social housing itself must be managed in the context of sustainable communities; tenants must be empowered and supported to sustain their tenancies. Everyone should have fair and equal access to social housing taking account of their needs and circumstances. Where there is competition for available housing, there should be arrangements in place for giving appropriate priority to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, whether or not they are in the statutory priority need groups.
- 2.2.4 The other main priority in this context is the promotion of choice, and those applying for social housing should have some say in where they live, including people who are statutorily homeless.

The Assembly Government will:

- Publish guidance on how social landlords should ensure that their housing is accessible to, and meets the needs of homeless people by June 2006
- Promote choice for homeless people setting out in statutory guidance how local authorities should take account of individual needs and preferences by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and housing associations to give reasonable preference to homeless people through their allocation scheme, and ensure that the needs of homeless people are taken account of in local lettings planning

2.3 Bond, Deposit and Rent in Advance Schemes

- 2.3.1 Access to the private rented sector can be very difficult for people on low incomes, often because of high rents, delays in processing housing benefit and the difficulty in raising deposits and rent in advance.
- 2.3.2 The Assembly Government is already funding bond schemes across Wales which guarantees to pay the landlord if costs are outstanding at the end of the tenancy. These guarantees usually cover repair and arrears costs up to a prescribed limit. Schemes provide bond certificates to private landlords that can be called upon in the event of damage to the property when it is vacated. The Assembly Government is currently funding, and monitoring, a pilot custodial bond scheme in Cardiff, where the bond is held and administered independently of both landlord and tenant.
- 2.3.3 The success of bond schemes in attracting private landlords varies considerably. Some landlords still require a deposit and rent in advance to make a letting to a vulnerable person on a low income attractive.

The Assembly Government will:

- Support the further development of bond schemes across Wales, taking account of gaps in current provision, the review of the Cardiff Custodial Bond Scheme, and the need for more generic inclusive services which include more private landlords by December 2006
- Review our policy and practice guide for bond schemes in Wales by December 2007

We will expect local authorities to:

- Explore the use of rent in advance and deposit schemes to increase access to private rented housing for people who would otherwise be homeless.

2.4 Exclusions

- 2.4.1 Some social landlords exclude many homeless people from consideration for housing. This may arise from previous conduct, particularly rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. Part 6 of the Homelessness Act 2002 gives local authorities powers to exclude applicants for a housing allocation if they are deemed unsuitable to be a tenant due to unacceptable behaviour. A test of unacceptable behaviour must be applied to all applications for housing which might be affected by previous behaviour. Local authorities may also find people who are homeless to be so 'intentionally' where their behaviour or actions have led to the loss of their home. Some social landlords

also exclude or discriminate on other grounds such as age.

2.4.2 Where people are excluded in accordance with the "unacceptable behaviour" provisions in the Housing Act 1996, landlords should ensure that they are given clear information for the reasons for the exclusion and the actions they can take to become eligible and how they can access support if needed.

2.4.3 Once a homeless person is excluded, they are likely to find it very difficult or impossible to find social housing in an area where they are likely to have family or other connections. They will often remain in the area even if this means they are homeless or inadequately housed.

The Assembly Government will:

- Issue regulatory guidance for housing associations on suspensions which mirrors the Homelessness Act provisions on exclusions due to unacceptable behaviour contained in the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness by December 2006
- Monitor social landlord compliance with guidance on restricting access to social housing through audit and regulation by December 2007
- promote multi-agency arrangements which review the circumstances of excluded people and provide support to enable them to be reconsidered for social housing by December 2007

We will expect:

- Local authorities and housing associations to exclude homeless people only where it is permissible under s160 of the Housing Act 1996.
- Criminal justice agencies, local authorities and housing associations to work within revised guidance on Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements in respect of homeless people who may pose a significant risk to the public.

2.5 Temporary Accommodation

2.5.1 The numbers of households placed in temporary accommodation by local authorities under their homelessness duties nearly trebled over the past three years. This is the result of the general increase in homelessness presentations, and resulting pressure on authorities.

2.5.2 Much of the increase has been amongst people who are living with friends or relatives under totally insecure arrangements. However it also includes a rising number of households in B&B, and significant numbers in hostels or the private sector on short term arrangements..

2.5.3 Lengthy stays in temporary accommodation are destabilising for vulnerable people, especially children. The quality and location of the accommodation have a major impact on the suitability of that housing, and can aggravate an already stressful situation. The availability of alternatives is linked to wider market pressures, but also depends largely on the approach of the authorities to finding alternative solutions.

2.5.4 Local authorities have already agreed targets with the Welsh Assembly Government on reducing the average length of time in temporary accommodation, and we have set a target in this Strategy to reduce it nationally by 20% by April 2008. We are already supporting the efforts of authorities to find alternatives to B&B, through its grant programme to local authorities. In addition we have consulted on legislation to require authorities to take account of a range of personal needs in the temporary accommodation they use, and to raise the minimum standard of accommodation by April 2008.

We will:

- Introduce legislation to place new requirements on local authorities from April 2006 to consider social and personal factors when finding temporary accommodation for homeless people by April 2006
- Introduce legislation setting new standards for the use of temporary accommodation by April 2006
- Monitor the progress authorities are making on their temporary accommodation targets through the Policy Agreements by December 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Examine the full range of options for providing temporary accommodation as alternatives to B&B, and identify through their homelessness strategies how they will meet their policy agreement targets
- Meet their targets to reduce the time households spend in temporary accommodation.

2.6 Bed and Breakfast

2.6.1 Bed and Breakfast is generally accepted to be an unsuitable form of accommodation for vulnerable people except in emergencies. It is also the most expensive form of provision, and its use often indicates a lack of planning by the authority. Unfortunately the numbers of households placed in B&B grew exponentially over the past three years, so that by end of September 2004 over 800 households were living in this form of

accommodation (including over 600 children), although the trend is now downwards.

2.6.2 The Assembly Government wants to minimise the use of B & B. We have set a national target to reduce the use of B&B by 50% from April 2005 by April 2008, and local authorities should have their own targets within the policy agreements which are consistent with the all Wales target.

2.6.3 The Assembly Government is committed to introducing legislation to restrict the use of B&B by April 2007. Local authorities will only be able to place vulnerable households with children and young people for up to 2 weeks, and from April 2008 this will apply to all priority need groups.

We will:

- Legislate to bring into effect new restrictions on the use of B&B by local authorities by April 2006
- Monitor the progress local authorities are making in reducing the use of B & B by reference to the Policy Agreements by December 2006
- Continue to provide support to local authorities to deliver improvements in temporary accommodation responses through support for spend to save initiatives by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Meet their Policy Agreement targets on reduction in use of B&B

2.7 Private Rented Sector

2.7.1 With pressures on the social rented likely to continue, the private rented sector may offer the most important source of accommodation to meet temporary and permanent needs of homeless people. For many single people, and those who are evicted or otherwise excluded from social housing, it may be the only tenure available to them, although its location, rent levels and landlord criteria mean that it is not available to all.

2.7.2 It is vital that local authorities have a detailed understanding of the local private market. They need to use this to attract landlords into offering housing to people homeless or in need of affordable accommodation. There are a range of ways to do this, but some authorities have

developed packages of support which include tenure advice, bonds and rent in advance (see below), HB fast tracking, support where tenancies break down etc.

- 2.7.3 The Assembly Government also encourages local authorities to promote private landlord forums which foster good practice. These local planning fora can play a key role in fostering an environment which builds a partnership with the private sector.
- 2.7.4 Standards of accommodation and management vary, and there is a particular concern with houses in multiple occupation (“HMOs”). The availability of good quality, well-managed private rented sector accommodation can have a significant impact of homelessness. The Assembly Government is committed to introducing a national mandatory licensing scheme in 2005, which aims to provide safe, acceptable living conditions without reducing the supply of private rented accommodation
- 2.7.5 It is not the aim of these proposals to reduce the size of the private rented sector by driving landlords out of the market with adverse consequences for tenants. Rather it is to raise standards and instil improvements so that the sector can continue to act as a magnet for meeting the needs of particular groups notably those on low incomes.

The Assembly Government will:

- Introduce a national mandatory licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation, which aims to provide safe, acceptable living conditions without reducing the supply of private rented accommodation by December 2006
- Establish a task and finish group to identify good practice in engaging the private rented sector in tackling homelessness by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Develop liaison arrangements with the private sector, and packages of support to facilitate the maximum use of private rented sector accommodation

2.8 Move -on

- 2.8.1 A wide range of emergency and other temporary accommodation is available to homeless people to meet their immediate housing needs and to help them prepare for resettlement in permanent accommodation. Unless they are able to move on from their temporary housing as soon as they are ready, they will remain in unsuitable housing and the resettlement process will be undermined They will also block access to the temporary housing provision for those who need it.

2.8.2 In some areas hostels and other short-term housing is often full due to lack of move-on accommodation, with consequential effects on other homeless people.

2.8.3 Arrangements for the provision of adequate move-on accommodation should be central to the planning of services within local homelessness strategies. This will require the full co-operation of local housing providers and support agencies.

The Assembly Government will:

- Promote local joint working to secure adequate provision of move-on accommodation by December 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and Housing Associations to establish strategic move-on planning arrangements as part of their Supporting People Operational Plans (SPOPs) and local homelessness strategies.

2.9 Partnership with Housing Associations

2.9.1 Housing Associations are key partners in tackling homelessness. In many cases they are providing a vital contribution to formulating and delivering the local strategies on homelessness. There is an increasing number of innovative joint ventures to help authorities meet their statutory duties.

2.9.2 However, there is concern that some Associations are not fully engaged with this agenda, and are not co-operating with authorities in meeting their strategic duties. The new Regulatory Code for Housing Associations emphasises the requirement for them to be full partners with authorities in tackling homelessness

We will:

- Examine how current strategic partnership arrangements are working and how these can best be organised to deliver effective joint working in the field of homelessness, including research into the role Community Housing Agreements can play by December 2006
- Discuss with WFHA and WLGA ways to improve dialogue and joint strategic positions on partnership working to tackle homelessness by June 2006

We will expect:

- Housing Associations to contribute fully to help local authorities meet their statutory responsibility in respect of homelessness.
- Housing Associations to assist local authorities in meeting their duties to provide temporary accommodation to homeless people, and collaborate with them on re-housing homeless people through local lettings planning and nomination arrangements
- Housing Associations to agree formal joint working arrangements to prevent and tackle homelessness within the area.

3. RESETTLEMENT AND SUPPORT

3.1 Rough Sleeping

3.1.1 The Assembly Government has a long established objective to end the need for anyone to sleep rough, by ensuring that all rough sleepers have some form of accommodation to go to if they wish. Much has been done to promote good practice in services for rough sleepers, with help from partners such as Homeless Link. However, indications from local homelessness strategies are that little progress has been made in this area. In many areas there is no direct access provision, and much of that accommodation is full and in practice not available to rough sleepers when they need it.

3.1.2 We also have a very limited understanding of the extent of rough sleeping. The measurement of rough sleeping has been patchy, as evidenced by local homelessness strategies.

3.1.3 Many new initiatives for rough sleepers have been developed, including outreach and day services, mainly with funding from the Assembly Government. However, a step change is required in order to meet our objectives in this area. We need to improve our measurement of the problem and our responses to it radically in an approach which is proactive and consistent across Wales.

We will:

- Require local authorities through their local homelessness strategy to specify how they will provide accommodation for rough sleepers by June 2006
- Set a target to reduce rough sleeping once a statistical baseline has been established by December 2007
- Support services which work with rough sleepers to offer them resettlement pathways by June 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Plan the provision of direct access services in their own area for rough sleepers, so that no-one needs to sleep rough or leave the area
- Proactively monitor rough sleeping through a combination of counts and continuous monitoring

We will expect our voluntary partners to:

- Set service standards with independent quality review mechanisms where they are delivering services to rough sleepers
- Work in partnership with local authorities to support the monitoring of rough sleeping

3.2 Supporting People

3.2.1 There has been a massive expansion of services for people who need support over the last three years, enabling them to live in the community and helping to prevent homelessness. Despite some contraction in 2005/06, local authorities and their partners have substantially greater resources available to them than under the previous financial arrangements. Supporting People partnerships will need to examine thoroughly the effectiveness with which these resources are being used. They will need to review their priorities to ensure they are being applied to best secure the prevention of homelessness.

We will:

- Support changes to objectives or specifications in Supporting People Revenue Grant (SPRG) projects where they are compatible with tackling homelessness by December 2006
- Promote the use of Supporting People services as part of the homelessness prevention and repeat homelessness agenda by December 2006
- Review the impact of proposed legislation on tenure on the Supporting People policy context and criteria by December 2007

We will expect local authorities in partnership with their Accredited Support Providers (ASPs) to:

- Submit SPOPs which reflect the focus on corporate objectives to address homelessness.
- Establish close working arrangements at strategic and operational level between homelessness and supported housing services.

3.3 Learning and Employment

3.3.1 Homeless people are often excluded from employment, partly due to lack of skills as well as a home. Their lack of accommodation makes it more difficult for them to obtain and keep a permanent job or to access training. Thus they become stuck in a vicious circle of homelessness and poverty.

3.3.2 The Welsh Assembly Government has been working in partnership with Tai Dysgu Gwaith and EIWA for some time to explore learning opportunities for people at risk of homelessness. Research we commissioned in 2002 recognised that some young people have poor educational and social preparedness for employment, and are not

ready to access conventional training courses. In 2004/5 EIWa agreed to provide funding of £100,000 to support the provision of a pilot programme of preparatory learning for people at risk of homelessness or otherwise in need of housing support.

We will:

- Review the pilot programme to assess its value in aiding the process of resettlement of people at risk of homelessness by December 2007
- Encourage the development of skills and employment assessments for homeless people, and referral arrangements to maximise their career and income opportunities by December 2006

We will expect:

- The DWP, Jobcentre Plus, and the Basic Skills Agency to provide focus and resources specifically to address the needs of homeless people.
- Cymorth Cymru to disseminate good practice from the pilot projects funded by EIWa.

3.4 Positive Lifestyles

3.4.1 Successful resettlement is dependent upon homeless people having the confidence and motivation to pursue positive objectives for themselves. Single homeless people who have been homeless for long periods are in particular likely to have a negative self-image and lack confidence in their own abilities to live independently.

3.4.2 A range of services has developed in Wales which addresses these issues, and tries to engender a constructive cycle through positive activities and support work. These services include motivational interviewing, confidence building based on existing achievements, skill-building through community projects, sports activities and arts and crafts focused day services.

We will:

- Promote positive lifestyles as part of the resettlement process through disseminating examples of successful practice by December 2006
- Support the bid for the Homeless Football World Cup to be held in Wales by December 2007

We will expect:

- Voluntary organisations and local authorities to provide opportunities for homeless people to develop their skills and confidence to support progression to independent living in the community.

4. CROSS-SECTOR WORKING

4.1 Former Prisoners and Prevention of Re-Offending

4.1.1 The Assembly Government supports the UK Government in tackling the causes of crime through joined-up policy with criminal justice agencies. We recognise the link between recidivism and homelessness, and the particular difficulties faced by people leaving prison. That is why in 2001 we extended the Priority Need Order to include them.

4.1.2 Since 2001 significant steps have been taken to secure a joined-up approach for ex-offenders. The Prison Link Cymru (PLC) service has been established to assess and plan for those prisoners at risk of homelessness on release. The All Wales Youth Offending Strategy (AWYOS) has set objectives for preventing homelessness amongst young offenders. The Reducing Re-offending Action Plan for Wales sets out how the National Offender Management Service will join the work of Prison and Probation staff with that of Assembly Government and others to improve successful resettlement. We have consulted on a draft protocol for joint working between local authorities and criminal justice and voluntary agencies. We have commissioned NACRO to measure the extent to which the needs of young offenders are being addressed within local homelessness strategies and SPOPs and by Youth Offending Teams. We must continue this progress to prevent homelessness amongst ex-offenders in the following ways.

We will:

- Progress our commitments under the AWYOS by working with YOTs and the Youth Justice Board to identify and meet the housing needs of young offenders and those at risk of offending in each area by June 2006
- Monitor and advise on the development of SPOPs and Local Homelessness Strategies to ensure they reflect joint working with criminal justice agencies to prevent homelessness by December 2006
- Review the implementation of the PLC scheme to ensure it is working effectively to support the prevention of homelessness by December 2006
- Explore with criminal justice agencies the scope for joint working and commissioning in preventing homelessness amongst ex-offenders by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and criminal justice agencies to work in partnership with local planning arrangements to secure appropriate housing and support for ex-offenders, including adoption of protocols in line with Assembly

guidance.

- The prevention of homelessness among ex-offenders and those at risk of offending to be incorporated as a core theme in criminal justice agencies prevention strategy.
- Criminal justice agencies to promote the prevention of homelessness within the Reducing Re-offending Action Plan for Wales.

4.2 Social Services

4.2.1 Local authorities have a wide range of statutory duties to provide care for vulnerable groups. These include requirements to assist in the formulation and implementation of the local homelessness strategy. In addition both housing and social services have duties to co-operate in meeting the needs of homeless people and children in need.

4.2.2 The overlapping responsibilities between housing and social services can create tensions, but also lead to enormous opportunities for joint and complementary working, particularly in the prevention of homelessness and other crises which lead to social exclusion. Social Care Plans and Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies have not yet delivered the progress in joint working to fulfil this potential.

4.2.3 There is an increasing number of formalised joint working arrangements between the two services aimed at assisting homeless people. However, the picture remains very mixed, and in too many areas, co-operation is inadequate to meet statutory requirements or the potential for prevention.

We will:

- Consider how we can strengthen the assessment of how Social Services Departments (SSDs) meet their statutory responsibilities within the (Social Services Inspectorate (SSIW) inspection programme by December 2006
- Foster development and dissemination of good practice and joint working between housing and social services by December 2006

We will expect:

- Local authority SSDs to engage constructively with their housing and support provider partners in tackling homelessness through the local strategic and service planning arrangements
- Local authority SSDs and housing services to establish formal joint working arrangements for dealing with care leavers, young people, older people, people with mental health problems and learning disabilities, and other vulnerable groups when they are at risk of homelessness.

4.3 Health

- 4.3.1 There is a strong correlation between poor health and poor housing. Homelessness can have an adverse effect on peoples' health, whilst at the same time homeless people are more likely to have difficulties accessing health care.
- 4.3.2 Planning frameworks are in place to address these needs, but at the moment they are not working adequately to secure the provision of the services that are needed to homeless people.
- 4.3.3 Where organisations or individuals have a particular commitment to this excluded group some good practice has emerged Health practitioners working with homeless people are beginning to network their experiences.
- 4.3.4 The All-Wales multi-professional, multi-agency Selected Minority Group has been established by the Welsh Assembly Government to help ensure that health policies take full account of the needs of selected minority groups including homeless people. The partnership group includes representatives from Shelter Cymru and Homeless Link Cymru, National Public Health Service, WCVA and statutory healthcare organisations.
- 4.3.5 In May 2005 Homeless Link organised a conference on Health and Homelessness supported by the Welsh Assembly Government. The conference highlighted the good practice that is emerging, but also the lack of support at strategic level.
- 4.3.6 We now need to establish a clearer focus on meeting the health requirements of homeless people through flexible and responsive service arrangements which achieve equality in access.

We will:

- Consider the recommendations emerging from the Health and Homelessness conference in May 2005 by June 2006
- Publish the health policy guidance which the Selected Minority Group will produce in 2006 by December 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities and Local Health Boards to review their Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies in order to ensure they have arrangements in place which address the specific needs of homeless people. These arrangements will need to be published and disseminated to organisations working with homeless people.
- Local Health Boards to play a full part in planning for homelessness services including Supporting People Planning Groups

- Local Health Boards and local authorities to work in partnership to ensure health services maintain contact with homeless people, and particularly with homeless families with young children, through referral arrangements

4.4 Domestic Abuse

- 4.4.1 Domestic abuse is a major social evil, and is also a significant cause of homelessness. In some areas as many as 20% of households in priority need have lost their home due to this problem.
- 4.4.2 The Welsh Assembly Government has developed a National Strategy to address domestic abuse in Wales. *"Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy - A Joint-Agency Approach"* was launched on 30th March 2005. The Strategy's primary objective is to establish an effective network of services for all victims of domestic abuse across the whole of Wales. It sets out an important framework for the development of local action to combat this serious crime which affects not only women but also men and can have a devastating effect on children. The overall aims of the Strategy are to facilitate the development and implementation of a quality co-ordinated joint-agency approach, to improve current service provision for victims of domestic abuse and to protect all individuals. To assist with the Strategy an additional £1.1million is being allocated in the 3-year period 2005-08. This will build on initiatives already in place such as the new National helpline.
- 4.4.3 A range of local initiatives has been established to provide options for women to avoid homelessness. These include the Cardiff Safety Unit and a pilot project funded by the Assembly Government to assist the assessment of cross-boundary and specialist needs.
- 4.4.4 Welsh Assembly Government is already funding Welsh Women's Aid to provide a range of services to help victims of domestic abuse, including 42 refuges throughout Wales.

We will:

- Expand our grant programme for domestic abuse services to improve support for women to remain in their homes and reduce the likelihood of homelessness by December 2006
- Evaluate the outcome of the pilot project and disseminate its findings by June 2007

We will expect:

- Local authorities and Womens Aid groups to work in partnership to provide community based and refuge provision for women at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse, and consider also the needs of men who may be

at risk

- Community Safety Partnerships to work jointly with local homelessness partnerships on developing advice and support services for women who wish to remain in their homes, such as 'sanctuary' schemes to enhance personal security.

4.5 Substance Misuse

- 4.5.1 The prevalence of drug and alcohol problems amongst homeless people is well documented. These problems can both cause and compound homelessness, as they become part of an entrenched lifestyle and coping mechanism.
- 4.5.2 Homeless people who are misusing substances often have other problems, such as mental health, and may experience difficulty in getting properly diagnosed.
- 4.5.3 The Assembly Government has a Substance Misuse Strategy, which sets out its priorities for planning and delivery of services. We have increased funding for Substance Misuse treatment from £3.3m in 2002/03 to £18.4m in 2007/08, an increase of about 550%. We are developing a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework module for Homelessness and Accommodation to help ensure that the accommodation is available to enable the transitions to independence for users, £4m of Social Housing Grant is being set aside for new accommodation. This is in addition to a substantial programme of SPRG revenue funding for projects supporting people with substance misuse problems.

The Assembly Government will:

- Consult on a service framework for the needs of homeless people or others in housing need
by December 2006
- Continue providing capital funding to increase the availability of access to housing for people with substance misuse problems
by April 2006

We will expect:

- Community Safety Partnerships to address the needs of homeless people within their Substance Misuse Action Plans.

4.6 Care Leavers

4.6.1 Local authorities have a corporate parenting responsibility to children looked after and care leavers. There is substantial legislative protection provided for care leavers through the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001. However, disagreements between council departments can result in care leavers being denied the support that they need. Few young people now become homeless on leaving care, but too many of them have been placed for long periods in B&B, and have struggled to secure and maintain suitable permanent accommodation.

4.6.2 The Welsh Assembly Government intends to introduce legislation which will help ensure that care leavers spend no more than a short period in B&B, and move on to more appropriate accommodation as quickly as possible. We have also undertaken surveys of local authorities and care leavers to elicit their views on the care leaving process, including how they are housed.

We will:

- Review the survey information to identify and address barriers to the provision of suitable accommodation for care leavers, and address any issues raised by June 2006
- Promote joint working between housing and social services in the re-housing aspect of the resettlement process, through monitoring of local homelessness strategies and leaving care services by December 2006

We will expect:

- Local authority social services and housing services to work together to ensure that the pathway planning process includes resettlement into suitable housing with appropriate support, and prevention of homelessness.
- Local authority social services and housing services to have joint protocols in place for dealing with care leavers.
- Local authority social services and housing services should establish specific assessment arrangements for care leavers prior to leaving care, and liaison for those who are later at risk of homelessness after leaving care

4.7 Armed Service Veterans

4.7.1 There is a significant incidence of homelessness amongst people who have formerly been in the armed services, who may be suffering from

stress related illnesses and may also have alcohol or substance abuse issues. The Veterans Agency, voluntary and ex-service organisations, such as The Royal British Legion ,SSAFA and Combat Stress offer support to service veterans including those with housing problems.

4.7.2 The Welsh Assembly Government has supported research by the MoD into the causes and extent of this problem, and how it can be alleviated. The Assembly Government has also established a working group, whose membership includes representation from the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Agency, to co-ordinate efforts to tackle homelessness amongst veterans in Wales.

We will:

- Examine the outcome of the current research project and explore its recommendations with partners by December 2006
- Promote with the Veterans Agency and partners better joint working between statutory and voluntary agencies to prevent homelessness amongst veterans by June 2006

We will expect:

- The Veterans Agency and Veterans organisations to promote awareness amongst the veteran population of services available to homeless veterans.
- Organisations working with homeless people to identify and advise veterans on the support available from veterans organisations.

5. EQUALITY OF ACCESS

5.1 Refugees

5.1.1 Refugees are particularly vulnerable to homelessness once they are given leave to remain. They will have to leave their NASS accommodation within 28 days, and are likely to have difficulty in securing housing as well as employment or benefits during this period.

5.1.2 The Welsh Assembly Government is funding the Refugee Well-Housing project, an all-Wales scheme run by the Wales Refugee Council to provide advice to refugees to avoid homelessness and assist resettlement.

We will:

- Review the effectiveness of the Well-Housing project to ensure it works effectively in reducing homelessness amongst refugees by June 2006
- Publish and implement the Action Plan on Asylum Seekers and Refugees by June 2006

We will expect:

- Tai Pawb to provide support and monitor how local authorities are addressing the needs of refugees
- The Welsh Refugee Council through the Well Housing Project to work with partners to ensure refugees are aware of and have access to their homelessness prevention advice service.

5.2 Black, and other Minority Ethnic Groups (BME)

5.2.1 Information on homelessness amongst BME groups is improving, with more statistical collection and the report commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government into BME housing and socio-economic circumstances in Wales. Local authorities are expected to identify and address the needs of BME homeless people at the local level, which should be reflected in their local homelessness strategies and BME housing strategies.

5.2.2 Tai Pawb has been established as the BME housing organisation for Wales, and its role encompasses advising and monitoring local services which provide for homeless people.

We will:

- Review how local authorities and their partners are addressing the needs of BME homeless people through their local strategies by December 2006

- Commission/undertake research into homelessness in Wales amongst BME groups by December 2006

We will expect:

- Tai Pawb to monitor and advise local authorities on implementing their responsibilities to BME homeless people
- Local authorities to work with Tai Pawb in identifying and meeting the needs of BME homeless people.

5.3 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People (LGB)

5.3.1 Research has highlighted the particular vulnerability of homeless young lesbians, gay and bisexual people. Stigma sometimes attached to homosexuality often leads to relationship breakdown with parents, making it impossible to remain in the family home. Even when this is not the cause of homelessness, societal attitudes can make the experience of homelessness much worse for lesbians, gay and bisexual people.

5.3.2 The Welsh Assembly Government is funding an all-Wales housing advice service for LGB people run by Trothwy Housing Association. We are also funding research by Spark consultants into housing needs and homelessness amongst this group, which will be published soon.

The Assembly Government will:

- Review the findings of the research into the housing needs for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people by June 2006
- Monitor how local authorities consider the specific needs of lesbians, gay and bisexual people in their Local Homelessness Strategy by December 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Review their services to ensure they are sensitive to the housing needs of LGB people, taking account of the Spark research report, and seek advice from Stonewall Cymru and other LGB organisations on how the recommendations should be addressed.

5.4 People with Disabilities

5.4.1 People with physical disabilities often find difficulty in accessing accommodation that meets their needs. They can be left stranded in

housing which they cannot fully access and which may be totally unsuitable for their needs. If the accommodation is not adequately usable for a disabled person, effectively they can be rendered homeless.

5.4.2 The Assembly Government is keen to see the emergence of more databases of accessible housing, which can be matched against registers of disabled people requiring re-housing. We have already agreed to provide funding for three years for a disabled persons housing advice project in south east Wales.

5.4.3 People with learning disabilities also have problems in finding and maintaining housing, particularly if their needs do not entitle them to support services.

We will:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the specialist advice service in South East Wales in preventing homelessness by December 2007
- Review with partners how specialist advice can best be delivered across Wales by December 2007

We will expect local authorities to:

- Ensure they provide information to homeless disabled people on the available housing that is suitable to their needs, and ensure they have access to specialist advice

5.5 Women

5.5.1 Services for homeless people, particularly rough sleepers, are often focused mainly on men, and women may feel reluctant to use these services. At the same time women can be particularly vulnerable to abuse or exploitation if they become homeless. Local authorities and partners should assess and ensure the availability of services, which homeless women feel able to use.

The Assembly Government will:

- Review the provision of local authority homeless services to ensure they are appropriate for women as well as men by December 2006

5.6 Older Homeless People

5.6.1 Some older people become homeless, and they can be particularly vulnerable to the experience of homelessness and its effects on their physical and mental health. Although they would be in statutory priority need for accommodation, they do not always engage with the statutory services.

5.6.2 The Wales Strategy for Older People provides the framework for development of broader policy in this area, and the Wales Care Strategy Group is leading a review of housing policy for older people.

We will:

- Work with local services and the UK Coalition on Older Homelessness to address the specific needs of older homeless people by December 2006

5.7 Gypsies and Travellers

5.7.1 Gypsies and travellers are by any measure often of the most excluded group in society. This can lead to homelessness, as there may be no provision to accommodate a transient lifestyle.

We will:

- Review the housing needs and service provision for gypsies and travellers in Wales by December 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Include the provision of services to Gypsies and Travellers as part of their local housing strategies

6. DELIVERING AND IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

6.1 Local Homelessness Strategies

- 6.1.1 Local authorities are required to carry out homelessness reviews and publish local homelessness strategies under the Homelessness Act 2002. We have issued statutory guidance on how these should be prepared. We have also reviewed the first round of strategies and provided feedback on how they need to be strengthened.
- 6.1.2 Under the Plan Rationalisation proposals, the duty to formulate local homelessness strategies will be met within local housing strategies, although authorities may still have homelessness strategies. Revised guidance will be issued on how the continuing duty to review and tackle homelessness should be met.
- 6.1.3 It is clear from the initial strategies that they have led to greatly improved partnership working and that there is much good practice on the ground. On the other hand much work remains to be done to gain a detailed understanding of homelessness and to establish a strong, joined-up agenda with corporate support and clear targets.

We will:

- Meet annually with every authority to review progress by December 2006
- Revise our guidance on local homelessness strategies taking account of experiences so far, and how the duty should be met under the Plan Rationalisation proposals by June 2006

We will expect:

- Local authorities to review progress annually through their partnership arrangements and to revise their own action plans taking account of this National Strategy, and submit them to the Assembly.
- Carry out a full review and revise their local homelessness strategies by September 2008.

6.2 Joint Working and Planning

- 6.2.1 Homelessness can only be tackled successfully through a full commitment to joint working from other departments, organisations and related service areas such as health and social services. 'Making the Connections' lays out a clear expectation that people will work in partnership to address social issues and improve service effectiveness.

6.2.2 It is equally important to achieve vertical integration of front-line practitioners into the planning process.

We will:

- Strengthen the statutory Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness in regard to joint working by June 2006
- Promote and support good practice and joint working by June 2006

We will expect:

- Expect statutory health, social services and criminal justice organisations in particular to engage with local homelessness strategy planning and reflect this within their own planning arrangements.

6.3 Good Practice

6.3.1 The agenda set out in this document assumes that good practice will be adopted across Wales. This relies on proactive networking of innovative practice solutions. The dissemination of good practice has not been maximised to date.

We will:

- Review our homelessness grants programme to ensure that the evidence of effective practice is widely circulated by December 2007
- Redesign our website to provide more effective links to highlight good practice and other websites by December 2006
- Work with local authorities to promote a more effective network for homelessness staff by June 2006
- Use our resources to promote continuing innovation and improvement in homelessness practice by June 2006
- Promote information sharing on effective practice in joint working, including joint working between housing, health and social services by December 2006

We will expect:

- The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations (WFHA), the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Cymorth/Homeless Link Cymru to promote good practice in tackling

homelessness as part of their core activities.

- Local authorities and voluntary organisations to share information on the effectiveness of their working practices with other organizations involved in tackling homelessness.

6.4 Measuring and Analysing Homelessness

6.4.1 It is vital that timely and accurate statistics are collected to enable the monitoring of trends in homelessness and its proper analysis at local and national level. Unfortunately some authorities have been very slow to collect and submit statutory homelessness statistics, and there appear to be inconsistencies with the way they are recorded. In addition, the availability and use of other statistics in local homelessness reviews has been very patchy.

6.4.2 There is a need for a more rigorous approach to collection of homelessness statistics, which should be given greater priority. At the same time better use needs to be made of these figures through analysis at local and national level.

We will:

- Provide advice to each authority on the proper interpretation of national data requirements
by December 2006
- Take action to address any significant delay in receipt of statutory homelessness returns
by December 2006
- Discuss statistical trends at least annually with each authority
by December 2006
- Publish an annual report on homelessness trends as well as quarterly bulletins
by December 2006

We will expect local authorities to:

- Review current statistical and monitoring processes, identifying and resolving any likely causes of delays or misinterpretation through management arrangements and external advice where necessary
- Broaden the use of data on homelessness to include those not in priority need, and reflect this in the local homelessness review and strategy process.

6.5 Monitoring and Review

6.5.1 It is vital that progress in achieving the Strategy's objectives is

monitored and reviewed, to ensure it is being effectively implemented, and to inform the development of the Strategy.

6.5.2 The Homelessness Strategies Working Group has a remit to advise on the development and implementation of the Strategy, and includes representation from WLGA, WFHA, and other organisations working with homeless people. Progress has been reported to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, and this now needs to be undertaken on a more regular basis.

We will:

- Provide annual reports to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on progress. This will include updated revisions to the Action Plan by April 2007
- Carry out a full review of the Strategy by April 2008.

6.6 Timescales

6.6.1 Actions to implement all aspects of this Plan will commence in 2005/6. Many of the actions do not have finite end dates, but we would expect substantial progress in most areas by April 2008, except where alternative dates are given.

We will:

- Review with partners the need to set further specific target dates, beyond the dates for performance targets already included in the main report by April 2007

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The Assembly Government recommends the following definition of 'homelessness':

'Where a person lacks accommodation or where their tenure is not secure'.

Examples of people covered by this definition will include people who are:

- sleeping rough
- living in insecure/temporary housing (excluding assured/assured shorthold tenants)
- living in short term hostels, night shelters, direct access hostels
- living in bed and breakfasts
- moving frequently between relatives/friends
- squatting
- unable to remain in, or return to, housing due to poor conditions, overcrowding, affordability problems, domestic violence, harassment, mental, physical and/or sexual abuse, unsuitability for physical needs etc.
- threatened with losing their home and without suitable alternative accommodation for any reason, e.g.
- leaving hospitals, police custody, prisons, the armed forces and other institutions or supported housing,
- required to leave by family or friends or due to relationship breakdown,
- within three months of the end of tenancy, facing possession proceedings or threat of eviction.

The Assembly Government recommends the following definition of 'rough sleeping':

'People who are sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air; people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation'. This definition will include for example, people sleeping on the streets, in doorways, in parks, in bus shelters, or buildings not designed for habitation, such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, squats, tents, or makeshift shelters.'

