

Including the Homeless

**A Strategy to promote
the social inclusion of
homeless people, and
those at risk of
becoming homeless,
in Northern Ireland**

July 2007

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

Although I have only recently taken up my responsibilities as Minister with responsibility for housing, I am well aware of the issues surrounding homelessness and the part that the Department for Social Development and other departments and agencies are playing in dealing with the problem and the consequential effects.



Homelessness has increased in recent years in Northern Ireland and this has been a major cause for concern for all those with an interest in housing issues. One of the Department for Social Development's strategic objectives is tackling disadvantage among individuals, neighbourhoods and communities. Addressing the causes and effects of homelessness clearly comes within the scope of this objective.


The Northern Ireland Housing Executive was one of the first housing authorities in the UK to develop a Homelessness Strategy. The Housing Executive's Strategy is focussed on helping people to avoid homelessness, and on re-housing them if they lose their homes.

However, homelessness is much more than a housing issue, as homelessness can occur as a result of poor health, unemployment or poverty. There are also clear links between many cases of homelessness and substance misuse. These issues, together with the lack of a stable home environment, can make it difficult for homeless people to access a whole range of services. Homelessness can in fact break the connections with the wider world that the rest of us take for granted.

The Department for Social Development has been leading a Working Group which was set up to consider homelessness in the context of Promoting Social Inclusion. This Strategy, which has been developed and agreed through extensive consultation, aims to assess the scale and nature of the problem, to identify the Government departments, other agencies and voluntary organisations that have a part to play and to set out proposals for action. I am grateful to all those who contributed to this work. The Department will continue to take responsibility for managing the implementation of the Strategy and will work with the other organisations involved to achieve the Strategy's objectives.

The Strategy aims to encourage a very wide range of bodies to do their best to make sure that homeless people are not excluded from the life of the community. The Action Plan which forms part of this Strategy document necessarily reflects the highly detailed nature of the many operational initiatives designed to meet this objective. However, I welcome the fact that the document also includes a set of Guiding Principles which clearly express the values on which the Strategy is based.

I want everyone in Northern Ireland, including the homeless, to have access to the services to which they are entitled and to have an opportunity to play their part in our society. I regard this Strategy as a significant addition to the Department's programme for tackling disadvantage and building communities and look forward to its successful implementation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Ritchie". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and larger than the others.

MARGARET RITCHIE MLA

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Given the complexity and range of the full spectrum of issues involved in promoting social inclusion of the homeless and those threatened with homelessness, clear signposts to sharpen the focus on achieving the aims and objectives are essential. These are provided in the form of sixteen Guiding Principles that will give effect to the Strategy.

Government Departments will work in partnership and collaboratively, together with other social partners to:

- 1. *Strategic direction*** – promote the social inclusion of the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless as a top priority (or appropriate priority) within the context of Lifetime Opportunities and adopt a cross departmental, cross-sectoral approach, forging joint working partnerships with others to promote dialogue and facilitate better strategic planning;
- 2. *“Definition” of problem*** – promote the sharing of information and improvement of their collective understanding of the "definition" of homelessness, the cause and effect, scale and nature of homelessness, and the consequential extent and nature of housing need and factor conclusions into strategic plans for future housing provision to underpin good practices, ensuring as far as possible that solutions address the problems and competing needs in a balanced way; reduction targets to be considered;
- 3. *Housing provision*** – promote the opportunity for everyone to access decent, affordable and energy efficient housing in safe and sustainable communities with access to services and opportunities that contribute to their improved health and social well being and helps them to sustain their tenancy, and live, where possible, within the community;
- 4. *Information and advice*** – promote the provision of timely, joined-up, "free" information and advice to those already homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless;
- 5. *Staff training & education*** – promote better informed, educated and trained public sector staff about homelessness issues;
- 6. *Eligibility and selection criteria*** – promote fair and effective eligibility and selection criteria in the allocation of accommodation which targets those in greatest need, with each case considered on its own merits and without automatic exclusions;
- 7. *Delivery of services*** – promote the delivery of services in a seamless, joined-up, responsive, and integrated way through multi-agency, and multi-disciplinary planning and provision where possible, building on existing examples of good partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors, and

delivering those services timely and to agreed standards and targets whilst monitoring and reviewing progress; joint protocols will be essential;

8. *Health and mental well being* – promote the health and mental well-being of the homeless and ensure they have access to quality health and social services when required; consider rolling out existing models of good practice across Northern Ireland at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homelessness in each Health and Social Services Trust area;

9. *Targeting more vulnerable people* – promote holistic support and targeting of those more vulnerable people in our communities who have more complex needs, with due care and diligence to all concerned to help them to find suitable, affordable accommodation and sustain independent living especially

- a. prisoners or potential prisoners;
- b. people suffering from alcohol or drug misuse;
- c. ethnic minority groups and people subjected to hate crime;
- d. people suffering from domestic violence;
- e. migrant workers;
- f. rough sleepers;
- g. people who are physically disabled or with a mental health problem or learning disability;
- h. travellers;
- i.. young people especially those leaving care

10. *Education* – promote awareness of and educate teachers and pupils on homelessness issues within schools to help prepare young people for adult life and independent living; provide education and training which allows them to maximise their potential and secure employment to help ensure they have a good foundation for inclusion in society and prevent them falling into homelessness; advise and support those most at risk of homelessness;

11. *Employment and learning* – promote new ways to help homeless people into employment, actively promote examples of good practices and successful outcomes, and encourage employers to be proactive in signposting employees to, or involving. advice services (where appropriate)- especially in instances of long term sick or termination of employment;

12. *Private rented sector* – promote improvements in standards and tenancy conditions (including rent controls) within the private rented sector and maximise the opportunity that this sector affords to provide accommodation;

13. *Social Security Benefits* – promote, if necessary and where possible, improved access to social security benefits for those becoming homeless, benefit information services, increased uptake of benefits and timely processing of

claims to prevent people getting into financial difficulty;

14. *Housing Benefit* – promote the most effective provision of housing benefit at rates which are considered appropriate for accommodation costs;

15. *Financial services* – promote access to financial services / debt management advice services to help minimise repossessions and homelessness;

16. *Equality of opportunity* – promote new ways to eliminate the stigma of homelessness and any consequential discrimination and inequality.

ACTION PLAN

The Strategy's Guiding Principles are underpinned by a detailed Action Plan intended to give effect to the Strategy. The Action Plan is based on the recommendations which emerged from consultation and each action is linked to the sixteen Guiding Principles.

STEERING GROUP

A cross-departmental, cross-sectoral Steering Group will be established to ensure that the Action Plan is implemented.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

- 1.1 Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion and has increased dramatically in Northern Ireland in recent years. Between 1999 and 2003, the number of households who made homelessness applications to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive increased by 49% and the number accepted as homeless increased by 65%. During 2005 - 2006, a total of 20,121 households presented as homeless. This represents a 15.9% increase on the previous year. Around 9,749 households presenting as homeless were awarded priority status. Of these households, 2,334 attributed their "homeless" status to accommodation not being reasonable and around 30.2% attributed their status to sharing breakdowns / family disputes and marital or relationship breakdowns.
- 1.2 The total number of applicants to the Common Waiting List in 2005 - 2006 was 32,215, an increase of 8% on the previous year. Of these applicants, 17,433 were in "housing stress". Single households made up the majority of these cases.
- 1.3 Figures for households presenting as homeless in Northern Ireland from 1 April 2004 to 30 September 2006, broken down by household type, are set out in Appendix 1, Table 1. Figures for homeless households awarded priority status in Northern Ireland from 1 April 2004 to 30 September 2006, broken down by 'reason for homelessness', are presented in Appendix 1, Table 2.

Purpose

- 1.4 The Government is committed to preventing homelessness wherever possible, and tackling it effectively when it occurs. Government Departments and Non Departmental Public Bodies have actively been addressing the problems and issues associated with "homelessness" within their legislative remits. However, to date this work has largely been carried out on an individual department / agency basis. The voluntary sector has found itself playing a key role not just in terms of advocacy, information and advice, but also providing for those people who have limited access to government services. Individuals affected can be particularly vulnerable and are quite often socially excluded. There is a pressing need for effective co-ordination in this area and greater combined drive to promote social inclusion.
- 1.5 This document sets out the Government's strategy to promote the social inclusion of homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless in Northern Ireland. It:
 - considers the "definition" of homelessness and its scale and impact, including the factors which can contribute to social exclusion;
 - identifies many of the services across Government Departments, relevant agencies, and the voluntary sector which are already in place to address the

- problem;
- recognises the important role that the voluntary sector has to play; and
 - sets out an agreed set of Principles, an initial Action Plan and Way Forward which will meet the Government's aims for the future by underpinning the way in which all relevant bodies will collaborate and co-ordinate their services to promote the social inclusion of this deprived and marginalised group of people in our community.

Promoting Social Inclusion

- 1.6 The Strategy is directly related to Northern Ireland's Social Inclusion Policy, which encourages Government Departments to form inter departmental groups and work together with social partners to:
- identify and tackle factors which can contribute to social exclusion;
 - undertake positive initiatives to improve and enhance the life and circumstances of the most deprived and marginalised people in our community.
- 1.7 Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) is an important element of the wider Lifetime Opportunities – the Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland which was launched by the Secretary of State on 13 November 2006. Lifetime Opportunities adopts a life cycle approach with targets and goals specifically aimed at key stages in people's lives. It incorporates the key principle of targeting resources and effort within programmes at those areas, groups and individuals in greatest objective need.
- 1.8 People who are in social need may be disadvantaged in many ways. They may, for example, be poorly skilled, unemployed or living on a low income. They might live in areas blighted by crime. They may not have a home or may have difficulties accessing services that others take for granted, for example those with mental health problems or learning difficulties. Some people are subject to combinations of problems and the effects of these are so severe that it is impossible for them to lead what most people would consider to be normal everyday lives.
- 1.9 The term 'social exclusion' describes what can happen to people who are subject to the most severe problems. Whilst social exclusion has to do with poverty and joblessness, it is much more than that. *It is about being cut off from the social and economic life of your community.*

Homeless people identified as high risk

- 1.10 Factors that contribute to social exclusion do not always fit comfortably within the areas of responsibility of individual Government Departments or other agencies. Attempts to deal with these issues can therefore lead to duplication in some areas and gaps in others. Furthermore, there are some groups whose members tend to be

more at risk of exclusion than others and whose needs must be addressed by Departments and other agencies in a much more collaborative and coherent way. In 2001, a consultation exercise took place on the future priorities to be tackled under the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative. Responses to the consultation identified homeless people as one of the groups at greatest risk of social exclusion.

- 1.11 In 2002, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Social Development Committee produced a report on homelessness which called for a joined-up approach to dealing with, and committing resources to, homelessness. In the same year, NIHE published its Homelessness Strategy, which set out a new and comprehensive approach to helping people to avoid homelessness and tackling homelessness when it occurs. In May 2004, the Public Accounts Committee reported on the Northern Ireland Audit Office's publication, Housing the Homeless and made a number of recommendations for future actions.

Establishment of PSI Cross-Departmental, Cross-Sectoral Working Group

- 1.12 Against this background, a cross-departmental, cross-sectoral Working Group was established in 2004 to promote the social inclusion of the homeless. Known as the PSI Working Group, it was led by the Department for Social Development and its Terms of Reference were:

“within the context of the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN, to consider how government Departments, Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies can best work together to firstly, ensure that the risk of homelessness is reduced and secondly, that the full range of appropriate services is available to those who find themselves homeless so that they can make the choices required to play a full part in society”.

- 1.13 The reviews by NIHE and the Assembly's Social Development Committee and the report from the Public Accounts Committee have provided a basis on which to improve existing arrangements for dealing with homelessness. The PSI Working Group sought to build further upon the recommendations from these and other relevant reviews. Notably, the Group included representatives from both statutory and voluntary sector organisations with an interest in homelessness or the potential to make a difference to homeless people. This approach is a clear recognition of the important role that the voluntary sector has played. Membership of the Group is listed at Appendix 2.
- 1.14 In the course of its work, the PSI Working Group considered research and statistics on homelessness; the roles and responsibilities of all statutory, public and voluntary sector bodies in relation to homeless people; models of good practice, and importantly the views of homeless people and their representatives. A number of focus groups were convened with advice agencies, temporary accommodation providers and homeless people themselves. The focus groups considered questions

relating to housing, health and social services, money and benefit issues, education, employment, criminal justice and community safety. The service users involved made a valuable contribution towards identifying potential measures to prevent homelessness as well as methods of improving access to services and service delivery

1.15 The PSI Working Group's Review was informed initially by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's homelessness statistics. However, it was recognised that these statistics did not reflect the "hidden" homelessness figures. Hence, given its desire to address the full extent of homelessness, the Working Group took account of not only those who are defined in current legislation as homeless or threatened with homelessness, but also those in any of the following situations:

- Persons without shelter of any kind, including people sleeping rough, victims of fire and flood, and newly arrived immigrants;
- Persons living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for homeless people;
- Persons in "insecure" accommodation, rather than held on an impermanent tenure, including those only with short term permission to stay and those with no legal rights or permission to remain in accommodation;
- Persons involuntarily sharing accommodation in unreasonable circumstances and
- Persons threatened with homelessness, including those in institutions and due for release with no accommodation, those facing possession proceedings and those required to leave current accommodation.

1.16 The Working Group's "definition of homelessness" for the purposes of the Review is given in full in Appendix 4.

Consultation

1.17 The Working Group published a draft report Promoting the Social Inclusion of Homeless People: Addressing the Causes and Effects of homelessness in Northern Ireland, in November 2004 for consultation. The aim of the consultation was to facilitate the development of a strategy through which relevant service provider agencies can work together to reduce social exclusion by preventing and responding to homelessness.

1.18 There was an unexpectedly high level of very detailed responses from a wide range of bodies including NIHE, Housing Associations, Northern Ireland Prison Service, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, district councils and political parties. In addition the Council for the Homeless (NI) organised a two-day conference to discuss and formulate responses and queries in relation to the consultation document. A list of those who responded is attached at Appendix 3.

Acknowledgement

- 1.19 The Department gave detailed consideration to all responses. Whilst some of the responses raised new issues and potential actions, those who responded were broadly supportive of the Working Group's findings and these have been taken forward in the context of this Strategy.
- 1.20 The Department is grateful for all the responses it received and would particularly like to thank the Council for the Homeless (NI) for leading on the formulation of replies. The participation of homeless people and frontline agencies in the focus groups, and all others who shared their views on how best to prevent and respond to homelessness is equally appreciated. It is worth noting that some of the most significant responses to the consultation exercise emerged from voluntary sector groups and these have largely shaped the content of the Strategy. Our appreciation also goes to those departments & agencies who responded so enthusiastically and constructively in the last few months thereby ensuring the Strategy was produced.

The Strategy

- 1.21 The consultation responses have been analysed by Department for Social Development officials who subsequently engaged with other relevant departments and organisations to discuss the feasibility of implementing the identified actions. There have inevitably been difficulties in reaching agreement with all parties on all the recommended actions, in particular getting a firm commitment to implementation of the recommendations. It is regrettable that this exercise took longer than anticipated however, the discussions are now sufficiently progressed for the Department to present this Strategy Document.
- 1.22 It should be noted that the Working Group's analysis included the most recent figures then available (2003/04) but made extensive use of figures for 2002/03, as it was possible to conduct a more detailed analysis of that year. Figures for 2004/05 and 2005/06 which were subsequently considered confirmed that trends identified in earlier years are continuing. It is considered that the Working Group's research, although based on earlier statistics, nevertheless remains valid and has therefore been applied to the development of this Strategy.
- 1.23 The remainder of this document contains the following Chapters:
- Chapter 2 – provides an assessment of “what it means to be homeless”;
 - Chapter 3 – presents the scale and nature of the problem in Northern Ireland;
 - Chapter 4 – describes a number of services and actions currently provided;
 - Chapter 5 – sets out the Strategy, including the Vision, Values, Aims and Objectives, Guiding Principles and Action Plan;
 - Chapter 6 – the Way Forward - including reference to financial implications;
 - Chapter 7 – refers to Equality matters.
- 1.24 The Action Plan is detailed in Appendix 5.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE 'HOMELESS'?

The definition of homelessness

- 2.1 'Homelessness' does not only mean people sleeping on the streets or without a roof over their heads. People who are homeless may be living in temporary accommodation, staying with friends or even, in some circumstances, living in their own home. Because the legal definition says that accommodation should be 'reasonable', people may be considered as homeless if their accommodation is not reasonably habitable, or if they have special needs that their accommodation does not meet.
- 2.2 Northern Ireland's existing homelessness legislation (the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988) provides that a person is 'homeless' if they have no accommodation available for their occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. A person will not be treated as having accommodation unless it is reasonable for them to continue to occupy it, and it is available for occupation by them and anyone who might reasonably be expected to live with them.
- 2.3 Homelessness is more than just a housing issue and can occur as a result of poor health, unemployment or poverty. If services are not in place to effectively address these issues, then the lack of a stable home environment can result in a wide range of problems including difficulties in accessing services.

The stigma of homelessness

"Being homeless can happen to anyone"

- 2.4 There is a widely held belief that homelessness is primarily caused by personal or individual failings. There is also a general lack of awareness of the structural factors which play a part in determining which people in society become homeless. This general societal view is illustrated in the results of a survey of the population undertaken on behalf of the Simon Community Northern Ireland. It was found that 41% of respondents felt that the principal responsibility for causing homelessness lay with the individual concerned, while a further 25% allocated principal responsibility to the homeless individual's family.
- 2.5 However, statistical analysis demonstrates that homelessness is most likely to affect two particular household types - single person households and lone parent households. This suggests that the structural factors that can cause homelessness are likely to be as significant as factors such as the personal ability of the individual to successfully resolve or manage issues.
- 2.6 Stereotypes about why people are homeless, the type of people who become homeless and assumptions about their behaviour can affect the services available to them. For example, stereotypes might mean that the services designed to assist

homeless people are threatened, or that the opening of a hostel for homeless people is opposed by other members of the community.

- 2.7 These stereotypes contribute to a stigma of homelessness. This stigma may be found within the community as a whole, where opposition to the presence of homeless people, in what is usually their own community, serves to increase their social exclusion.

"You have to deal with the opinions from outsiders - the stigma of where you live - your address"

- 2.8 Stigma may also be perceived by employers or by service providers. It can make it more difficult for homeless people to resettle into a permanent home, to receive the health or social support that many people take for granted, to access employment or to take an active role within their own community.
- 2.9 Focus groups with providers of temporary accommodation have found that it is believed, both by homeless people and by those who work with them, that employers often have preconceived ideas about homeless people and believe that they are not employable. Research across the UK has found that three out of five homeless people felt that employers were less likely to give a job to a person who was homeless.
- 2.10 Homeless people have the same entitlements to services, employment and safe, reasonable housing as everyone else. Prejudice which prevents them accessing these things only makes it more difficult for them to resettle as part of a community.
- 2.11 The stigmatisation of homelessness can also deter people with housing problems from seeking help. There may be reluctance, particularly among rural homeless people, to seek help from statutory or voluntary agencies, due to feelings of stigma associated with the term 'homeless'. Other problems, such as domestic violence, may be associated with stigma in themselves, making victims reluctant to run further risks such as becoming homeless. It is vital that information and support is available to those who need it, and that users of services are not stigmatised simply because they are in need.
- 2.12 Addressing the stereotypes that affect homeless people is a key challenge in improving the services available to them. Promoting the social inclusion of this group requires recognition that human rights and equality of opportunity apply to homeless people as much as they apply to anyone else.
- 2.13 It is, however, necessary to take a realistic view of the cultural changes that can be achieved. Unless existing community attitudes are challenged, it will continue to be difficult to deliver services to people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness. Mechanisms are needed which encourage key stakeholders within

communities to come together to agree solutions, rather than preventing service delivery or forcing services to move elsewhere.

Shared Future - Good Relations

- 2.14 The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland, A Shared Future, pointed to the need for local communities to be supported and assisted to find local solutions and local accommodations where poor relations exist between communities. Local communities were encouraged to build partnerships between each other and within themselves, and to engage in the ownership, development and implementation of programmes to meet these needs.
- 2.15 A Shared Future takes account of the need for 'good relations' to go beyond relations between the two main community traditions in Northern Ireland. They should address differences within these communities as well as the needs of other groups – persons of different race, sexual orientation, persons with a disability and other groups covered by equality legislation. Consultation on A Shared Future identified 'a real need for civic leadership' in order to facilitate the promotion of respect and diversity.' A similar approach to integrating communities and challenging stigma may be effective in respect of people who are homeless.

The impact of homelessness

- 2.16 *Homelessness can be both a cause and effect - leading to a continuous downward spiral of social exclusion.* Socially excluded households are more likely to become homeless. Households that are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, may find it more difficult to access relevant services. Yet being homeless is likely to create a greater need for some services. Homelessness can therefore be both a cause and an effect of social exclusion and can create or contribute to a continuous downward spiral.
- 2.17 *Homelessness can lead to health deterioration and difficulty accessing primary and secondary care.* The stress associated with becoming homeless can have a significant negative impact on both physical and mental health. At the same time, accessing primary care health services, such as registering with a GP and obtaining referrals for secondary health care, may become more difficult, particularly if a household is living in emergency or temporary accommodation.
- “You do get GPs who are very supportive of homeless people and there are others who don't want to know homeless people, who stereotype the homeless person and so are not prepared to take on anybody”.*
- 2.18 *Homelessness can lead to difficulty accessing Social Security Benefits and Financial Services leading to poverty and debt.* Once homeless, it may be more difficult to produce acceptable evidence of identity, which is a requirement for

anyone seeking to obtain financial services, such as opening a bank account or receiving welfare benefits. Existing debts, such as rent arrears, can mean that accommodation is harder to obtain. Financial exclusion can in turn affect access to transport, which may be necessary in order to access services.

- 2.19 Research has identified levels of poverty in Northern Ireland that are higher than Great Britain, though similar to levels in the Republic of Ireland. Certain household types are more likely to experience poverty, including younger households, lone parent households and households where there is no family member in work due to unemployment, sickness or disability.
- 2.20 In addition levels of financial exclusion are also higher in Northern Ireland. People who lack access to mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, particularly current accounts, are unable to avail of discounts that may be offered on payments via direct debit, and are more likely to borrow from sources such as moneylenders charging higher rates of interest. Homeless people are one of the groups that have been identified as being at particular risk of financial exclusion.
- 2.21 ***Homelessness can lead to difficulty accessing or keeping employment.*** Homelessness also has implications for employability. The increased stress and health problems that are often a consequence of becoming homeless can make getting or keeping a job more difficult. Living in temporary accommodation can mean that some jobs, for example those involving being on call or night work, are inaccessible because they conflict with hostels' opening hours.
- 2.22 ***Homelessness can lead to difficulty accessing education, achieving results and retaining social & community links.*** Where families with children are in temporary accommodation, access to education services can be disrupted, particularly if the household moves between a number of different placements. This can have an adverse impact upon the attainment and achievement of children in school, potentially creating difficulties for them in later life.

"I have been at four different schools since we left home last year. I haven't had time to make new friends - I still think of my friends as the ones I had when I went to my old school. None of them know me now." (11 year-old girl living with her family in temporary accommodation)"

Social Exclusion

- 2.23 ***Homelessness is therefore not an isolated problem, but part of a broader phenomenon of social exclusion.*** Research across Europe suggests that there is persuasive evidence about 'the relationship between homelessness and other factors which are either an indicator of social exclusion or associated with high social risk. Two such factors are poverty and long-term unemployment.

Promoting Social Inclusion

2.24 For all these reasons, homelessness is highly relevant to Lifetime Opportunities policies. Promoting the inclusion of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness requires a co-ordinated approach from government departments, particularly those with responsibility for housing, providing health and social services, tackling poverty, preparing people for and supporting them into employment, and promoting community safety. As a result of the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative, relevant departments and other agencies are committed to working in partnership to tackle social exclusion among homeless people in a coherent way.

“We are all human beings when it comes down to it at the end of the day.....it shouldn't differ because you are homeless”.

CHAPTER 3: SCALE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Homelessness Statistics

- 3.1 The NIHE collects statistics on those who apply to it for assistance under the homelessness legislation. However, the true figure of homelessness is difficult to ascertain and may therefore be hidden, as individuals or households experiencing homelessness may not approach NIHE or a registered housing association.
- 3.2 Rural homelessness in particular may be hidden, with the result that, without information about levels of homelessness, agencies can experience difficulties in demonstrating the need for services or the nature of the services required.
- 3.3 The NIHE statistics refer to ‘presenters’ and ‘full duty applicants’. The category ‘presenters’ includes all applicants for whom NIHE conduct a homelessness assessment, whether or not the applicants are subsequently found to be homeless under the legislation. The category ‘full duty applicants’ refers to those applicants who are found to be:
- homeless or threatened with homelessness within the next 28 days;
 - eligible for assistance;
 - in priority need and
 - ‘unintentionally’ homeless.

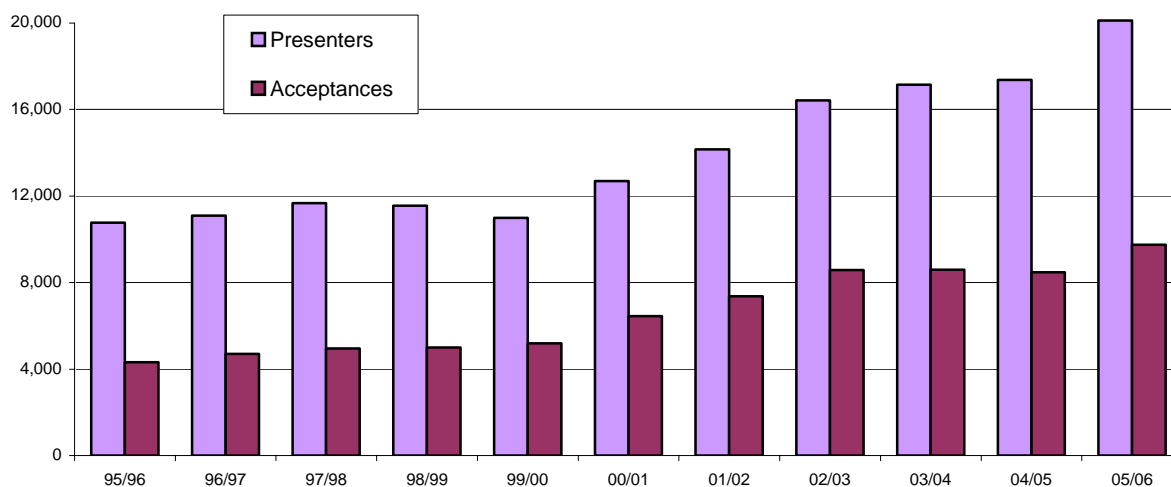
Number of Households presenting as homeless

- 3.4 From 1991 to 1995, an average of around 10,000 households per year presented to the NIHE as homeless. From 1995, this figure began to increase, and after the introduction of the Common Selection Scheme in 2000, the number of presenting households rose substantially in 2001/02 and 2002/03. There were small increases in the following two years (to 17,000 in 2003/04 and to 17,362 in 2004/05) with a substantial increase (to 20,121) in 2005/06. *The number of households presenting as homeless has doubled during the last 10 years, rising from around 10,000 in 1995 to 20,121 in 2006.*

Numbers of presenters accepted as Full Duty Applicants

- 3.5 A corresponding rise has taken place in the numbers who are accepted by the Housing Executive as full duty applicants. *The number of presenters accepted as full duty applicants has doubled during the last ten years rising from around 4,000 in 1995 to 9,749 in 2006, and represent approximately 50% of those presenting.*
- 3.6 The figures in **graph 1** show the comparison between those households presenting and those accepted as full duty applicants over the ten year period from 1995/96 – 2005/06.

Graph 1. Numbers presenting and accepted as full duty applicants, 1995/96-2005/06



Number of people presenting as homeless

- 3.7 In many cases, households consist of more than one person. For example, while the number of households presenting as homeless in 2002/03 was 16,500, these households were made up of over 19,000 adults and 10,500 children (29,500 people in total).
- 3.8 The number of households who were awarded full duty status in 2002/03 was 8,500. These households numbered over 10,000 adults and 7,000 children (17,000 people in total). *The number of people affected by homelessness in 2002/03 was therefore a minimum of 17,000 people (the total number of people in households accepted as full duty applicants).*
- 3.9 The Simon Community NI, using a formula based on NIHE's figures and the average size of presenting families, concluded that the total number of people who became homeless or were threatened with homelessness in Northern Ireland in 2002/03 was even greater, estimated at around 22,500.

Reason for Increases

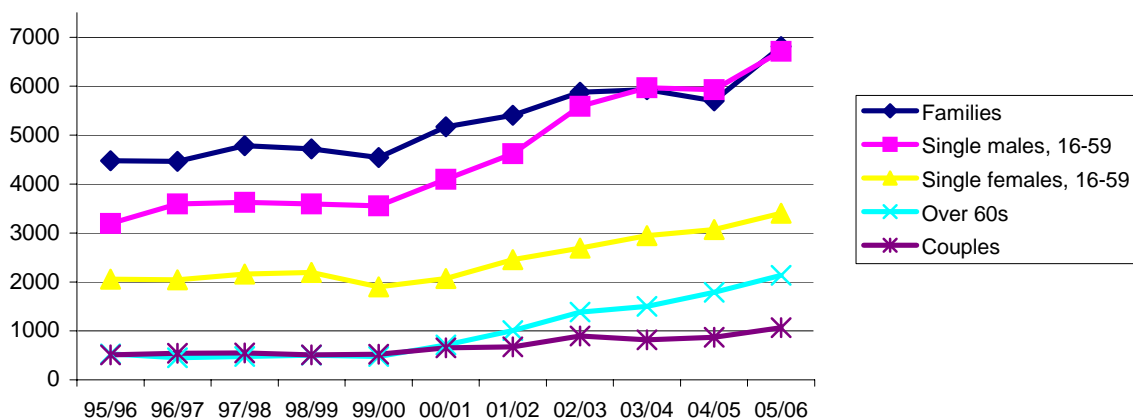
- 3.10 It is likely that part of the increase in the homelessness figures in recent years is due to the introduction of the Common Waiting List and Selection Scheme. The merging of the waiting lists of all the *social landlords* and the introduction of more comprehensive housing need assessments meant that NIHE staff visited hundreds of applicants for the first time and re-visited thousands of others, some of whose circumstances had changed. Where appropriate, these new and re-visited applicants were assessed under the homelessness legislation.

- 3.11 In the year the new Scheme was introduced (2000/01), the number of households recorded as presenting increased substantially, and the number of full duty applicant households increased by one quarter. The greater number of assessments and reassessments picked up many cases of homelessness that were previously undetected, allowing a more accurate estimate of the full scale of homelessness.
- 3.12 It is accepted, however, that the increase in the number of presenters is also likely to be due to an overall increase in the level of homelessness, for a variety of reasons.

Who is most at risk? - Most common household types

- 3.13 The most common household type to present as homeless in 2002/03 was families with dependent children, who constituted over a third of those presenting as homeless. Of these families, three-quarters were headed by a lone parent. The second most common household type to present as homeless was single males aged between 26 and 59 (a quarter of all presenters). There is a considered view that sexual orientation is one of the reasons why young men in particular find themselves homeless.
- 3.14 Between 1995/96 and 2005/06, the numbers presenting as homeless increased across every household type, though some household types increased at a faster rate. (**graph 2**)

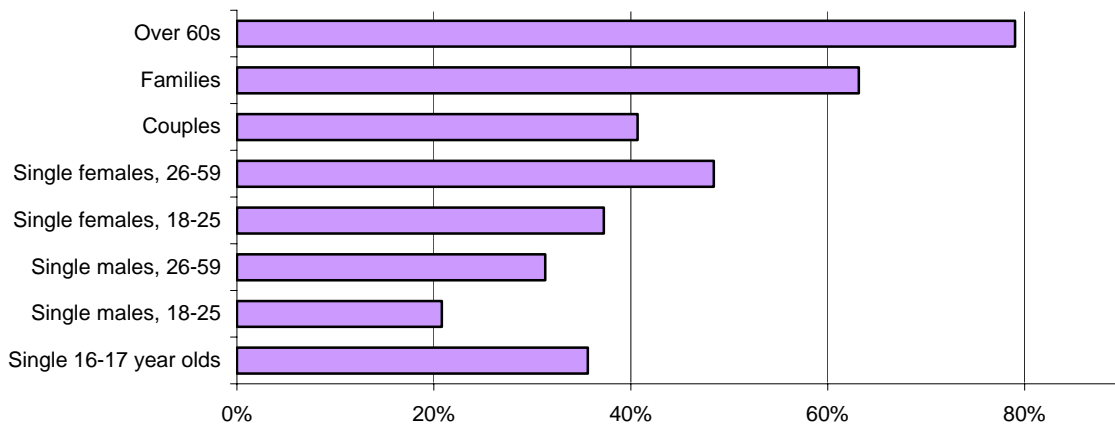
Graph 2. Homeless presenters by household type, 1995/96 to 2005/06



Those most likely to be assessed as full duty applicants

- 3.15 Some households, given the provisions for identifying those in priority need, are more likely to be assessed as full duty applicants. For example, more than four-fifths of the pensioner households who presented as homeless were assessed as full duty in 2005/06, compared to one quarter of single males aged 18-25 (**graph 3**).

Graph 3. Percentage of presenting households in each category accepted as full duty applicants (2005/06)



Why do people become homeless? (Risks and Triggers)

- 3.16 A number of factors can be identified which have a strong influence on the risk of homelessness. Research commissioned by the Scottish Executive has identified the structural factors that determine people's life chances (such as income, employment, access to housing and so on) and concluded that these underpin almost all pathways into homelessness. There are also a number of more individualised characteristics and life experiences that have a strong influence on pathways into homelessness.
- 3.17 The research identified the risk factors associated with homelessness and the immediate triggers which ultimately bring about homelessness.

Risk Factors

3.18 Risk factors may be structural, institutional, or concerned with family background or the individual, as shown in **figure 1**.

<p><u>Structural factors</u></p> <p>Shortage of affordable housing</p> <p>Low income and poverty</p>	<p><u>Individual factors</u></p> <p>Using drink or drugs at an early stage</p> <p>Getting involved with crime at an early stage</p>
<p><u>Institutional factors</u></p> <p>Having been in care</p> <p>Having been in the armed forces</p>	<p>Offending behaviour / experience of prison</p> <p>Lack of qualifications / basic literacy skills</p>
<p><u>Family background factors</u></p> <p>Experience of family homelessness in childhood</p> <p>Family breakdown and disputes</p> <p>Being in reconstituted families with step-parents</p> <p>Sexual or physical abuse in childhood or adolescence</p> <p>Experiencing premature death of parents or step-parents</p> <p>Having parents or step-parents with drug or alcohol problems</p>	<p>Persistent truancy or exclusion from school</p> <p>Young parenthood</p> <p>Lack of social support networks</p> <p>Debts, especially rent or mortgage arrears</p> <p>Causing nuisance to neighbours</p> <p>Drug or alcohol misuse</p> <p>Having poor physical or mental health, or learning disabilities</p> <p>A combination of mental health, drug and alcohol problems</p> <p>Experience of violence from inside or outside the home.</p> <p>Sexual orientation</p>

Figure 1. Risk factors for homelessness

Co-existence of Risk Factors

3.19 Risk factors may co-exist. For example, children who have spent time in care may be more likely to have no educational qualifications, and therefore to be unemployed and at greater risk of homelessness. A targeted approach is required which addresses the needs of those with multiple risk factors, as well as those for whom homelessness or the threat of homelessness is a one-off, crisis event.

Triggers

3.20 Triggers are the immediate events that lead to homeless episodes. Some of the most common trigger events are shown in **figure 2**.

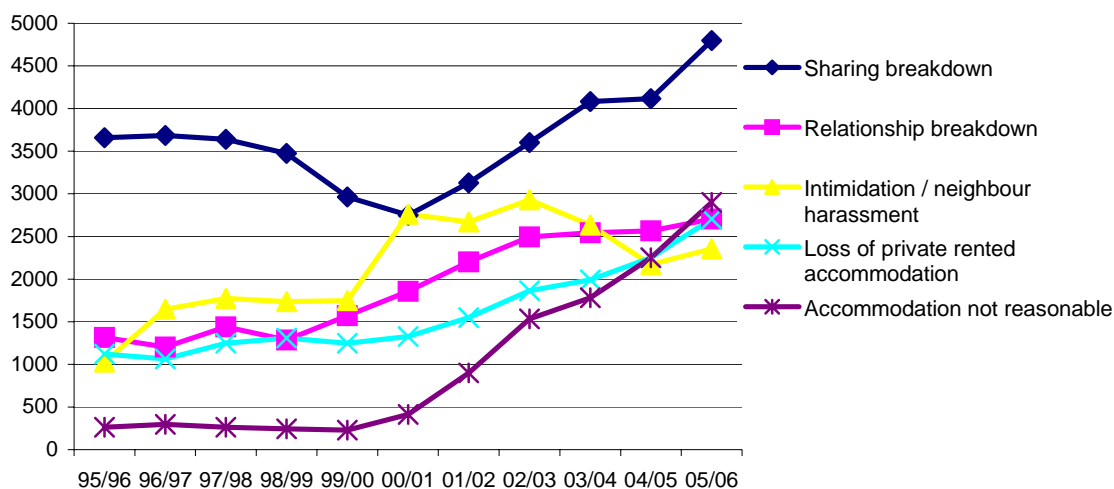
Financial crisis/debt	Leaving the parental home in a crisis
Eviction from owned or rented home	Marital or relationship breakdown
Abandonment of owned or rented home because of financial or other problems (such as neighbourhood harassment or intimidation)	Widowhood
Householders no longer willing to accommodate a sharing household	Deterioration in mental health or increase in alcohol or drug misuse (also exacerbated by homelessness)
	Discharge from the armed forces, or leaving prison

Figure 2. Trigger events

The research states that these trigger factors are almost always combined with an inability to find alternative affordable housing on time and the operation of the social security system (particularly for young people).

- 3.21 Information on the events that lead to homelessness in Northern Ireland is collected by NIHE which, as part of its assessment of people who present as homeless, records their 'reasons for homelessness'.
- 3.22 These figures illustrate the range of trigger events that can lead to homeless presentations and give an indication of the number of people experiencing these situations, but they do not necessarily describe the *causes* of homelessness. For example, there may be many reasons why a sharing breakdown or a family dispute results in homelessness.
- 3.23 Trends in these trigger events can be identified in recent years (a few examples are shown in **graph 4 overleaf**).

Graph 4. Trigger events for homeless presenters, 1995/96 to 2005/06

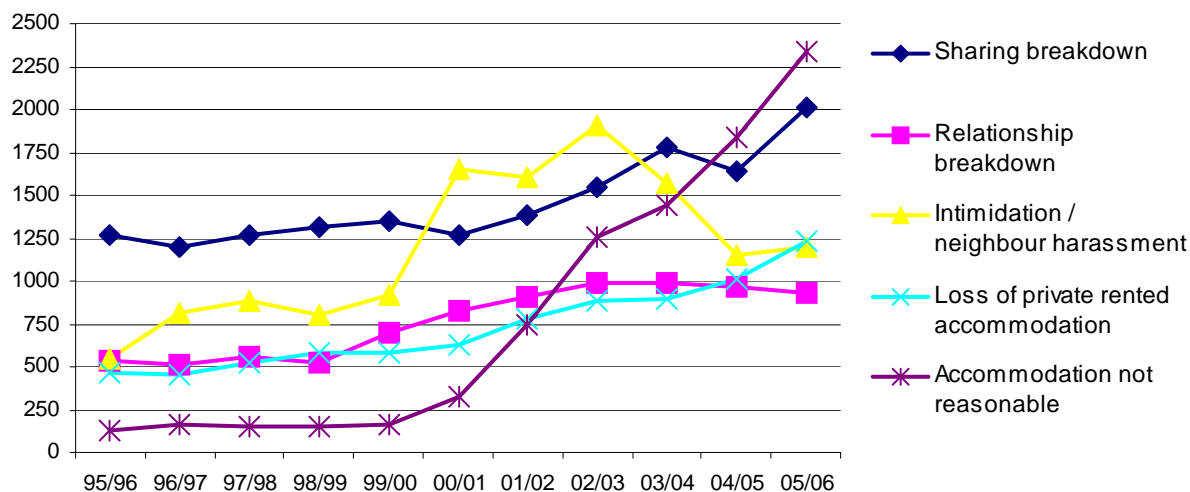


3.24 Notably, there has been a more than tenfold increase in the number of presentations due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ between 1994/95 and 2005/06. Presentations due to ‘marital/relationship breakdown’ more than doubled during the same period and those due to ‘loss of rented accommodation’ almost doubled. There were slower increases across most of the remaining trigger events. Presentations due to ‘intimidation’ are decreasing steadily, while a new category of ‘neighbourhood harassment’ introduced in 1999/2000 fluctuates but the general trend is upward.

3.25 The increases in presentations are reflected to some extent in similar increases in full duty acceptances (as shown in **graph 5 overleaf**). The most dramatic increase has been in the category ‘accommodation not reasonable’, which increased almost twentyfold between 1995/96 and 2005/06.

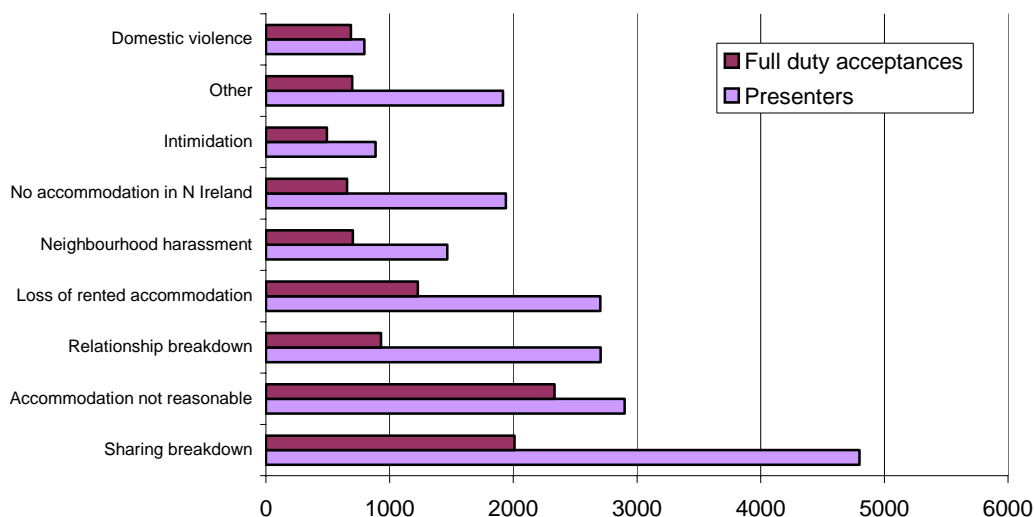
3.26 The numbers of full duty acceptances in other categories have tended to fluctuate between 1995/96 and 2005/06 although ‘domestic violence’ acceptances have increased while acceptances for ‘marital/relationship breakdown’ have fallen slightly in recent years, despite the increase in presentations mentioned above.

Graph 5. Trigger events for full duty applicants, 1995/96 to 2005/06



3.26 The figures for 2005/06 show that the most common reasons given by presenters were ‘sharing breakdown/family dispute’ followed by ‘accommodation not reasonable’. These were also the most common reasons among households who were accepted as full duty applicants, but in reversed order (see **graph 6**).

Graph 6. Trigger events for homelessness, 2005/06

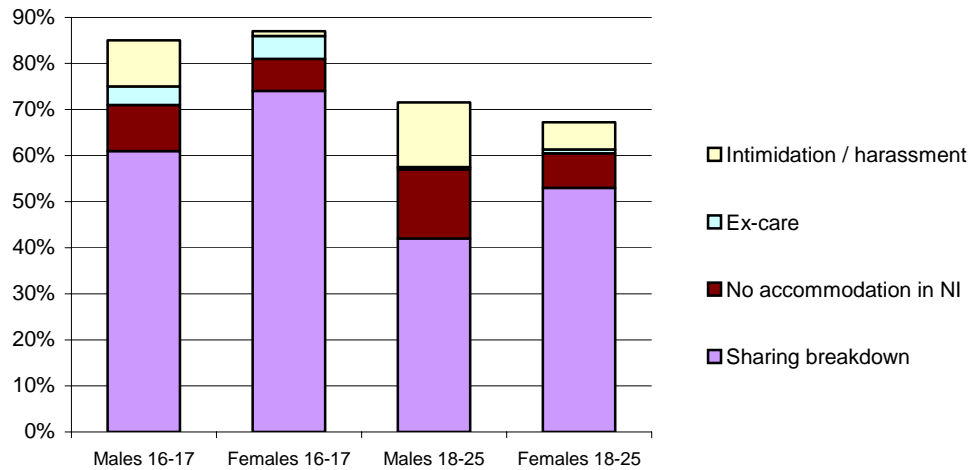


3.27 Different household types tend to present as homeless for different reasons, reflecting the structural causes of homelessness. Thus the most common reasons, as outlined above, reflect the most common reasons among the households who are more likely to present, such as single people or lone parent households.

3.28 If the reasons for homelessness are analysed by household type, new patterns emerge. There is evidence that the number of pensioner households presenting due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ has increased significantly, reflecting the need for

different types of accommodation as mobility and other needs change.

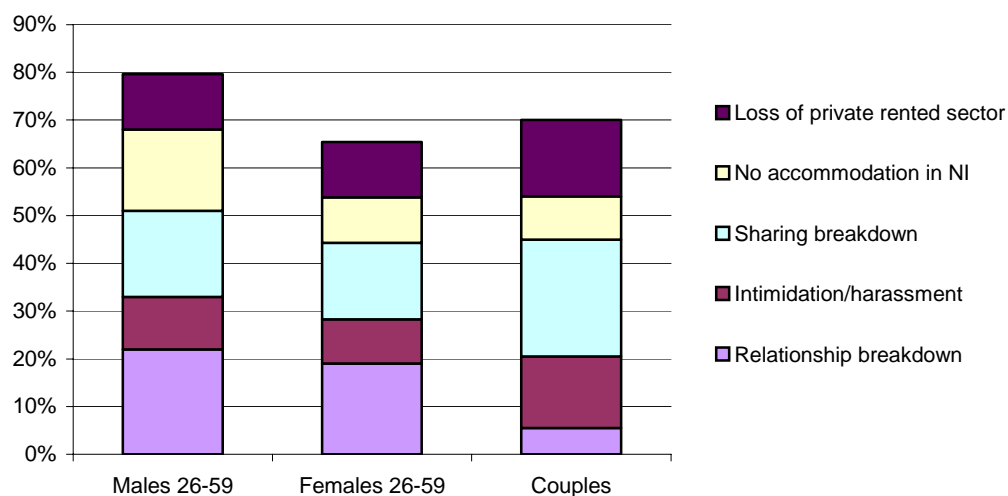
Graph 7. Young single-person households presenting as homeless, by reason (2005/06)



Graph 7 shows young single-person households who presented as homeless in 2005/06. ‘Sharing breakdown’ was by far the most common trigger event cited.

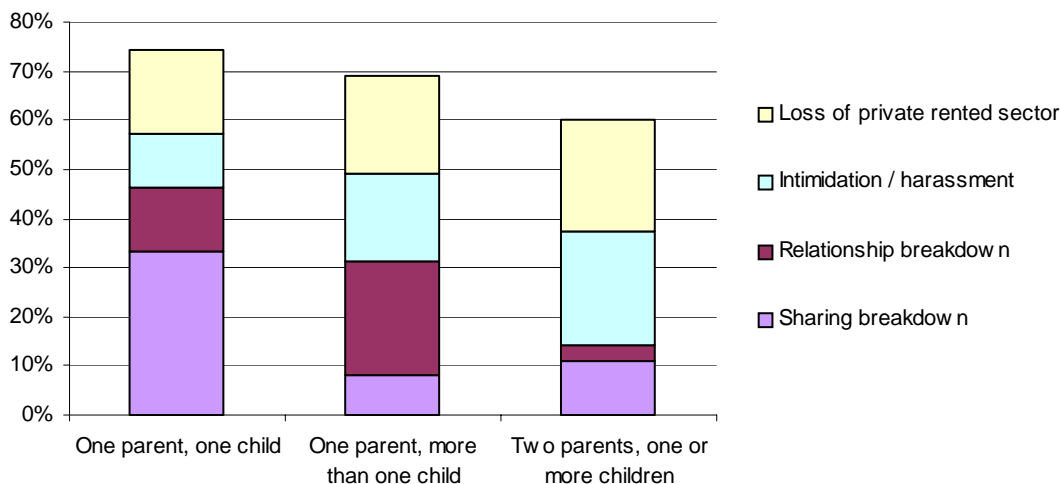
Graph 8 shows older single-person households and couple households who presented as homeless in 2005/06. Among single-person households, the most common trigger event was ‘relationship breakdown’. Among couple households, the most common trigger event was ‘Sharing breakdown’.

Graph 8. Single 26-59 year olds and couple households presenting as homeless, by reason (2005/06)



3.29 Across family household types, the triggers to homelessness were diverse, as shown in **graph 9**. Among households consisting of a lone parent and only one child, ‘sharing breakdown’ was the most commonly cited trigger event.

Graph 9. Family households presenting as homeless, by reason (2005/06)



3.30 Among households consisting of a lone parent and more than one child, ‘relationship breakdown’ was the most commonly cited trigger, along with ‘intimidation/neighbourhood harassment’ and ‘loss of private sector accommodation’. Among households consisting of two parents and one or more children, the most common factor was ‘intimidation/neighbourhood harassment’.

3.31 This does not mean that couples and two-parent households are more likely to experience intimidation or neighbourhood harassment. Rather, it reflects the lower total number of homeless presentations from these groups, and their lower risk of homelessness for other reasons.

3.32 The presence of different trends and trigger events for the various household types indicates the significance of structural causes of homelessness, and suggests that methods of resolving homelessness are required which recognise the impact of these structural causes.

How do people resettle after experiencing homelessness?

3.33 Research suggests that there are a number of routes out of homelessness, which depend on the household type and the reason for homelessness, though it is noted that these routes are strongly mediated by the statutory homelessness duties.

“When you become homeless you have problems and no one is sorting them out. The problems escalate and you become depressed because of where you are – it’s a vicious circle.”

3.34 Some households, for example, single person households, may be able to resolve their homelessness without applying to the statutory or voluntary sector for assistance, or after applying unsuccessfully. However, others may need additional short or medium term support from voluntary or statutory organisations, for example if they have difficulties with addictions or mental health.

3.35 Some households will resolve homelessness through being accepted as full duty applicants and ultimately accessing social housing.

3.36 Some households, for example, young people or those with children who are fleeing abuse, may require temporary support from statutory or voluntary organisations before they access mainstream unsupported housing.

*“I think that young people coming out of care should be placed in suitable accommodation, for example, with peers of their own age, semi-supervised and information, support and advice should be available ...
also emotional support.”*

3.37 People in households with longer histories of repeat and/or continuing homelessness may need resettlement by voluntary or statutory agencies into permanently supported accommodation in order to successfully resolve homelessness.

3.38 The ability to resolve homelessness is therefore affected by a number of factors:

- financial situation;
- access to a family or social support network;
- information on housing options and relevant providers;
- access to good quality advice and assistance;
- access to suitable accommodation;
- full duty applicant status; and
- availability of specialist accommodation and support services in areas where people choose to live.

CHAPTER 4: SERVICES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

Introduction

4.1 Over the last number of years several strategies and measures have been put in place to address homelessness. A number of these, but not all, are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

4.2 The NIHE has certain statutory responsibilities to those found to be homeless. These depend on the nature of each case, and can include providing advice and assistance, providing temporary accommodation for a reasonable period, arranging transport to temporary accommodation if necessary and securing suitable accommodation. Suitable accommodation includes both temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation, usually allocated through the Housing Selection Scheme.

4.3 In addition, NIHE is implementing its Homelessness Strategy, which sets out a comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness. It builds upon existing policies to identify a wide range of improvements that are currently being developed in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations.

Department for Social Development (DSD) / NIHE

4.4 A number of other policies and schemes, run by NIHE and partner agencies and overseen by DSD, are relevant to homelessness. These include:

- Supporting People, which provides housing support to enable vulnerable persons to live independent lives in the community; and
- The Review of the Private Rented Sector, which aims to improve conditions in the sector so that it can be promoted as a supplement to social housing.

4.5 People and Place: A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal sets out government's approach to tackling the problems of multiple deprivation in urban areas. By working across Government, Neighbourhood Renewal aims to deliver improved public services, create safer environments, reduce inequalities within and between communities and more generally promote social inclusion. Such initiatives contribute to the prevention of homelessness, complemented by preventive initiatives provided by other agencies who work with specific client groups or individuals who are at risk.

Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)

- 4.6 Within the Programme for Government, ‘Working for a Healthier People’ was identified as one of five overarching priorities. The Investing for Health strategy, led by DHSSPS set out to improve the health of the people of Northern Ireland and to reduce health inequalities. Homelessness was identified in the strategy as among the causes of poor health and health inequalities, and it was noted that positive engagement with individuals and communities is required to address these issues, in addition to effective partnership working between Departments, other public bodies and the voluntary and community sectors.
- 4.7 DHSSPS has a number of policies, programmes and services which impact upon homelessness, or which relate to the needs that some groups of homeless people may have. For example, some people who are homeless may have experienced domestic violence, they may have mental health or substance misuse issues, or they may be elderly or disabled and have specific health and care requirements.
- 4.8 The impact of homelessness on people using health and social services has been reflected in a number of recent strategies and policy initiatives developed by DHSSPS. For example, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Office, DHSSPS led an interdepartmental working group on domestic violence. The group’s strategy document Tackling Violence at Home: A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland which was published in October 2005 is being taken forward by a regional steering group on domestic violence.
- 4.9 DHSSPS’s Promoting Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan gives an ongoing commitment to further develop policies and programmes to promote mental health, taking account of the particular needs of vulnerable clients, including homeless people. The independent Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, initiated by DHSSPS, has recently published a series of reports on how best to provide services to people with specific mental health needs or a learning disability, and cover relevant social issues, including housing. The Drug Strategy for Northern Ireland and the Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm are being progressed under a joint implementation model, which includes activities targeting homeless people specifically. In addition, the Department’s position paper on Community Nursing (November 2003) provided a framework to enable nurses to more effectively contribute to the specific needs of homeless people and the Oral Health Strategy will address the needs of socially excluded people, including people who are homeless.
- 4.10 DHSSPS’s mental health policies and guidance include consultative guidance on discharge from psychiatric hospitals. The Department has also issued guidance on “substitute prescribing”, the aim of which is to help stabilise the often chaotic lifestyles of opiate drug mis-users. In recognition of the fact that some individuals may not be registered with a GP, for reasons which include homelessness, the guidance allows for the individual to self-refer to the secondary care service.

- 4.11 There is also guidance on the provision of services in community settings for older people and other client groups. Guidance in relation to the discharge of older people from hospital, and quality standards established for Assessment and Care Management, have been developed in support of the community care policy. Also, the 'Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership' initiative is designed to respond to community need with particular emphasis on social exclusion, including homeless people.

Health and Social Services Trusts

- 4.12 Health and Social Services (HSS) Trusts have certain accommodation responsibilities to *children in need* (under the Children (NI) Order 1995). Under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, HSS Trusts will, in partnership with others, seek to improve the life chances of young people who are looked after by Trusts as they make the transition from care to independent living.

Northern Ireland Office (NIO)

- 4.13 The NIO published its community safety strategy, Creating a Safer Northern Ireland, which aims to create the conditions which promote an inclusive partnership-based approach in developing community safety initiatives between relevant agencies, voluntary groups, the private sector and local communities. Through the Community Safety Unit, it also co-ordinates the 'Be Safe' initiative and provides funding to a number of support programmes which would benefit homeless people, including Victim Support and Women's Aid.

Probation Board for Northern Ireland

- 4.14 The Probation Board for Northern Ireland aims to minimise homelessness among offenders and to improve offender access to mainstream accommodation through its Accommodation Strategy for Offenders.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

- 4.15 The Northern Ireland Prison Service has carried out a Strategic Review of Resettlement Services, which aims to address the risk factors associated with offending, including issues of homelessness, accommodation and community. The Resettlement strategy Implementation Plan April 2005 – March 2007 is guiding resettlement systems and procedures in all of the Prison and Young Offender Establishments. A lack of adequate and suitable accommodation is a significant factor for re-offending from prison. The NIHE is a member of the Resettlement Multi-Agency Steering Group for Northern Ireland, and has taken this matter into account within Strategic Accommodation Plans. In addition, Substance Misuse Treatment projects, funded by NIO under the Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Campaign, exist in each of the three main prisons, which include 'through-care' or follow-up on release. Work in these projects would include help with housing.

Social Security Agency

- 4.16 In addition to its payment of welfare benefits, the Social Security Agency undertakes work with certain groups of people, such as care leavers, to assist them with the costs involved in acquiring accommodation. For example, through the Social Fund, Crisis Loans can be paid to cover advance rent payments and Community Care Grants can be paid to help with the costs of starting a home.

Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)

- 4.17 DEL has, within the context of the Report of the Northern Ireland Executive's Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment set out an Employability Model within which it seeks to identify and address labour market needs and barriers to employment under four broad headings: Personal Attributes; Personal Circumstances; Managing the Labour Market; and Structural Aspects. Within this model homelessness is recognised as a restriction to a person's employability.
- 4.18 Jobs & Benefits offices and Jobcentres offer a range of services and provisions available to all working age benefit recipients and others who wish to find a job or improve their employability, including the homeless. Interviews which Personal Advisors (PAs) based in these offices have with clients focus on an individual's personal circumstances and explore their experience, skills, strengths, abilities and job goals, whilst aiming to identify any relevant barriers to employment. Based on this information PAs make recommendations from a range of accessible measures, including referral to appropriate specialist agencies, which aim to address the client's specific support needs. Following a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot Targeted Initiatives in 2005/06, DEL put in place in April 2007 community-based and work-focused intermediary services for priority clients in the 'economically inactive' grouping. This grouping would, by common definition, include those who are considered homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This new initiative called LEMIS (Local Employment Intermediary Service) is available at eight locations throughout Belfast, and in Londonderry and Strabane – all areas with significantly high levels of multiple deprivation. As with the Targeted Initiatives, LEMIS providers are each supported by a locally based Stakeholder's forum made up of voluntary / community partners and employers, all of whom are interested in working in partnership to help address employability issues in their areas.
- 4.19 Homeless people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) are required, when they become eligible, to join New Deal as a condition of receipt of payment of JSA. Provision exists however for early entry to the programme of homeless people who so choose. New Deal Personal Advisors can provide support and make referrals to appropriate agencies. In November 2005 a pilot initiative, Progress to Work (NI) (p2w(NI)), was introduced, the aim of which is to improve the employability of clients who are ex-offenders / ex-prisoners or have a history of drug / alcohol misuse or homelessness where these issues are likely to be a significant barrier to

obtaining employment. Initially intended to run until 31 March 2007, following an interim evaluation the pilot has been extended for a further year.

Department of Education

- 4.20 The Department has a number of programmes in place which promote social inclusion and address disadvantage. These programmes do tackle some risk factors associated with homelessness such as poor educational outcomes, persistent non-attendance and challenging behaviour. The School Improvement Programme includes: the School Support Programme, which provides support to low and underachieving schools; the 'Group I' Schools Initiative, which provides more intensive support; and the Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy. The Department's School Improvement Policy is under review and it is intended that a new policy will come into operation from September 2008.
- 4.21 Under the Children and Young People Funding Package, some £10m per annum has been allocated to the Department of Education to develop Extended Schools. The focus is on supporting learning, healthy lifestyles and creativity with funding allocated directly to the school and targeted at the most disadvantaged and marginalised pupils. Support for young people who are disaffected and who have difficulty sustaining a placement in a mainstream school is available through the Education and Library Boards' Education Welfare Service, Behaviour Support Teams and a range of alternative education provision. This support aims to address the barriers to learning at an individual level and keep the young person engaged in beneficial learning

Department for Regional Development

- 4.22 The Department's Regional Development Strategy aims to encourage the development of balanced communities, while its Regional Transportation Strategy aims to improve public transport services, infrastructure and communication methods in order to actively contribute to social inclusion.

Food Standards Agency

- 4.23 The Agency has been carrying out research into food poverty and homelessness in Northern Ireland, the results of which are expected to be published in the near future.

Voluntary Sector

- 4.24 The voluntary sector plays an important role in tackling homelessness and threatened homelessness in Northern Ireland. It delivers a wide range of functions including advocacy services, identifying needs and issues, campaigning, research and consultation, information and advice, policy development, equality / human rights issues and direct provision of accommodation and support services.

4.25 The voluntary sector also adds value to the delivery of services, for example through its specialist knowledge, experience and skills, and its involvement of people in service delivery, whether as users or self-help autonomous groups. Voluntary bodies can offer independence from existing and past structures/models of service, access to the wider community and a degree of flexibility and freedom from institutional pressures.

Housing Associations

4.26 Part of the voluntary sector, housing associations are the main developers of new social housing for rent in Northern Ireland. They deliver affordable rented housing to complement that which is managed by NIHE. Many associations specialise in particular aspects such as meeting the needs of senior citizens, single persons and those requiring more intensive support. The housing association movement has pioneered advances such as sheltered housing, 'Foyers' which combine accommodation and training programmes for young people at risk of homelessness, group housing for members of the Irish travelling community and equity-sharing tenure through the NI Co-ownership Housing Association.

Voluntary and Statutory Partnerships

4.27 Voluntary sector organisations currently work in partnership in a range of contexts to develop and improve the services available to people who are homeless. These include:

- 'www.housingadviceNI.org', a Northern Ireland website containing practical information for the public on homelessness and housing issues (developed by Housing Rights Service in partnership with Shelter and supported by NIHE);
- Community Housing Advice Project, a comprehensive package of advice, training and support services on housing and homelessness for frontline advice agencies across Northern Ireland (provided by Housing Rights Service in partnership with Citizens Advice and Advice NI, currently funded by European Regional Development Fund under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme 3.2, DSD, NIHE and the Community Fund);
- A rural housing strategy (developed by NIHE and based on research carried out by the Council for the Homeless); and
- A Multiple Needs strategy (developed by NIHE and based on research carried out by the Council for the Homeless).

CHAPTER 5: THE STRATEGY - VISION, VALUES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, AND ACTION PLAN.

Introduction

5.1 As can be seen from Chapter 4 there has clearly been considerable development in provision for homelessness within Northern Ireland in recent years and some effective cross-departmental, cross-sectoral partnership working. The PSI Working Group has been greatly impressed and encouraged by the considerable efforts already undertaken to promote the social inclusion of homeless individuals and families and to address the shortcomings in service provision. It is also clear that the voluntary sector representing the homeless is becoming much more involved in the delivery of services and partnership working between voluntary, departmental and non-departmental statutory bodies has improved.

Vision

5.2 Chapters 2 and 3 explore the impact of homelessness on the holistic well-being of individuals, families and communities. Homelessness is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of the broader issue of social exclusion and in many instances is directly linked to poverty and long term unemployment. If this problem is to be addressed fully in the context of the Lifetime Opportunities, then much more needs to be done to tackle the social exclusion of this vulnerable group.

5.3 Decent and available housing is widely accepted as an important catalyst in the process of developing a sense of individual and community well-being, with beneficial consequences in terms of a stable home environment, better health and better educational and employment opportunities. Therefore the prevention of homelessness by targeted intervention, especially for higher risk groups and at trigger events, and the promotion of pathways out of homelessness, are crucial to success.

5.4 Our vision therefore is quite simply:

"that everyone will have access to good quality, affordable, energy efficient housing in the tenure of their choice."

Values

5.5 As described in Chapters 2 and 3, people who are homeless can often face barriers or be denied access to services that others take for granted. But everyone has the same needs for everyday life including housing, health, education, employment, money, and, not least, a social life. One of the Government's key priorities published in the document Northern Ireland - Priorities and Budget 2006 - 2008 is a society based on partnership, equality, inclusion and mutual respect. The priorities reflect the current economic, social and environmental factors that need to be addressed to ensure long-term and sustainable improvements in the quality of

life for all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

5.6 Our values are therefore based on the fundamental belief that individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness should receive services which:

- respect them as individuals - through openness in the provision of information, courtesy, integrity, confidentiality and understanding in individual interactions with service users; and
- demonstrate fairness and equality - resources for services should be allocated and managed according to criteria which are transparent and which demonstrate equity.

5.7 These values are underpinned by our obligations under Equality and Human Rights legislation and have been greatly informed by the core values of both statutory and key voluntary sector organisations.

Aims and Objectives

5.8 The consultation exercise highlighted the need for a strategic, multi agency approach to ensure that homeless people and those threatened with homelessness can access the services to which they are entitled. It also highlighted the need to target support services at the most vulnerable groups, provide specialist services such as debt counselling, and prioritise certain groups such as young homeless people and care leavers.

5.9 The aim of the Strategy is therefore to tackle social exclusion and promote social inclusion by changing the way that things are done so that programmes and services are organised and delivered in ways that are more helpful to disadvantaged people. Based on the consultation exercise, the specific objectives of the strategy are, through collaborative partnership working, joined-up, integrated service provision, and optimisation of resources, to:

- prevent or minimise homelessness where possible,
- make accessible, effective and safe provision for those who are homeless;
- support progression to independent living where possible;
- provide better outcomes for personal and social functioning for all people with housing needs;
- guarantee service users significantly improved experience of and satisfaction with services; and make a real and meaningful difference to their lives;
- improve job satisfaction for staff and volunteers in dealing with homeless individuals or families.

5.10 The overriding aim is essentially to ensure that each person with housing needs receives appropriate, co-ordinated, integrated housing or support services which

are fit for purpose, where and when he or she requires them. Each person should expect to have access to quality information and advice, and receive a high quality seamless service, which is timely and, where possible, individually tailored.

- 5.11 The Strategy naturally adopts a strong "rights based" perspective and envisages a degree of cultural change, with true partnership and empowerment in service planning and provision, effective team working and collaboration and integration with and between provider groups. It provides a unique opportunity to address the full spectrum of issues not only in relation to housing but also the wider holistic perspective of health and social well-being, sustainability within communities and actions to address the current problems and barriers to good practice.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 5.12 Given the complexity and range of the full spectrum of issues involved in promoting social inclusion of the homeless and those threatened with homelessness, clear signposts to sharpen the focus on achieving the aims and objectives are essential. These are provided in the form of sixteen Guiding Principles that will give effect to the Strategy.

Government Departments will work in partnership and collaboratively, together with other social partners to:

- 1. *Strategic direction*** – promote the social inclusion of the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless as a top priority (or appropriate priority) within the context of Lifetime Opportunities and adopt a cross departmental, cross-sectoral approach, forging joint working partnerships with others to promote dialogue and facilitate better strategic planning;
- 2. “*Definition*” of *problem*** – promote the sharing of information and improvement of their collective understanding of the "definition" of homelessness, the cause and effect, scale and nature of homelessness, and the consequential extent and nature of housing need and factor conclusions into strategic plans for future housing provision to underpin good practices, ensuring as far as possible that solutions address the problems and competing needs in a balanced way; reduction targets to be considered;
- 3. *Housing provision*** – promote the opportunity for everyone to access decent, affordable and energy efficient housing in safe and sustainable communities with access to services and opportunities that contribute to their improved health and social well being and helps them to sustain their tenancy, and live, where possible, within the community;
- 4. *Information and advice*** – promote the provision of timely, joined-up, "free" information and advice to those already homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless;

5. ***Staff training & education*** – promote better informed, educated and trained public sector staff about homelessness issues;
6. ***Eligibility and selection criteria*** – promote fair and effective eligibility and selection criteria in the allocation of accommodation which targets those in greatest need, with each case considered on its own merits and without automatic exclusions;
7. ***Delivery of services*** – promote the delivery of services in a seamless, joined-up, responsive, and integrated way through multi-agency, and multi-disciplinary planning and provision where possible, building on existing examples of good partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors, and delivering those services timely and to agreed standards and targets whilst monitoring and reviewing progress; joint protocols will be essential;
8. ***Health and mental well being*** – promote the health and mental well-being of the homeless and ensure they have access to quality health and social services when required; consider rolling out existing models of good practice across Northern Ireland at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homelessness in each Health and Social Services Trust area;
9. ***Targeting more vulnerable people*** – promote holistic support and targeting of those more vulnerable people in our communities who have more complex needs, with due care and diligence to all concerned to help them to find suitable, affordable accommodation and sustain independent living especially
 - a. prisoners or potential prisoners;
 - b. people suffering from alcohol or drug misuse;
 - c. ethnic minority groups and people subjected to hate crime;
 - d. people suffering from domestic violence;
 - e. migrant workers;
 - f. rough sleepers;
 - g. people who are physically disabled or with a mental health problem or learning disability;
 - h. travellers;
 - i.. young people especially those leaving care
10. ***Education*** – promote awareness of and educate teachers and pupils on homelessness issues within schools to help prepare young people for adult life and independent living; provide education and training which allows them to maximise their potential and secure employment to help ensure they have a good foundation for inclusion in society and prevent them falling into homelessness; advise and support those most at risk of homelessness;

- 11. *Employment and learning*** – promote new ways to help homeless people into employment, actively promote examples of good practices and successful outcomes, and encourage employers to be proactive in signposting employees to, or involving. advice services (where appropriate)- especially in instances of long term sick or termination of employment;
- 12. *Private rented sector*** – promote improvements in standards and tenancy conditions (including rent controls) within the private rented sector and maximise the opportunity that this sector affords to provide accommodation;
- 13. *Social Security Benefits*** – promote, if necessary and where possible, improved access to social security benefits for those becoming homeless, benefit information services, increased uptake of benefits and timely processing of claims to prevent people getting into financial difficulty;
- 14. *Housing Benefit*** – promote the most effective provision of housing benefit at rates which are considered appropriate for accommodation costs;
- 15. *Financial services*** – promote access to financial services / debt management advice services to help minimise repossessions and homelessness;
- 16. *Equality of opportunity*** – promote new ways to eliminate the stigma of homelessness and any consequential discrimination and inequality.

Action Plan

- 5.13 The Strategy's Guiding Principles underpin a detailed Action Plan which is intended to give effect to the strategy. The Action Plan is based on the recommended actions which emerged from the consultation exercise as a priority for government departments and others to consider and progress.
- 5.14 In the interests of presenting a complete picture, all actions recommended by those consulted have been presented, in summary format. To maintain the strategic focus, the actions have been directly linked to the sixteen Guiding Principles. They address necessary top down actions as well as those required from the bottom up, ranging from strategic and policy matters to operational and service delivery issues. At this stage it is not possible to proceed with some of the recommended actions because the principle of parity prevents any independent action. For some others, there is already an arrangement in place or the recommended action has been completed. The majority of the remaining recommended actions have now been agreed in principle by relevant departments and agencies, and are in the process of being introduced. For those recommended actions not yet implemented or agreed, further debate and deliberation will be essential as an integral part of the implementation process, which is described in Chapter 6 of this document.
- 5.15 It has not been possible at this stage to agree all target completion dates. Where

possible dates have been specified but they will all be considered and agreed as part of the implementation process.

Other Reports, Strategies and Studies

5.16 A number of other reviews, strategies, studies and projects directly related to housing or with a potential impact on current or future housing provision, are currently under development or recommendations are being considered or implemented. These include for example:

- Sir John Semple's Affordability Review;
- Studies on the Northern Ireland Housing Market, Common Waiting List, and Rent Review;
- Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability;
- OFMDFM's Commitment to Promote Social Inclusion of Lone Parents
- OFMDFM's Racial Equality Strategy
- OFMDFM's 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People
- OFMDFM's Equality Strategy on Sexual Orientation
- OFMDFM's Gender Equality Strategy
- A Shared Future, OFMDFM's policy and strategic framework for good relations
- Proposed piloting of a domestic violence one-stop-shop
- Migrant Worker Strategy and Action Plan (developed by the Migrant Workers Thematic Sub-Group of the Race Equality Forum, which is facilitated by DEL)
- DSD's Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services
- Homelessness and Food Poverty Research (Food Standards Agency)

It will be extremely important to carry out impact analyses and take account of the results of these studies etc. and incorporate outcomes and recommendations into the PSI (Homelessness) Action Plan as required. It will be equally important to build and maintain communications and protocols with key players involved in these areas. to maximise the effect of Lifetime Opportunities for all service users.

Review of Public Administration

5.17 The proposed implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) has the potential to present many challenges to government departments, agencies, political representatives, councils, voluntary and community groups and others over the coming months. Subject to any review of the local government aspects of RPA, it is envisaged that the new district councils will play a central role in planning and delivering services in their areas through the community planning process. Indeed the councils themselves may have a role in the delivery of a range of housing related services. This would entail councils working very closely with bodies like NIHE but also with DSD's Housing Division, Urban Regeneration and

Community Development Group and Voluntary and Community Group, as well as the Department of the Environment and Department for Regional Development. The possible transfer of some responsibilities from NIHE and Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group to the new councils, revision of the planning system, the development of local housing strategies and new local authority community plans would all necessitate strengthened links and partnerships between all concerned to ensure that housing and community planning is addressed effectively and efficiently at local and district level and ensure that the end result is better services for the public. Such strengthened links and partnerships could have a crucial role in effecting this strategy to promote the social inclusion of homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless.

CHAPTER 6: THE WAY FORWARD – IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Introduction

6.1 The Strategy, incorporating the sixteen Guiding Principles and the detailed Action Plan, provides a comprehensive blueprint for realising the new vision for promoting the social inclusion of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. However, the Guiding Principles and Action Plan, as drafted, represent only the starting point in dealing with homelessness issues in an inclusive way. The Strategy will only be effective if:

- the processes by which the new strategy can be realised are specified;
- all the main stakeholders and service providers are committed and involved; and
- the Guiding Principles and Action Plan are treated as "a living implementation framework".

6.2 DSD will continue to assume lead policy and legislative responsibility for homelessness. Other Departments, non-departmental public bodies, and voluntary sector bodies will continue to implement preventive and provision measures as necessary and within their legislative remit. *In addition, to effect the Strategy and promote the social inclusion of the homeless and those facing homelessness, a cross-departmental, cross-sectoral Steering Group will be established.*

Steering Group: Terms of Reference

6.3 The Steering Group will be known as the PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group. It's terms of reference will be :

"to oversee and ensure the implementation of the Guiding Principles and Action Plan as specified in the Strategy or as modified at a later date, to agreed timescales and quality standards, and to monitor and evaluate progress to ensure the Strategy remains appropriately focused and outputs are effective."

6.4 The Guiding Principles and Action Plan will be the framework within which departments, non departmental bodies and the voluntary sector will work together to address the challenges raised by the increasing numbers of homeless people and those facing homelessness. The involvement of voluntary sector representatives will facilitate holistic solutions tailored to users' needs and allow "healthy tensions" between statutory and voluntary groups to be addressed pragmatically. The Strategy will be formally reviewed and approved annually, with Ministers suitably informed, to ensure it remains appropriately focused and capable of being adapted to new needs as they arise.

Steering Group Membership

6.5 The PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary within the Department for Social Development who is responsible for the Resources, Housing and Social Security Group. It will include senior representatives (Grade 5, 6 or 7s) from:

- DHSSPS including Trusts and Bamford Interdepartmental Task force;
- DEL
- DE (as required)
- DSD - Urban Regeneration & Community Development Group
- DSD - Social Security Agency (as required)
- OFMDFM (PSI Lone Parents Project / Strategy for Children and young People)
- Youth Justice Agency
- NIO Criminal Justice (Community Safety Unit)
- Northern Ireland Prison Service
- Probation Service
- NIHE
- NIFHA
- Housing Rights
- Simon Community
- Council for the Homeless (NI)
- Foyer Federation
- Animate or Step (to represent migrant workers)
- Someone representing the interests of victims of domestic violence, travellers and other ethnic minority groups .

Other groups and departments may be invited or attend as required.

Frequency of Meetings

6.6 The PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group will hold its inaugural meeting in June / July 2007 and meet approximately every 2 months thereafter unless the Group decides otherwise.

Secretariat will be provided by DSD Housing Division who will also be responsible for maintaining the Action Plan.

Consideration should be given to maximising electronic facilities at all available opportunities.

Sub Groups

- 6.7 The PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group may be supported by sub-groups set up to carry out research or implementation activity. These will be established as required and after the inaugural meeting of the Steering Group.

Implementation Funding

- 6.8 Lifetime Opportunities means departments using their existing resources more effectively through collaborative, co-ordinated, and joined up services. Similarly, this Strategy is based on the premise that departmental resources already devoted to preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of homeless people will be used in a more joined up way to deliver better services. The implementation of the Action Plan should, in theory, achieve some savings as work on the issues becomes better co-ordinated and actions and information are not unnecessarily replicated by different organisations. However, it is not possible at this stage to determine any savings which might arise as the Action Plan is still fluid and requires considerable discussion and assessment before full implementation.
- 6.9 It is also possible that these discussions may, in due course, highlight new initiatives and the need for more investment to effectively implement the Strategy. It is recognised that current public sector funding is extremely limited and any requirement for additional resources will have to be assessed on the basis of a sound economic appraisal and availability of funds in the light of competing priorities and future expenditure reviews.
- 6.10 On this basis, no savings have been declared and no additional funding has been allocated to implement the Strategy at this stage.

CHAPTER 7: EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

- 7.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:
- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - men and women generally;
 - persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - persons with dependants and persons without.
- 7.2 In addition, public authorities are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
- 7.3 The Northern Ireland Civil Service is fully committed to complying with this statutory duty and the Department for Social Development has set out in its Equality Scheme how it will fulfil those obligations. The Department’s Mission Statement, “Together, tackling disadvantage, building communities” highlights the commitment to work with others to best achieve this objective.
- 7.4 A copy of the Department’s Equality Scheme is available at www.dsdni.gov.uk. Copies are also available from Corporate Policy and Planning Branch, Lighthouse Building, 1 Cromac Place, Gasworks Business Park, Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2JB (tel: 028 9082 9502).

Equality Considerations

- 7.5 While poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional issues that cross all Section 75 equality categories, research has indicated that certain Section 75 groups are more likely to face poverty and social exclusion, particularly those with caring responsibilities.
- 7.6 Research has also shown that women are more likely to face poverty than men, particularly in households where they are the single parent or have caring responsibilities. Households with one or more disabled members are more likely to be in poverty when compared to households with no one with a disability.
- 7.7 Social exclusion, by definition, implies inequality and the policies and programmes which aim to address such inequality can therefore be expected to have an impact on particular equality groups. Chapters 2 and 3 of this document have highlighted the impact, potential scale and nature of homelessness. Clearly

homelessness can have both cause and effect characteristics and lead to a downward spiral of social exclusion. By developing this strategy and tackling the issue of homelessness we are contributing positively to reducing social exclusion and helping those who are disproportionately disadvantaged or subject to inequality. In addition the Guiding Principles have been developed to reflect the evidence based factors of homelessness such as structural, institutional, individual or family background and the many trigger events as described in Chapter 3, with the overarching intention of promoting equality for those who are disadvantaged or marginalised through homelessness.

- 7.8 It is recognised however that more work is required to fully understand the scale and nature of the problem and the second Guiding Principle “Definition of Problem” is specifically intended to address this issue following the establishment of the proposed Steering Group. Until that work is completed it will be difficult to get any further below the surface of any specific inequalities that might exist. It is therefore crucial that the high level equality considerations applied to the development of the strategy to date are supplemented by detailed equality screening / impact assessments where appropriate, prior to implementation of any of the recommended actions which are approved by the Steering Group. In these instances the relevant department or agency will be responsible for ensuring that the necessary screening and full impact assessments are carried out at the due time and prior to implementation.

Involvement of Homeless People or their representatives.

- 7.9 All of the section 75 categories listed in paragraph 7.1 are reflected within the homeless population. In accordance with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister’s Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland, this Strategy takes account of the views of homeless people and their representatives as well as voluntary sector groups involved in service delivery.
- 7.10 We acknowledge that there may be difficulties in involving homeless people in consultation, but nonetheless it is important to engage directly with the whole range of people who are homeless. In particular, it would be useful to establish structures for feedback that can be revisited on a regular basis, to facilitate the evaluation of services. This could encompass methods of prevention in addition to issues of service delivery to those who are homeless.

TABLE 1 HOUSEHOLDS PRESENTING AS HOMELESS (BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE)										
H/HOLD TYPE	04/05 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT	OCT- DEC	JAN- MAR	05/06 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT	OCT- DEC	JAN- MAR	06/07 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT
Single male	1,410	1,488	1,331	1,699	1,685	1,689	1,490	1,845	1,558	1,883
16-18 years	52	56	40	46	52	59	48	51	54	80
19-25 yrs	432	436	388	516	525	526	446	527	484	578
26-59 yrs	926	996	903	1,137	1,108	1,104	996	1,267	1,020	1,225
Single female	766	780	663	862	902	865	717	921	868	1,002
16-18 years	87	78	76	65	90	74	63	85	79	79
19-25 yrs	365	358	304	414	422	422	318	417	418	462
26-59 yrs	314	344	283	383	390	369	336	419	371	461
Couples	268	189 (R)	161 (R)	252	288	242	244	290	358	191
Families	1,261	1,527 (R)	1,194 (R)	1,718	1,624	1,686	1,507	1,988	1,516	2,249
Pensioner h/holds	404	431 (R)	420 (R)	538	523	511	516	588	528	309
Undefined	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	4,109	4,415	3,769	5,069	5,022	4,993	4,474	5,632	4,828	5,634

“(R)” means “revised figure”

TABLE 2 HOUSEHOLDS AWARDED PRIORITY STATUS (BY REASON)										
REASON	04/05 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT	OCT- DEC	JAN- MAR	05/06 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT	OCT- DEC	JAN- MAR	06/07 APR- JUN	JULY- SEPT
Sharing Breakdown/ Family dispute	417	270	521	430	512	495	446	557	435	549
Marital/ Relationship breakdown	246	154	319	249	234	237	211	249	230	254
Domestic Violence	139	104	193	175	172	165	181	170	168	163
Loss of rented Accommodation	265	143	301	301	281	305	275	369	302	372
No Accommodation in NI	149	102	193	150	147	183	162	166	119	165
Intimidation (civil disturbance)	154	90	133	70	100	153	122	119	87	124
Accommodation not reasonable	442	274	604	517	566	524	573	671	599	621
Release from hospital/prison/ Other institution	46	26	57	51	43	43	33	39	38	45
Fire/flood/ Other emergency	19	10	23	21	15	15	23	20	10	13
Mortgage default	19	11	21	26	28	20	27	36	26	32
Bomb/fire Damage (civil disturbance)	20	9	16	15	11	9	15	10	7	7
Neighbourhood harassment	200	120	226	161	185	184	181	155	162	200
Other reasons	50	36	99	83	81	74	77	80	85	94
TOTAL	2,166	1,349	2,706	2,249	2,375	2,407	2,326	2,641	2,268	2,639

Membership of the PSI Working Group

Mr Derek Baker	Department for Social Development (Chair)
Mr John Bourke	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Mr Gerry Coates	First Housing Aid and Support Services
Mr David Crothers	Housing Division, Department for Social Development
Mr Ward Erwin	Criminal Justice Services Division, Northern Ireland Office
Ms Carol Carser	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Mr Nigel Carson	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Mr Michael Graham	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Ms Janet Hunter	Housing Rights Service
Ms Sheena Mairs	Preparation for Work, Department for Employment and Learning
Ms Margaret Cameron	Southern Health and Social Services Board
Dr Chris Morris	Statistics and Research, Department for Social Development (ex-officio)
Mr Sean Holland	Social Services Inspectorate, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ms Carol O'Bryan	Simon Community NI
Ms Ricky Rowledge	Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland
Ms June Ingram	Equality, Rights and Youth Service, Department of Education
Mr Chris Williamson	Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

ORGANISATIONS WHICH RESPONDED TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Age Concern	Institute of Public Health in Ireland
Alliance Party	Methodist Church in Ireland
Altnagelvin Hospitals Health & social Services Trust	Newry & Mourne Borough Council
Ards Borough Council	NIACRO
Banbridge District Council	North and West Housing
Barnardos	North Eastern Education & Library Board
British Association of Social Workers	Northern Health & Social Services Board
Business in the Community	Northern Ireland council for Voluntary Action
Childrens Law Centre	Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
Citizens Advice	Northern Ireland Housing Council
Coleraine Borough Council	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Council for the Homeless (NI)	Northern Ireland Prison Service
Chartered Institute of Housing	Open Door Housing Association
	Probation Board Northern Ireland
Children in Northern Ireland	Royal Hospitals (Health & Social Inequalities Department)
Department for Employment and Learning	Rural Community Network
EGSDA Connecting Adults with Learning	Save the Children
Eastern Health & Social Services Board	Social Democratic & Labour Party
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	Simon Community (NI)
Flax Foyers	Social Economy Agency
Foyer Federation	Mr Tommy Rodgers
Health Promotion Agency	Training for Women Network Ltd.
Housing the homeless Fund	Ulster Unionist Party
Housing Rights Service	University of Ulster (School of the Built Environment)
Health & Social Services Councils	Western Health & Social Services Board
Include Youth	

APPENDIX 4





PSI Working Group's definition of “Homelessness”

For the purposes of the PSI Working Group’s review, homelessness was defined as:

- Persons defined in as homeless or threatened with homelessness under current legislation.
- Persons experiencing one or more of the following situations, even if these situations are not covered by the legislation:
 - rooflessness (without shelter of any kind- can include victims of fire and flood, and newly arrived immigrants).
 - rough sleeping i.e.
 - sleeping, or bedding down, in the open air, e.g. on the streets, in doorways, in parks, in bus shelters; or
 - in buildings or other places not designed for habitation, e.g. barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, tents, makeshift shelters.
 - houselessness: i.e. living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for homeless people such as night shelters, hostels and refuges.
 - unsuitability of accommodation for long-stay purposes e.g. Bed and Breakfast establishments.
 - insecure accommodation i.e. accommodation that is insecure in reality rather than simply, or necessarily, held on an impermanent tenure- includes persons:
 - with no legal rights or permission to remain in accommodation, such as squatters or young people asked to leave the family home; and
 - with only a short-term permission to stay, such as those moving around friends’ and relatives’ houses with no stable base.
 - involuntary sharing in unreasonable circumstances: i.e. involuntarily sharing accommodation with another household on a long-term basis in housing circumstances deemed to be unreasonable.

- Persons threatened with homelessness for the following reasons, even if these situations are not covered by legislation:
 - due for release from hospital, police custody, prisons, other institutions or supported schemes who with no accommodation to go to;
 - facing possession proceedings;
 - within three months of the end of a short term/limited tenancy;
 - under threat of legal or illegal eviction; or
 - required to leave current accommodation due to relationship breakdown.

‘INCLUDING THE HOMELESS’**ACTION PLAN**

KEY	
	Action not yet started
	Action agreed in principle or some activity started
	Action complete
	Principle of parity prevents action

The PSI (Homelessness) Action Plan which is underpinned by the sixteen Guiding Principles will give effect to the Strategy. The Action Plan is based on the recommended actions which emerged from the consultation exercise as a priority for government departments and others to consider and progress.

In the interests of presenting a complete picture, all actions recommended by those consulted have been presented, in summary format. To maintain the strategic focus, the actions have been directly linked to the relevant Guiding Principles. They address necessary top down actions as well as those required from the bottom up, ranging from strategic and policy matters to operational and service delivery issues. At this stage it is not possible to proceed with some of the recommended actions because the principle of parity prevents any independent action. For some others, there is already an arrangement in place or the recommended action has been completed. The majority of the remaining recommended actions have now been agreed in principle by relevant departments and agencies, and are in the process of being introduced. For those recommended actions not yet implemented or agreed, further debate and deliberation will be essential as an integral part of the implementation process, which is described in Section 6 of this document.

It has not been possible at this stage to agree all target completion dates. Where possible dates have been specified but they will all be considered and agreed as part of the implementation process.

A STRATEGY TO PROMOTE THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE HOMELESS OR THOSE AT RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS - APPENDIX 5

PRINCIPLE	CONSULTEES RECOMMENDED ACTIONS (arising out of PSI Working Group consultations)	CURRENT POSITION	STATUS
<p>1 – Strategic direction Promote the social inclusion of the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless as a top priority within the context of Lifetime Opportunities, and adopt a cross-departmental, cross-sectoral and strategic approach, forging joint working partnerships with others to promote dialogue and facilitate better strategic planning.</p>	<p>DSD Housing Division to produce a Strategy to Promote the Social Inclusion of the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.</p> <p>DSD to establish and lead a cross departmental, cross sectoral Steering Group to implement the principles and recommendations of the Strategy to Promote the Social Inclusion of the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.</p> <p>Steering Group to consider the requirement for other strategies to be developed and for example to consider introduction of legislation to require NIHE to produce a Homelessness Strategy every five years.</p>	<p>Target completion May 2007.</p> <p>Target initiation June 2007.</p> <p>To be considered by the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group from June 2007 onwards. NIHE’s current Homelessness Strategy expires in October 2007 at which time it will be reviewed. It will be essential for DSD to lead the Steering Group towards the development of prevention strategies and how NIHE’s Homelessness Strategy will interface with this Strategy.</p>	<p align="center">●</p> <p align="center">●</p> <p align="center">●</p>
<p>2 – “definition of problem” Promote the sharing of information and improvement of our collective understanding of the "definition" of homelessness, the cause and effect, scale and nature of homelessness; and the consequential extent and nature of housing need; and factor our conclusions into strategic plans for future housing provision to underpin good practices ensuring as far as possible</p>	<p>The PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group should initiate activity when it is established.</p>	<p>To formally commence in June 2007 when PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group is established. NIHE has however already completed some preliminary assessment of waiting list trends, times, points levels etc. and it is intended that this will be built upon in a second phase from April 2007 onwards.</p>	<p align="center">●</p>

<p>that solutions address the problems and competing needs in a balanced way.</p>			
<p>3 – housing provision Promote the opportunity for everyone to access decent, affordable, and energy efficient housing in safe and sustainable communities with access to services and opportunities that contribute to their improved health and well being, and help them to sustain their tenancy, with eviction a last resort.</p>	<p>DSD to address the growth in waiting lists and consider increasing the Social Housing Development Programme from 1500 units per annum, acquire surplus land, and help first time buyers in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>The target starts figure and growth of waiting lists is currently under review and is being considered in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review and Sir John Semple’s Affordability Review. The recommendations will be factored into discussions.</p> <p>DSD has identified and acquired surplus land in specific areas where social housing need has become critical and will roll out this process on an annual basis. Recommendations from Sir John Semple’s Affordability Review will be factored into discussions.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>DSD Housing Division to encourage social landlords to take a balanced, holistic approach to issues such as anti-social behaviour and ensure eviction is a last resort.</p> <p>NIHE to give more priority to prevention services.</p> <p>DSD and NIHE to address affordability issues (e.g. Single Room Rent, Rent Guarantee, and Grants).</p>	<p>A number of initiatives have recently been introduced to assist first time buyers. The Co-ownership scheme was amended in 2006 to make it more accessible for people on lower incomes by increasing value limits in April and October to reflect rising house prices. Recommendations emerging from Sir John Semple’s Affordability Review will be factored into discussions. Also the starting threshold for stamp duty was increased to £125,000.</p> <p>Government has set a target that all social housing should meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010 and new build programme will be increased from 1,500 to 2,000.</p> <p>Guidance issued by the Department advises NIHE and registered housing associations of the need to make a balanced judgement in cases of anti-social behaviour and to have regard to its own interests as a landlord, the interests of the public, and the interests of the tenant and his household. The guidance emphasises that eviction should be a last resort.</p> <p>NIHE has mapped out the prevention services it can provide. Other bodies must be involved to ensure a strategic approach. It will be essential for DSD to lead the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group towards the development of prevention strategies.</p> <p>NIHE - ongoing, where legislation permits. Rent Guarantee Scheme has been evaluated and will be extended and targeted on specific groups. Sir John Semple's Affordability Review will impact this action point and any emerging recommendations will be factored in to discussions. It should be noted however that the parity principle can prevent direct action..</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>

<p>4 – information & advice Promote the provision of timely, joined up, "free" information and advice to those already homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.</p>	<p>DSD Housing Division to ensure that a Housing Advice Strategy is put in place.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division to amend the law to provide for NIHE to have statutory responsibility for ensuring advice is available and to regulate the form of advice and the means of provision</p> <p>DSD Housing Division to amend the law to provide for advice to be provided by a range of providers.</p>	<p>NIHE currently provides a comprehensive range of advice services that are regularly reviewed.</p> <p>DSD proposes that the legislation should be amended to require the Housing Executive to ensure that advice about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness is available free of charge and that where the Executive is required to provide advice and assistance, the Department should have the power to prescribe the kind of advice and assistance to be provided.</p> <p>See comment above. The proposed legislative changes would enable the Housing Executive to arrange for advice to be provided by a range of providers.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>DSD Housing Division to amend the law to provide for the issue of a Statutory Code of Guidance.</p> <p>NIHE to fully implement Article 11(3) of Housing (NI) Order 1988 (advice to those threatened with homelessness)</p> <p>NIHE to update the guidance on dealing with homelessness issued to NIHE staff.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division, NIHE and all other providers and Voluntary groups to develop working partnerships to promote the early provision of advice, identification and intervention including managing debt.</p>	<p>Guidance on homelessness is already issued by the Housing Executive to all district offices.</p> <p>NIHE is committed to improving the standard of the advice it provides, including to those threatened with homelessness.</p> <p>NIHE updates its policies and guidance as necessary on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>HRS organised a conference on housing debt and has actively encouraged NIFHA to pursue this issue. Examples include "Shelternet" and "Chap". May be scope for additional action in relation to the private rented sector. This will need to be taken forward by the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>5 staff training / education Promote better informed, educated and trained public sector staff about homelessness issues</p>	<p>NIHE to ensure that staff training includes "attitudes to homelessness" and substance abuse</p> <p>Relevant organisations to include guidelines on working with the homeless in their Codes of Conduct</p>	<p>Training associated with NIHE's homelessness policy document and support programme includes substance abuse issues.</p> <p>Further "integrated training" may be required to help public sector staff recognise abuse issues. This should be addressed through the PSI (homeless) Steering Group.</p> <p>The Social Security Agency's Income Support guidance (GAP Volume 5(i)) and Jobseeker's Allowance guidance (Special Circumstances Volume 1) include guidance on homelessness.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>









		<p>DHSSPS intends to increase awareness of homelessness issues amongst their staff and the Department and HSS Trusts will include this as a specific matter to be addressed in annual PSS training contracts with Boards.</p> <p>DEL to consider the need for inclusion, of information on the issues faced by homeless people and how these can be addressed, in guidance for frontline staff. This is already included in p2w(NI) guidance.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>6 – eligibility and selection Promote fair and effective eligibility and selection criteria in the allocation of accommodation, which targets those in greatest need, with each case, considered on its own merits and without automatic exclusions.</p>	<p>NIHE to review Housing Selection Scheme and carry out Equality Impact Assessment.</p> <p>The provision of sufficient and suitable temporary accommodation (temporarily including the provision of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.</p> <p>NIHE to research the relationship between homelessness and the eligibility provisions to ascertain number who become homeless because they are ineligible for assistance.</p>	<p>To be considered.</p> <p>Since March 2006, Bed and Breakfast has only been used in emergencies and NIHE is on target to phase out the use of this type of accommodation</p> <p>NHE is recording management information on ineligible persons. This action point will need to be addressed in the context of the second guiding Principle and will have to be pursued through the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>DSD Housing Division to amend legislation to ensure that there is a statutory requirement for ‘unacceptable behaviour’ to be properly investigated and homeless applicants are not treated as ineligible without good reason.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division to amend legislation to ensure that released prisoners are not treated as intentionally homeless.</p>	<p>Being addressed through Guidance. The Department issues, on a non-statutory basis, guidance to NIHE and registered housing associations on dealing with anti-social behaviour. The guidance has been amended to emphasise that all cases must be thoroughly investigated and all decisions based on established facts.</p> <p>DSD / NIHE has already issued guidance on this. NIHE and registered housing associations have the power to treat applicants as ineligible for housing accommodation by reason of their unacceptable behaviour. Guidance issued by the Department therefore advises that blanket exclusions should not be applied against particular classes of applicant, given that landlords can consider individual cases on their own merits.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>

	<p>NIHE to ensure that Guidance covers assessment of ex- offenders and difficulties faced by 16-17 year olds.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division to ensure that homeless applicants have a right to request a review of decisions made by NIHE about their entitlement to assistance under the homelessness legislation.</p>	<p>NIHE is developing a protocol with Social Services The Department proposes that the legislation should be amended to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All homeless 16 and 17 year olds not already provided with accommodation by social services; and • All homeless 18 to 21 year olds who are leaving care or are vulnerable to sexual or financial exploitation, should have “priority need” status for re-housing by the Housing Executive. <p>DSD will introduce legislation to provide for the right to be placed on a statutory basis with a subsequent right of appeal to the county court. In the meantime NIHE will continue to carry out reviews on request.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>7 – delivery of services Promote the delivery of services in a seamless, joined up, responsive and integrated way to ensure multi-agency, and multi-disciplinary provision where possible, building on existing examples of good partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors, and deliver those services timely and to agreed standards and targets, whilst monitoring and reviewing progress.</p>	<p>HSS Trusts / Boards to get involved in planning and delivery of health and welfare services for multi-needs homeless, and put mechanisms in place to identify persons known to trusts through the care system or family support services who are at risk of homelessness and thereby ensure timely interventions.</p> <p>NIHE to commission research into breaking the cycle of homelessness and targets for reducing repeat homelessness.</p>	<p>DHSSPS's objective is to ensure greater co-operation between agencies so that housing needs are met in a timely and responsive manner allowing for a smooth transition from care to supported or independent living. They will develop agreed Regional good practice frameworks between NIHE and HSS Trusts to meet the accommodation and support needs of 16 -21 year olds, and define roles and responsibilities to ensure appropriate assessments are made by social services and that there are clear pathways to support.</p> <p>NIHE has developed a mechanism for measuring repeat homelessness & targets will be put in place in due course.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>NIHE to review House Sales Scheme to ensure that the Scheme is not contributing to homelessness.</p> <p>NIHE to ensure that co-ordinated information / advice & support services are targeted at the most vulnerable, first time tenants.</p> <p>NIHE to develop a standards framework for continuous service improvement.</p>	<p>To be considered by DSD and also taken forward in the context of emerging recommendations from Sir John Semple’s Affordability Review.</p> <p>Early Tenant Counselling Service in place. Bryson House project being developed with Registered Housing Associations.</p> <p>To be considered.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>

	<p>NIHE to develop a central database on accommodation.</p> <p>NIHE and RHAs to establish Tenancy Sustainment Teams (Supporting People to fund tenancy maintenance support).</p>	<p>Bed Bureau database is in place</p> <p>Bryson House project is being developed through the Supporting People Programme. There are a number of other Tenancy Sustainment projects underway but this is not province wide and further work is required with voluntary groups.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>8 Health /mental wellbeing Promote the health and mental well being of the homeless and ensure they have access to quality health and social services when required. Consider rolling out existing models of good practice across northern Ireland at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homeless in each Health and Social Services Trust area. .</p>	<p>NIHE and RHAs to use local structures to raise service delivery issues with health providers.</p> <p>DHSSPS to encourage local Drugs and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams (DACTS) to target vulnerable groups, including homeless people where there are clearly identified substance misuse issues.</p> <p>DHSSPS / HSS Trusts to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review availability and accessibility of health/ social services for homeless people; - provide GP clinics in hostels; - extend District Nursing service across NI; - ensure that health assessment of homeless presenters is carried out; - provide assistance with transport costs for the homeless to attend clinics or GPs 	<p>Local Supporting People Partnerships and Homeless Area Action Plans are in place</p> <p>As part of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, local DACTs have set up Board-based community support services. Part of their remit is to identify needs and facilitate interventions targeting identified vulnerable groups including homeless people in respect of substance misuse. This could include specific activities and / or training.</p> <p>DHSSPS's objective is to ensure more effective delivery of primary health and social care to homeless people. They will develop, with Health Trusts and Boards, agreed Enhanced Service Frameworks to bring primary care services (social, medical and dental) to homeless people in hostels and homeless presenters. They will also ensure that health checks on homeless presenters are carried out</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review how records for homeless people are transferred and ensure that homelessness training is available to staff within the Health Service. - to give further consideration to more effective delivery of services for women (including family planning; child care; health; sexual assault; domestic violence; accessibility of services) 		

	<p>DHSSPS/ HSS Trusts to develop information- sharing protocols with NIHE, SSA and voluntary sector.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division and NIHE to work in partnership with DHSSPS Review Team responsible for implementation of recommendations arising from Bamford Review</p>	<p>DHSSPS's objective is to ensure greater co-operation between agencies so that housing needs are met in a timely and responsive manner allowing for a smooth transition. They will develop agreed Regional good practice framework between NIHE and HSS Trusts to meet the accommodation and support needs of 16 - 21 year olds.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division has met with Bamford Review Team and requested the opportunity for both DSD Housing and NIHE staff to work more closely with the Team to better understand the housing issues.</p> <p>A representative from the anticipated Inter-Departmental Task force set up to co-ordinate the Governments response to the Bamford Review and implement the recommendations will be invited onto the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>9 (9a – 9h) – Targeting of more vulnerable people Promote the holistic support and targeting of those more vulnerable individuals or families or those who have more complex needs with due care and diligence to all concerned, to help them find suitable and affordable accommodation and sustain independent living within the community.</p>			
<p>9a prisoners / ex offenders Prisoners or potential prisoners - To ensure the provision of effective advice and support to people on remand, on bail, in prison, prior to and after release to facilitate their resettlement where possible within their original community</p>	<p>The Prison Service to encourage prisoners to save.</p> <p>NIHE to provide resources for Base 2 projects.</p>	<p>Prison Service has agreed to this action point and will take necessary action – but it is only possible for prisoners likely to serve longer sentences. Currently it is the practice in the Working Out Scheme and Foyleview in Magilligan.</p> <p>Funding is being provided through NIHE for Base 2 and CRIP projects to assist victims of intimidation, including ex-prisoners. The Prison Service have not been involved in funding Base 2 project but they work closely with NIACRO in other areas of resettlement i.e. employment and reintegration.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>Prison Service and NIHE to provide housing advice & guidance, and independent living training to prisoners prior to and on release.</p>	<p>Prison Service is considering the possible scope for working with NIHE (Supporting People) in a partnership with Probation Board (PBNI). This involves a proposal for dedicated accommodation to be made available for women to re-enter the community following release from prison in other areas and not just Cookstown. NIHE has re-housing arrangements, including housing needs assessment, in place before prisoners are released. Independent living training is integrated into Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre, Foyleview in Magilligan, and the Working Out Scheme. It is not offered to the majority of prisoners at the moment. In Young Offenders Centre, the young offenders are juveniles of 17 years and over. To prepare them for self-sufficiency there are courses in cookery, employability and crafts. A money management programme is planned for 2007. Juvenile Justice Agency has already worked with representatives from Simon Community and are currently looking at methods of intervention. They are committed to working in partnership to effect this</p>	<p>●</p>

	<p>Prison Service to engage with NIHE to ensure that effective support services are provided within the individual’s original community.</p> <p>NIHE to provide accommodation to life-sentenced prisoners living outside.</p> <p>Prison Service and NIHE to consider the need for new support schemes so that former prisoners don’t become homeless due to substance misuse or other vulnerabilities after release.</p> <p>Prison Service to manage the Prisoners Advice Service</p> <p>DHSSPS / CSA to review access to GPs etc by released offenders.</p>	<p>strategy to promote social inclusion of the homeless.</p> <p>The Prison Service has engaged, in partnership with NIHE, a Housing Rights Advice Worker (from Housing Rights Service and funded by NIHE) who links all 3 Prison Establishments and Young Offenders Centre. Prisoners are given advice from Prison staff, NIACRO, and Housing Rights to assist them with housing issues.</p> <p>New services for prisoners are being developed in the context of the MASRAM strategy for re-housing sex offenders. NIHE is a significant contributor to this process.</p> <p>Prison Service has employed an Addiction Services Manager to develop and co-ordinate the contract the 3 prisons have with voluntary organisations specialising in addictions. Prisoners are screened on committal and made aware of the addiction services at the prison induction programme.</p> <p>The Prisoners Advice Service is modelled on a ThruCare Centre in Maghaberry Prison, Pre-Release programme in Magilligan, and at the pre-release stage in Hydebank wood Prison and Young Offender’s Centre.</p> <p>The Healthcare in the Prisons directly links prisoners to GPs in the community on release, where necessary.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>9b – alcohol / drug misuse Alcohol excess / drug misuse - To provide sufficient and suitable accommodation for those suffering from alcohol excess or drug misuse so that less street drinkers are sleeping rough</p>	<p>NIHE to provide “wet” i.e. alcohol- tolerant hostels</p>	<p>Stella Maris is a “wet” hostel and the Salvation Army has recently provided additional crash bed and day centre facilities. A need remains for “move on” accommodation and NIHE is carrying out an economic appraisal of a potential site</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>9c - hate crime / ethnic minority groups - to provide advice and support to people subjected to hate crime so that fewer members of minority or vulnerable groups become homeless as a</p>	<p>NIHE to consult minority groups, carry out mapping, raise awareness and educate staff as necessary, actively promote good relations and carry out target hardening, and support victims.</p>	<p>NIHE’s Community Safety Team is addressing these issues</p>	<p>●</p>



result of intimidation, harassment or anti social behaviour	DSD Housing Division to introduce new anti social behaviour legislation where appropriate	New legislation on anti-social behaviour will be considered when the legislative timetable permits a suitable opportunity.	
9d – domestic violence Victims of Domestic violence - to provide advice and support to those subjected to domestic violence and establish appropriate partnerships with Domestic Violence Regional Steering Group.	NIHE and DHSSPS to take steps to raise awareness, encourage reporting, and provide support.	Training of NIHE district office staff in domestic violence issues is complete. Support packages for victims of domestic violence have been put in place in a number of areas and NIHE is supporting the 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline. DSD Housing Division and NIHE are now represented on the Domestic Violence Regional Steering Group. Representative from Domestic Violence Regional Steering Group or Voluntary Sector to be invited onto PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group.	 
9e – migrant workers Migrant workers - to provide appropriate advice and support to migrant workers and make emergency provision for those facing a housing crisis	DSD to consider impact of loss of tied accommodation by migrant workers.	The Department is working in partnership with NIHE, RHAs and the voluntary sector to ensure that provision is made for migrant workers who lose their accommodation. The Department is represented on the Migrant Workers Thematic Sub Group facilitated by DEL and participated in the Migrant Workers Conference organised by Animate in January 2007. Animate will be invited to join the PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group to represent the interests of migrant workers.	 
9f – rough sleepers Rough Sleepers -to address the needs of rough sleepers on a strategic basis and to work in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations to provide specialist accommodation and support services to them.	NIHE to develop homelessness & health strategies and manage the Multi-Disciplinary Homelessness Assessment Team. NIHE HSS Trusts to establish a system to ensure that rough sleepers keep appointments, provide outreach services, residential solutions, crash beds, Health Living Centres, information, GP clinics, Floating Support, Homelessness District Nursing.	NIHE's Rough Sleeping Strategy takes account of health issues and the management of the multi disciplinary team. A number of these services are being developed but further consideration is required. The PSI (Homelessness) steering Group will need to pursue these aspects.	 
9g – disabled / mental health Disabled People / those with mental health problems or learning difficulties More effective delivery of services to disabled people.	DHSSPS / HSS Trusts to review services for disabled (community care plans; adaptations system & Disabled Facilities Grant; provision of temporary and permanent accommodation; DDA audit; UK/RoI building standards; Building Regs).	All recommendations emerging from the Bamford Review to be assessed in detail. A representative from Interdepartmental Task Force set up to coordinate the government's response to the recommendations of the Bamford Review will be invited onto PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group.	









<p>9h – Travellers – to provide housing for those who wish to live in settled communities and halting sites for those who wish to maintain their transient way of life.</p>	<p>DSD / NIHE to proceed with housing provision through discussion with all relevant representative bodies.</p>	<p>While much still remains to be done in order to deliver on the provision of accommodation solutions for Travellers significant progress has been made by DSD / NIHE. Solutions include the provision of group housing, serviced sites, transit sites, and emergency halting sites. Four initial group housing schemes for the travelling community have or are being funded via the social housing programme. There are five services sites in operation. The multi agency steering Group established by the Housing Executive has identified a need for a further five transit sites and work is continuing to deliver on this target. There are currently three emergency halting sites. The housing executive has also developed relationships with a wide range of voluntary and statutory agencies in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>9i – young people Young people - to address the needs of young homeless people on a strategic basis, ensuring they have access to housing, medical and welfare services and benefits, to prepare them for independent living and help them sustain their tenancies.</p>	<p>NIHE to adopt a “Strategic approach” to youth homelessness.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division / NIHE to agree joint working protocols with Social Services.</p> <p>All to consider the designation of Specialist Officers to deal with young homeless people.</p> <p>DSD / Foyer Federation to ensure that more Foyer Schemes are developed and extended.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division and NIHE to ensure that more intensive support is provided for the most vulnerable young people, including the provision of outreach workers to visit and monitor young people when accommodation has been allocated.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division / SSP&LD to amend the law to remove under-25 Private Rented Sector restrictions on Housing Benefit.</p> <p>DHSSPS / HSS Trusts and Boards, working collaboratively with DSD and NIHE, to meet their full statutory responsibility to young people leaving care and to assess all 16 / 17 year old presenters and ensure that</p>	<p>NIHE to engage with the Department of Education.</p> <p>DSD / NIHE to agree joint Protocols with Social Services.</p> <p>NIHE to consider subject to resource limitations. SSA is prepared to consider introducing specialist homeless/at risk customer advisers where caseloads suggest this would be appropriate.</p> <p>To be considered in the context of the recommendations of Sir John Semple’s Affordability Review.</p> <p>This is being addressed via Supporting People. Elements of need have been identified & responses are being developed.</p> <p>Because of the policy of parity with the UK, the Department has no scope to do this.</p> <p>DHSSPS’s objective is to secure suitable, safe accommodation for 16/17 year olds leaving care and homeless 16/17 year olds from outside the care system and ensure value for money. DHSSPS, boards and Trusts first objective and obligation is to secure suitable, safe accommodation for 16/17 year olds leaving care and they are working with NIHE to commission jointly accommodation for these young people.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>

	their housing and welfare needs are met	Regarding other homeless 16/17 year olds there is a shared responsibility between DHSSPS, DSD and NIHE and this issue needs to be considered in more depth and pursued through the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group. DHSSPS also have an objective, shared with NIHE, to support homeless young people re-integrate into their family to prevent long term homelessness, and help maintain family life where the young person lives outside the family home through the creation of a comprehensive support plan. The Department will jointly establish a pilot scheme (with NIHE and HSS Trust) to test family group conferencing to see if homeless young people can be reconciled / integrated into their family with third party mediation / support. This of course can only be pursued where it is considered safe to do so and is in keeping with the assessed needs of the young person. Where this approach is applied, it should contribute to addressing NIHE's own agenda of early intervention / prevention of homelessness.	●
		DHSSPS also have an objective to promote continuity of care and support for young people aged 18 - 21 who have left care and who continue to reside with their foster / kinship carers, and promote better outcomes of young people post care life in training, education and employment. The Department will, jointly with NIHE and HSS Trusts, establish Former Carer Scheme for 18 - 21 year olds who are engaged in Education, Training, Employment or Prevocational Initiatives to enable those care leavers to continue living with their foster carers up to age 21. Inclusion of foster carers as a priority within the Homebuy Scheme, a pool of "supported lodgings" and "vacation accommodation" are all under consideration. NIHE / DSD in partnership with DHSSPS are committed to the development of a regional pilot which will provide a pool of supported lodgings providers to address specific accommodation needs of homeless young people and additional housing / support needs of care leavers.	● ●
10 – Education Promote awareness of and educate teachers and pupils on homelessness issues within schools to help prepare young people for adult life and independent living; Provide education and training which allows them to maximise their potential and secure employment to	Department of Education and Education Authorities to ensure that Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) have a role in identifying, assessing and referring children at risk of homelessness. DSD / NIHE to develop information-sharing protocols and partnerships with Education Authorities, to maximise resources to prevent homelessness.	The Department of Education aims to re-issue guidance to schools on child protection / pupil welfare issues- these include identifying signs of stress and homelessness will be mentioned in this context. Education Welfare Officers have already been instructed to liaise with NIHE where appropriate. NIHE is liaising with Education Welfare Officers where appropriate but stronger partnerships and protocols need to be put in place. This will need to be pursued through the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group	● ●

<p>help ensure they have a good foundation for inclusion in society and prevent them falling into homelessness circumstances; Advise and support those at particular risk.</p>	<p>Department of Education to ensure that issues of homelessness and independent living skills are integrated in the curriculum and included in school website projects</p> <p>Department of Education to raise awareness of homelessness in the teaching profession.</p> <p>NIHE to facilitate roll out of the Foyer Federation's peer mentoring project.</p>	<p>There are strands within the curriculum designed to prepare children for leaving school and adult life. The funding package for Children and Young People included in NI Priorities and Budget 2006/08 makes specific provision for training "Looked After" children in independent living skills.</p> <p>For action in the 2007/08 school year. Designated teachers qualified to deliver training on child protection/ pupil welfare issues will be provided with material on homelessness produced by NIHE.</p> <p>The "Outspoken" initiative is funded by NIHE. Having been operational in the Belfast area for some time, it has recently been extended to cover schools in the North East. Further expansion will depend on evaluation and priorities.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>Juvenile Justice Agency to arrange for skills training for independent living to be provided for young offenders' centres.</p> <p>DSD SSP&LD to amend the law to eliminate the '16 hour' rule which prevents adults from claiming Housing Benefit while studying full time</p>	<p>The Juvenile Justice Centre (JJA) has identified homelessness as an area for action when generating reintegration plans for young people. JJA has been working with the Simon Community and currently examining methods of intervention into specific social/ community themes.</p> <p>Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action here.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>
<p>11- Employment / Learning Promote new ways to help homeless people into employment, actively promote examples of good practices and successful outcomes, and encourage employers to be pro-active in sign-posting employees to or involving advice services (where appropriate) especially in instances of long term sick leave or termination of employment.</p>	<p>DEL to encourage employers to raise awareness of services, liaise with homelessness providers, signpost and support during crisis, develop staff ability to find alternative employment, communicate with New Deal, employ the homeless and provide advice where accommodation is linked to employment.</p> <p>DEL to encourage support of homeless projects, maximise businesses willing to</p>	<p>The consultees' recommendations are not exclusively for DEL to deliver. The Department's Employment Service has in place an Employer Strategy to allow it to more readily identify and meet the vacancy servicing needs of employers through a consistent approach to engagement, while focusing on the needs of its client jobseekers. Employment Service staff ensure that employers are fully aware of its facilities offered locally and of the availability of potential employees represented by the wide range of unemployed clients. Through the Progress2 work(NI) programme, support workers advocate with employers on behalf of individual clients, encouraging them to employ such individuals. Should an individual take up employment, the support worker would be available for help and support for the initial employment period. Employment Service's role is to advocate on behalf of the unemployed. It is not their role to work with employers in relation to their existing workforce.</p> <p>DEL contracts with a range of organisations for the delivery of specific programmes and support for clients. These arrangements are subject to the public procurement</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>


	assist combating homelessness and fund measures to assist homeless into employment	process.	
	<p>DEL to provide mainstream funding for delivering training / employment programmes (e.g. Foyers)</p> <p>DEL to promote a needs-led approach, more flexible than New Deal, to address literacy, numeracy & social skills.</p> <p>DEL to ensure more flexibility in Government training programmes and hostel policies to enable homeless people to complete training programmes.</p>	<p>Specifically, in terms of assisting the homeless into employment progress2work(NI) is the Department's current provision to assist homeless people to move towards and into work- see below.</p> <p>DEL's programmes and services are subject to the public procurement process.</p> <p>The new Northern Ireland ESF Programme (2007 - 2013) will add value to the Department's mainstream employment programmes and initiatives by helping to extend employment opportunities in particular for those groups at disadvantage in the labour market. Indicative activities may include identifying and reducing the personal barriers to entering, remaining and making progress in employment. Training and other support provided may continue after participants have entered jobs. Activities may be delivered by Voluntary and Community sector organisations who are well placed to engage people who are disadvantaged.</p> <p>Under the New Deal programmes, a bonus may be paid to those who take up essential skills training where there is a barrier to work. . On entry to New Deal, all participants are screened to identify possible literacy and numeracy (essential skills) barriers. Those identified as having possible essential skills barriers are assessed by an external contracted provider. If the assessment confirms a barrier the participant is offered the opportunity to address this need. Clients essential skills barriers are addressed in a vocational context and related to the world of work. In addition, all participants undertake a nationally accredited Essential Skills qualification. Whilst addressing their individual need participants are paid a training allowance and an additional £10 per week for a period of up to 26 weeks as an incentive to address the barrier. Those who following a period of engagement achieve their essential skills qualification also receive a £100 bonus. Within the New Deal there is provision for homeless people to enter the programme early if they so choose.</p> <p>The Department is currently piloting a more flexible menu-based and tailored approach to dealing with all of its clients. This approach will work on the basis of options from a menu of provision which will be tailored to the needs of the individual client. Essential skills provision mirror that available within New Deal and will be offered to this more extended customer base.</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>

		<p>In addition, a new Frontline Service will categorise customers according to their distance from the labour market and then draw up a personal action plan for each client to specifically address their needs. Both of these approaches are being piloted in 2007 with plans to replicate the new service across all offices by 2008.</p> <p>Under the EST Programme indicative activities may include improving the employability of those at a disadvantage in the labour market by raising their essential skills of numeracy, literacy and ICT skills. Employment Service provision is contracted out to providers</p> <p>Employment Service provision is contracted out on the basis of an open tendering process. Core funding is not provided. p2w(NI) is DEL's provision for homeless people. Subject to the outcome of the current evaluation a decision will be taken on mainstreaming the programme. DEL has no responsibility for hostel policies. The proposed new frontline and tailored menu-based approach will provide more flexibility to ensure that provision is adapted where appropriate to suit individual client needs. The Department is always willing to receive any comments regarding the operation of its current programmes and will use this information to assist in the redesign of future programmes</p>	
	<p>NIO to review Rehabilitation of Offenders Order</p>	<p>The new frontline and tailored menu-based approach will provide more flexibility to ensure that provision is adapted where appropriate to suit individual client needs. The Department is always willing to receive any comments regarding the operation of its current programmes and will use this information to assist in the redesign of future programmes.</p> <p>While the current policy is parity with the rest of the UK, the NIO will review the Order when it has an opportunity to do so given current legislative commitments. NIO Criminal Justice Policy division are committed to working with the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group.</p>	

<p>13 – Private Rented Sector Promote the achievement of improvements in the standards and tenancy conditions including rent controls within the private sector and maximise the opportunity that this sector affords to provide accommodation.</p>	<p>DSD to take necessary action to improve standards and tenancy conditions in the private rented sector.</p>	<p>The Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 was made on 7 June 2006 and came into operation On 1 April 2007. Amongst other things, it targets unfitness and disrepair through repair enforcement and rent control; reduces inequities between tenure types; and simplifies, clarifies and raises awareness of landlord and tenant obligations.</p>	
<p>14 – Social Security Benefits Promote if necessary and where possible, improved access to benefits for those becoming homeless, benefit information services, increased uptake of benefits and timely processing of benefits to prevent people getting into financial difficulty.</p>	<p>SSA should refer young people, at risk, to staff who would be familiar with the young persons entitlements</p> <p>SSA to improve consistency in processing times, payments and information access</p>	<p>SSA staff are familiar with entitlements and are qualified to deal with such claims..</p> <p>Income Support and Jobseeker’s Allowance claims are processed to departmental targets to ensure consistency (targets generally mirror targets set by the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain).</p> <p>Social Fund decisions are monitored by SSA’s Standards Assurance Agency and the Office of the Social Fund Commissioner to ensure consistency.</p> <p>SSA produces a wide range of information leaflets available in up to seven languages other than English. These are accessible from its offices and website.</p>	   
	<p>DSD SSP&LD to review rates of benefit.</p> <p>DSD SSP&LD to review Social Fund capping</p> <p>SSA to review requirement for those with no address to attend local SSOs.</p>	<p>Rates of benefit are determined by legislation. Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action.</p> <p>Discretionary grants and loans are a cash-limited system which keeps the Social Fund flexible, reduces the potential for abuse and ensures that people on low incomes can be assisted where necessary. The Department has no plans to remove the cash limits.</p> <p>Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, SSA has no scope for action.</p>	  

	<p>SSA to promote benefit uptake in prisons</p> <p>SSA to review Direct Payments for those in hostels or other short term accommodation.</p> <p>DSD SSP&LD to remove barriers to information sharing with NIHE and Inland Revenue</p> <p>DSD/ SSP&LD to amend the law to ensure that DLA / IB claimants are pass-ported to HB.</p> <p>SSA to amend the law in respect of payments to those with no fixed address and payment of severe disability premium to those in hostels</p>	<p>SSA has signed up to the NI Prison Service Resettlement Strategy which reviewed the arrangements for the provision of advice on benefit claims by Prison Service and NIACRO staff.</p> <p>Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action.</p> <p>There is currently a legal gateway for sharing information between DSD and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive / HM Revenue and Customs for use for the purposes of functions relating to social security or child support.</p> <p>Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action.</p> <p>To facilitate the secure delivery of benefit payments to customers, SSA's preferred option has been to make payments direct to Post Office Card Accounts, Banks and Building Societies. Post Office Card Accounts were designed specifically for the purpose. However, the Post Office Card Account contract is expected to terminate in the next few years The SSA's Payment Modernisation Project which was completed in the summer of 2005, aimed to make the benefit payment process cheaper and more secure by encouraging customers to have their benefits paid directly into bank or building society accounts..</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>
	<p>SSA to review need for photographic ID for Direct Payment purposes.</p> <p>DSD SSP&LD to increase Social Fund Budgeting / Crisis Loans</p>	<p>Payment of benefits through a number of different Credit Union accounts has been successfully trialled and it is SSA's intention is to facilitate all customers who wish to have their benefits paid into nominated Credit Union accounts in the future. There is no legislative requirement for benefit to be paid by the Direct Payment method and, given the difficulties experienced by homeless people in opening bank accounts, their benefit would normally be paid by cheque. The introduction in November 2006 of the Local Payment System – which automates the (local) cheque production process and improves accounting arrangements has further enhanced this service.</p> <p>For benefit security/anti-fraud purposes, ID requirements are the same for all customers.</p> <p>As a result of on-going reform of the Social Fund, the minimum amount of Budgeting Loan has increased from £30 to £100 and the maximum has</p>	<p>●</p> <p>●</p>

		increased (from the difference between any sum repayable and £1,000) to £1,500.	●
	DSD SSP&LD to include deposits / rent in advance in Community Care grants and promote use as alternative to financial services	Rent deposits are excluded from Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans	●
14 – Housing Benefit Promote the most effective provision of housing benefit at rates which are considered appropriate for accommodation costs.	DSD SSP&LD to extend HB for sentenced prisoners to 52 weeks	While remand prisoners are eligible for Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks, sentencing is regarded as a “change of circumstances” and the applicant loses benefit if he does not return home within 13 weeks. Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action.	●
	DSD to consider the payment of housing costs for home-owning remand prisoners	Because of the policy of parity with the rest of the UK, the Department has no scope for action.	●
	DSD SSP&LD to make additional payments to Housing Benefit recipients living in bail hostels	A person on bail is eligible for Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks. This applies whether he is required to live in a bail hostel or anywhere other than his usual home.	●
	DSD SSP&LD / NIHE to ensure that Housing Benefit meets realistic accommodation costs	Housing Benefit levels are considered to be reasonable at present.	●
15 – Financial Services Promote access to financial services and debt management advice services to help minimise repossessions and homelessness.	All to promote use of Credit Unions	HRS has made contact with the two main Credit Union umbrella bodies. SSA has been trialling the payment of benefits through a number of credit union accounts and intends to extend this in the future.	●
	NIHE and RHAs to ensure that debt advice services are available free of charge.	NIHE has a Service Level Agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and funds CAB to provide a free debt advice service to its tenants if they are in arrears.	●
	DETI to review loan companies and marketing practices with a view to regulation.	Regulation of the financial services sector is a reserved matter and DETI has no scope for action. However the Office of Fair Trading have confirmed that the Authority Trading Standards for NI did participate in a national and regional review of compliance of credit advertising. The outcome is awaited. DSD will need to consider this matter further through the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group.	●
	DSD Housing Division to amend the law to require lenders/ landlords to notify NIHE of	DSD will consider this matter.	●

	repossession intentions.		
16 Equality of opportunity Promote new ways to eliminate the stigma of homelessness and any consequential discrimination and inequality.	The Promoting Social Inclusion Steering Group to consider and address when it has been established in April 2007.	This is extremely important and should be considered and addressed through the PSI (Homeless) Steering Group from April 2007 onwards.	

Glossary of Terms

Child in need	(as defined by Articles 17 and 18 of the Children (NI) Order 1995) refers to a person under the age of 18 who is either: (a) unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him or her of services by an authority; (b) his or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services; or (c) he or she is disabled.
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
Dependent child	within the context of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, means any child under 16, and includes all children aged 16-18 who are in, or are about to begin, full time education or training, or who for other reasons are unable to support themselves and who live at home.
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DSD	Department for Social Development
DSD (SSP&LD)	Department for Social Development Social Security Policy & Legislation Division
Eligible child	(under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) means a 16 or 17 year old who has been looked after by an authority for a prescribed period, which began after he or she reached a prescribed age and ended after he or she reached the age of 16.
Former relevant child	(under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) means an 18 to 21 year old who may be either (a) a person who qualified as a relevant child or (b) a person who qualified as an eligible child.
Full duty applicants or full duty status	refers to those applicants under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 who are found to be homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and unintentionally homeless (see definition of intentionality).
HSS	Health and Social Services

Intentionality	refers to the test applied to applicants under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 to determine whether the applicant deliberately did something, or failed to do something, which resulted in them becoming homeless.
Multiple needs	more than two problems experienced by a person or household who, as a result, is unlikely to be able to live successfully in unsupported accommodation (includes mental health problems, substance misuse, physical health problems, challenging behaviours and vulnerability because of age).
Neighbourhood harassment	dispute between neighbours resulting in harassment or other threatening behaviour.
New TSN	“New Targeting Social Need” (the Government’s anti-poverty strategy prior to the introduction of Lifetime Opportunities)
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Person qualifying for Advice and assistance	(under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) means a child or young person under 21, who, after reaching the age of 16 but while still under 18 was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered (as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002).
Presenters	applicants for assistance under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (NI) Order 1988.
Priority need status	awarded under Article 5 of the Housing (NI) Order 1988 to homeless people with priority need for accommodation (includes people who: are pregnant; have dependent children; are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason; are threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as fire or flood; have been subject to violence and are at risk of violent pursuit; or are a young person at risk of sexual or financial exploitation).
PSI	Promoting Social Inclusion

Relevant child	(under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) means a 16 or 17 year old who is not being looked after by an authority, and was (before last ceasing to be looked after) an eligible child.
Sharing breakdown	dissolution of a private arrangement or agreement for sharing accommodation.
Social landlords	NIHE and registered housing associations.
Social housing and social rented sector	housing accommodation held under NIHE or registered housing association tenancies.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT

**This document is available in hard copy or on the internet at:
www.dsdni.gov.uk**

If the document is not available in a format which suits your needs, please let us know and we will make alternative arrangements.

If you have questions about the Strategy document or if you would like additional copies, please contact the secretariat to the PSI (Homelessness) Steering Group on (028) 9081 9586, or write to:

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