



# More than a roof: Progress in tackling homelessness

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Background

**1** When the term "homeless" is used, many people have an image of a person sleeping rough in a cardboard box on a city high street. In fact, the vast majority of people recorded in official homelessness statistics are living with friends or relatives, or have been helped to find temporary accommodation until a settled home becomes available.

**2** There are 20 million households in England, of which more than a million move home each year. Most of these move in a constructive and organised way. However, the circumstances of a relatively small but significant number of others put them at risk of homelessness, for example where relationships or families break down, when they are struggling with debt, suffer traumatic events or mental health problems, develop substance dependency or are affected by other personal problems and can no longer keep the home they rent or own (**Figure 1**).

**3** Around £1 billion per year is spent on measures to prevent and deal with homelessness, covering Bed & Breakfast, leased and hostel accommodation, general administration and other related costs (**Figure 2**).

**4** Homelessness can have a profound impact on the health, welfare and employment prospects of those who experience it. One study has suggested that the life expectancy of rough sleepers is only 42 years.<sup>1</sup> Other studies suggest that children in insecure or temporary accommodation often have their schooling disrupted. They may not have space to play or do their homework and are more prone to behavioural problems. They may also suffer from a poor diet where they are forced to share cooking facilities.

**5** A key structural factor in the level of homelessness is the supply of affordable housing. In some parts of the country demand has pushed prices up beyond the reach of a significant proportion of the population, thereby increasing pressure on the rented sector. The amount of new social housing has declined in recent years. There is a large backlog of households in shared dwellings and those in various forms of temporary or unsatisfactory accommodation who are all in need of inexpensive, secure housing.

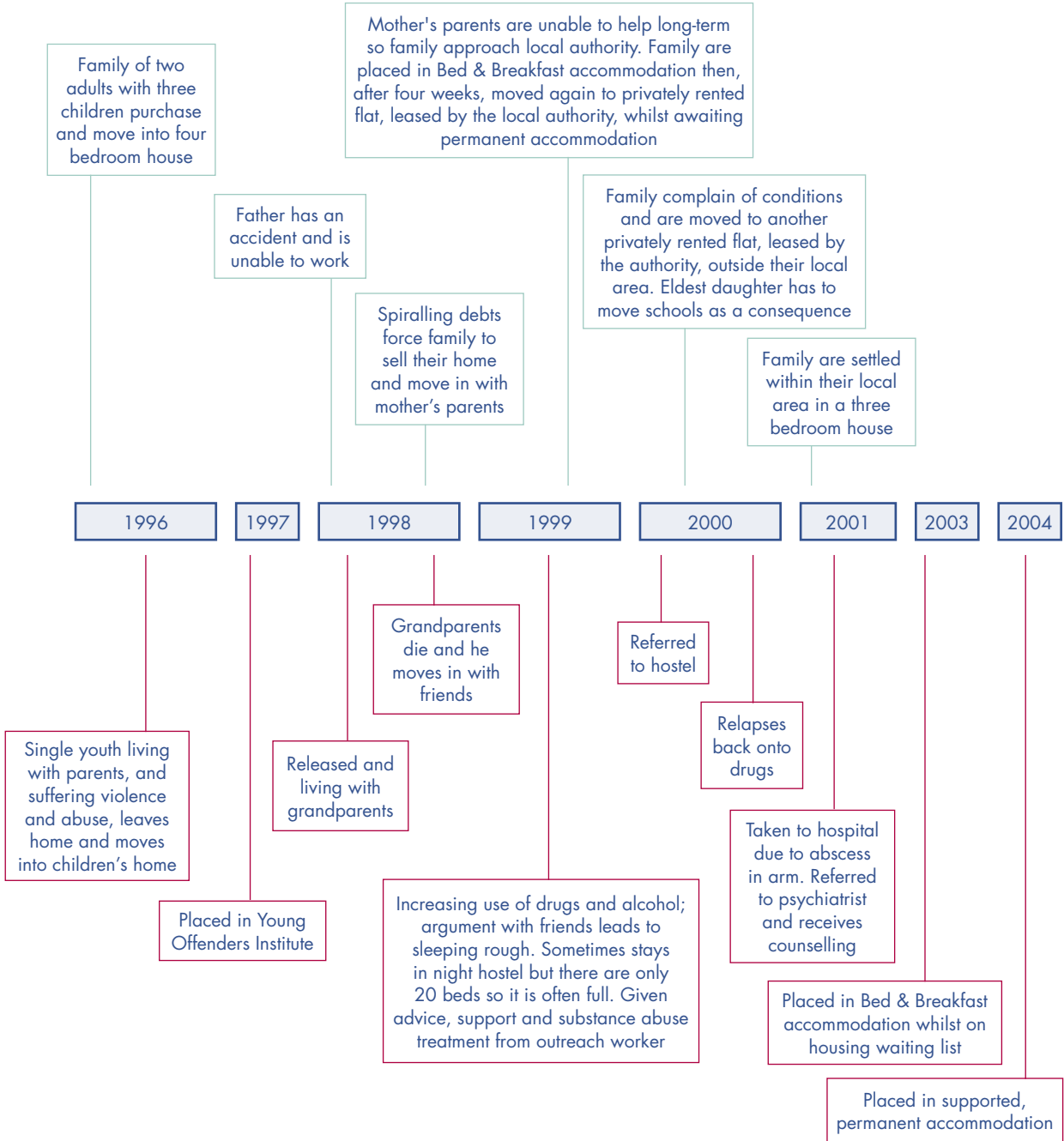
**6** The research for this report on the Government's progress in tackling homelessness was undertaken before the publication of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (OPDM's) five year plan "Sustainable Communities: Homes for All," published in January 2005. This plan sets out a strategy for increasing housing supply, affordability and quality, reducing homelessness and halving the number of households in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010. Additional funding to increase the supply of new social rented housing and to expand preventive services is part of a package of measures intended to reduce homelessness.

**7** Homelessness is caused by more than housing problems. The challenge has been to find more effective ways of dealing with homelessness problems as they arise and to develop sound approaches to help prevent homelessness wherever possible. "Homes for All" contains more details of work in progress and proposed to support effective prevention as part of the Government's overall strategy to reduce homelessness.

<sup>1</sup> Grenier P (1996) Still dying for a home, Crisis.

# 1 How families and individuals can become homeless

## Family homelessness



## Rough sleeping

Source: Compiled from National Audit Office interviews with homeless families and rough sleepers

**2** The nation spends around £1 billion a year to prevent and deal with homelessness<sup>1</sup>

	£ million
<b>Office of the Deputy Prime Minister</b>	
Grants to local authorities and voluntary and community sector	60
Supporting People funding for those who have been homeless or are at risk of it	350
Capital funding (via Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme) <sup>2</sup>	24
<b>Local authorities</b>	
Hostel accommodation (gross)	62
Bed & Breakfast accommodation (gross)	270
Leasehold accommodation (gross)	78
Administration and welfare costs	93
Other costs	66
Less grants from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (included in line 1)	(45)
<b>Total</b>	<b>958</b>

Source: National Audit Office/CIPFA

NOTES

- 1 This figure does not show wider savings in public expenditure arising from the above funding streams.
- 2 The needs of the homeless are integrated into other Housing Corporation funding streams.

## How homelessness is tackled

**8** Front-line responsibility for helping homeless people find a home falls to local authorities. They have a statutory duty to house those who are homeless and in "priority need". Priority need groups include households with children, those who are vulnerable as a result of age, disability or poor health, and people fleeing violence – these are the "statutorily homeless". Local authorities have a range of other duties and powers, for example to review homelessness and produce a strategy at least every five years. They also must provide free advice on homelessness prevention to anyone in their area. Additionally, many people find their own solutions or turn to the voluntary and community sector to meet their housing and support needs, without needing to engage with a local authority.

**9** Where permanent social housing is in short supply, or the homeless household needs extensive support, local authorities use "temporary accommodation" to house those to whom they have a statutory duty. In some cases, this may take the form of Bed & Breakfast hotels, hostels or refuges. More commonly, authorities use privately rented or leased properties, or social housing units. In many cases, they also work in partnership with voluntary and community sector bodies, which provide housing and care for both the statutory and non-statutory homeless.

**10** The use of temporary accommodation to house those found to be statutorily homeless has risen dramatically in recent years – from around 40,000 in 1997 to over 100,000 by September 2004. The use of temporary accommodation tends to be concentrated in those parts of the country with greater general housing supply pressure. Around 60 per cent of those who occupy temporary accommodation are in London. Around 19 households per 1,000 in the capital are occupying some form of temporary accommodation.

## The scale and spread of homelessness

**11** Analyses produced by the Barker Review of Housing Supply<sup>2</sup> have estimated that over 400,000 households are in urgent need of secure, affordable and self-contained housing.

**12** The number of households presenting themselves as homeless to local authorities rose from 242,000 in 1997 to 300,000 in 2003, an increase of 24 per cent. The numbers that local authorities accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need of accommodation increased from around 100,000 in 1997 to 137,000 in 2003 – a 37 per cent rise. Some of this rise reflects a widening since 2002 of the categories of vulnerable groups for whom local authorities must secure housing.

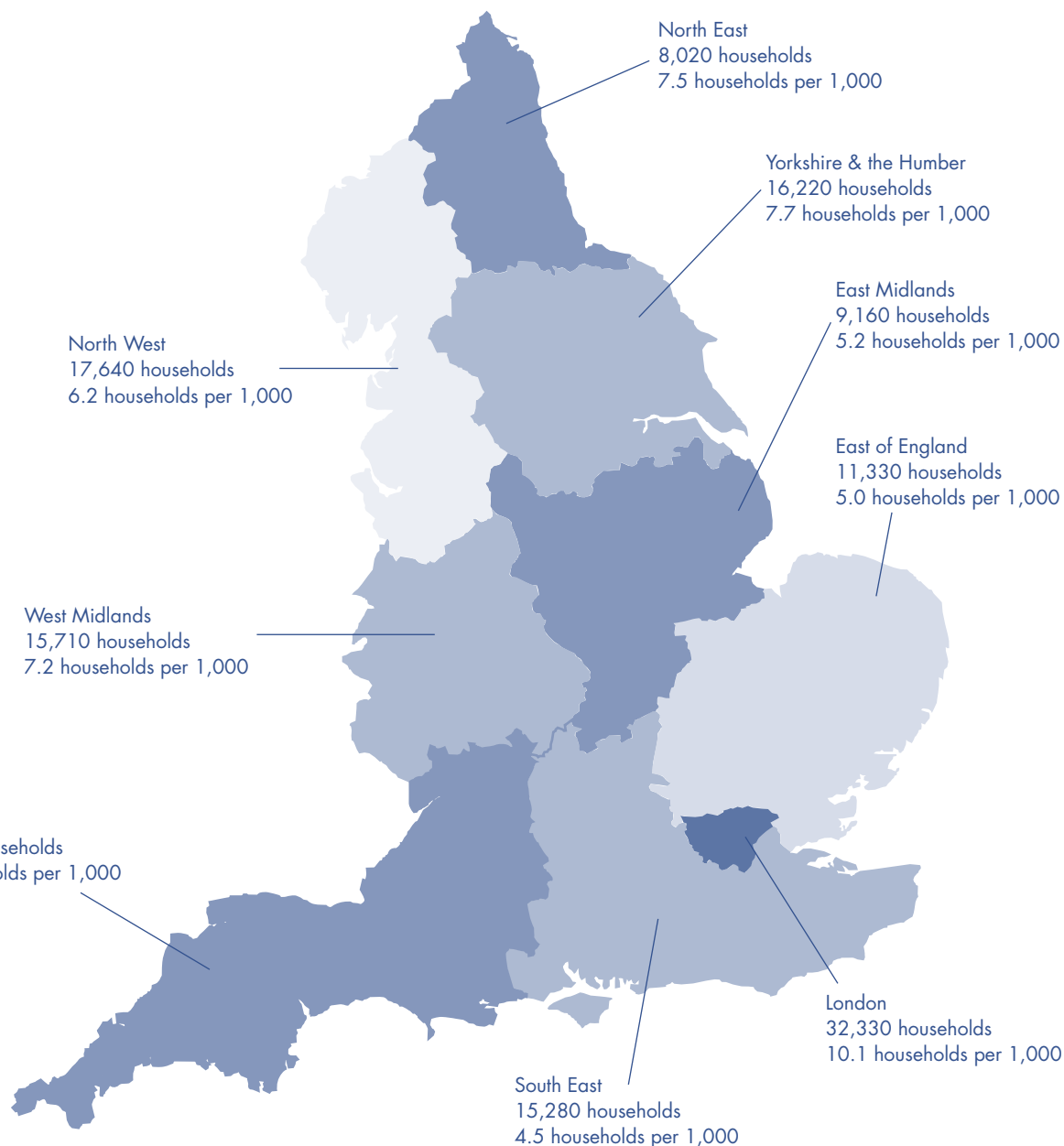
**13** During 2004, the number of applications and acceptances fell in each of the first three quarters. If this trend were to continue, we might expect the figures for the whole year to be around seven per cent lower than in 2003 – that is to say around 280,000 applications and 127,000 acceptances.

2 Barker Review of Housing Supply: [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/consultations\\_and\\_legislation/barker/consult\\_barker\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/consultations_and_legislation/barker/consult_barker_index.cfm)

**14** London has the highest numbers of homeless households, both in absolute terms, and in relation to population density (**Figure 3**). Yorkshire & the Humber and the North East also have high levels of homelessness

in relation to population density although they are not subject to the same level of housing pressure as London. The South East and East of England have the lowest rates of acceptances relative to population.

**3** In absolute terms, and in relation to population levels, London had the highest number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need in 2003



Source: ODPM statistical release, September 2004

## A new approach to homelessness

**15** In March 2002 the Government published "More Than A Roof"<sup>3</sup>, which established the need for a new and more coordinated approach to tackling homelessness. It declared that homelessness was closely associated with social exclusion, and highlighted the need for coordinated action over a period of years. It also urged the development of services that would help people before they find themselves in a crisis situation. In addition, the Homelessness Act 2002 placed new duties on local authorities including the requirement to develop and publish strategies for dealing with homelessness (Figure 4).

**16** The Government has established targets relating to two of the most extreme manifestations of homelessness. They address the exposure of children to Bed & Breakfast accommodation, which is often of a poor standard and may involve sharing facilities, and the level of rough sleeping. The targets are:

- that by March 2004, local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children has to live in a Bed & Breakfast hotel, except in an emergency, and even then for no longer than for six weeks (set in March 2002); and
- to sustain levels of rough sleeping that are two-thirds below the levels recorded in 1998, or lower (a target to achieve this reduction was set in July 1998, and a target to sustain or improve on the reduction was set in 2002).

**17** A separate Homelessness Directorate within the ODPM was established in 2002. In 2003 it merged with the Housing Care and Support Division to form the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate ("the Directorate"). Its role is to:

- promote homelessness prevention (Figure 5) and the effective implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002;
- reduce the inappropriate use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless families with children;
- reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough;
- develop approaches to tackling homelessness which result from constructive working across departments; and
- deliver a programme providing housing related support for vulnerable groups, known as "Supporting People".

<sup>3</sup> ODPM (2002), More than a Roof. Online at [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_601520.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601520.hcsp)

## 4 The main provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002

### A strategic approach

Local authorities had to carry out a multi-agency homelessness review and develop a strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, by July 2003.

### Additional powers to assist the homeless

The Act gives local authorities the freedom to secure housing for homeless households who are **not** in priority need, allowing them to help people in their community.

### Strengthening the duty local authorities owe to the homeless

Local authorities must now secure housing for unintentionally homeless households in priority need for as long as it takes to find a settled home, rather than for just two years.

### Extending local authorities' duty-to-house to more vulnerable people

An Order increased the categories of vulnerable groups for whom local authorities must secure housing. Local authorities must now house a wider range of unintentionally homeless people, including those who are:

- vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic, racial or other forms of violence
- vulnerable as a result of an institutionalised background in care, the Armed Forces or prison
- 16 and 17 year olds whose support networks have broken down irrevocably and who are not owed a duty by social services.

Source: National Audit Office/HMSO

### NOTE

The Act received Royal Assent on 26 February 2002 and applies to England and Wales.



## 5 How homelessness can be prevented

Cause	Action
Parents, relatives or friends not being able or willing to provide accommodation	Mediation services, usually contracted out by local authority to, for example, Relate
Relationship breakdown, including domestic violence	'Sanctuary' schemes, which allow domestic violence victims to remain in their homes once security measures are in place
End of assured shorthold tenancy	Housing advice. Rent deposit or bond schemes to encourage landlords to let to potentially homeless people. Landlord-tenant mediation services, to resolve disputes about behaviour or repairs
Mortgage and rent arrears	Debt counselling. Advocacy services in magistrates' court. Fast tracking housing benefit claims
Person ill-equipped to sustain a tenancy	Advice and support under the Supporting People programme for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness, for example improving budgeting and 'life' skills
Lack of information	Early and proactive intervention from local authority homelessness services to discuss options and offer assistance and advice

Source: National Audit Office

**18** In 2004-05, the Directorate allocated just under £60 million to local authorities and a range of voluntary and community sector bodies to promote improved practices in preventing homelessness and improving the lives of those who experience homelessness (Figure 6). Additionally, in 2004-05, the Directorate is distributing Supporting People funds of over £350 million, part of a wider £1.8 billion programme. These funds are designed to help authorities plan, commission and provide housing related support services specifically to help vulnerable people who have been homeless rebuild their lives and help those at risk of homelessness to sustain independent living in their own homes.

### The focus of this report

**19** After considering the scale and nature of homelessness in England (Part 1), we examined progress towards the Government's two key targets and the impact they have had (Part 2). We also evaluated the progress in encouraging new approaches to tackling homelessness (Part 3).

**20** We surveyed over 200 providers of homelessness services, visited six local authorities, interviewed people who were (or had been) homeless, consulted with a wide range of bodies, convened a panel of homelessness experts to guide our work, examined ODPM's independent evaluation of local authority homelessness strategies<sup>4</sup> and analysed available sources of homelessness statistics. Our methodology is explained in more detail in Appendix A.

4 HQNS (2004), Evaluation of Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies, ODPM.



## 6 The delivery chain – the role of key national, regional and local bodies in tackling homelessness

### 1 Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate (ODPM)

- Sets policy and targets
- Conducts overall financial management and monitors performance
- Gives specialist advice and collates and spreads best practice
- Works in partnership with other central government departments
- Oversees the Supporting People programme – housing related support to vulnerable people

### 9 Government Offices in the Regions

- Develop government programmes at regional and local level
- Support the local authorities in their area
- Work in partnership with local organisations and local people

### 354 Local Authorities

- Assess homeless applications
- Give advice and other help to prevent homelessness
- Hold the statutory duty to house those in priority need and homeless
- Conduct homelessness reviews and develop homelessness strategies
- Work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and housing providers
- Allocate temporary and permanent accommodation using their own social housing stock, privately rented/leased accommodation and Registered Social Landlords

### 500+ Voluntary and Community Sector organisations

- House statutory and non-statutory homeless people, for example in hostels for rough sleepers
- Offer advice, support and treatment for substance abuse and other issues
- Give training, skills and development such as workshops and courses

### 2000+ Registered Social Landlords

- House statutory and non-statutory homeless people nominated by local authorities
- Supply and manage temporary accommodation under contract to local authorities
- Provide supported accommodation and ongoing tenancy support
- Build and let new social housing
- Manage 1.45 million homes across England

Source: National Audit Office



## FINDINGS

### In relation to the Bed & Breakfast target

*"That, by March 2004, local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children has to live in a Bed & Breakfast hotel, except in an emergency, and even then for no longer than six weeks"*

**21** We estimate that as a result of the setting of the target up to 24,000 families with children have so far experienced improved surroundings and quality of life whilst waiting for a permanent home. Aside from a small number of special cases, the target was met by the intended date of March 2004. When the target was set two years earlier, local authorities were accommodating some 7,000 families in Bed & Breakfast hotels of which 4,000 had been resident for six weeks or more.

**22** The initiative represents good value for money by successfully "investing to save". Progress has been achieved through careful targeting of special funds by the Directorate on those local authorities who faced the biggest challenges in meeting the target, for example by switching to use of better forms of accommodation. Bed & Breakfast accommodation is an expensive option, and longer term arrangements with private sector landlords can prove to be much cheaper. We estimate that national annual savings to local authorities could be as much as £40-50 million.

**23** Wider benefits for homeless people have arisen as a result of the setting of the target. The approaches used to move families out of Bed & Breakfast hotels are equally applicable to other homeless people in Bed & Breakfast accommodation. Many authorities are using the resulting savings to re-house other client groups in better forms of temporary accommodation, or to address other homelessness priorities.

**24** After the target date, there was a slight increase in the number of families with children in Bed & Breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks, although the Directorate informed us that their latest monitoring (ahead of formal data on the quarter ending December 2004) shows the number to have fallen again. A small number of families are likely to remain for more than six weeks, reflecting exemptions allowed in the new legislation applying from 1 April 2004 which gives the target a statutory basis. It is important that such use is confined to exceptional cases, and does not re-emerge as a significant problem.

**25** The quality of alternative accommodation to Bed & Breakfast is still variable. Whilst in general temporary accommodation alternatives to Bed & Breakfast hotels offer better surroundings, especially for children, the quality is variable. The Directorate has consulted on new minimum standards, which are to be included in revised statutory guidance.



## In relation to the rough sleeping target

*"To sustain levels of rough sleeping that are two-thirds below the levels recorded in 1998, or lower"*

**26 The national target reduction in rough sleeping has been met and sustained.** Local authorities produce official data on rough sleepers by making an annual count or an estimate of people sleeping on the street. In 1998 there were 1,850 rough sleepers in England on a single night. The recorded number of rough sleepers fell by over 70 per cent between 1998 and 2004 to just over 500.

**27 The setting of the target combined with financial support and advice from the Directorate has helped to stimulate new local approaches to tackle rough sleeping.** Vulnerable adults are now better identified and supported by homelessness services. Local authorities have established more co-ordinated approaches and worked in closer partnership with voluntary and community sector partners as well as with health and addiction services to improve services to rough sleepers.

**28 The fall in rough sleeping in London has not been as great as the fall nationally.** Half of all people sleeping rough in England do so on the streets of London, and particularly in Westminster. The numbers in London have fallen significantly since 1998, but not by as much as two-thirds.

**29 There is a lack of robust information on the sufficiency of accommodation to help house and support former rough sleepers.** Since rough sleepers often have complex problems, they are particularly likely to fall into a pattern of repeat homelessness. They therefore need a programme of support to address their initial problems, and access to suitable accommodation (often referred to as "move-on" accommodation) to help their rehabilitation back into normal life. But there is a lack of definitive evidence as to whether there is sufficient "move-on" accommodation of the right type that can be matched with the right type of support service, especially in London.

## Encouraging new approaches nationally

**30 The bringing together of a number of former units dealing with separate aspects of homelessness and housing support into a single Directorate has helped to develop a more co-ordinated approach to homelessness issues within ODPM.** It has also helped to provide a focal point for homelessness policy more widely within central government.

**31 Through its engagement with a range of central government departments and agencies, the Directorate has helped to achieve a number of changes in policies and procedures and sponsored a number of promising initiatives.** These have brought about, or have the potential to bring about, improvements in the services provided to homeless people; in particular, by working with:

- the Prison Service to ensure that prisoners' housing needs are identified, and to help prisoners sustain their existing accommodation on entry to custody or find permanent accommodation on release. This work has included supporting the provision of housing advice centres in prisons;
- the Home Office to encourage schemes which allow the victims of domestic violence to stay in their original homes;
- the Department of Health to help address the health needs of rough sleepers and those in temporary accommodation;
- the Ministry of Defence to establish schemes to provide advice and shelter for ex-service personnel; and
- the Department for Education and Skills on pilot schemes to provide respite care, emergency accommodation and support for young people who have run away from home or who are at risk of being expelled from the family home.

**32 While the Directorate has made progress in widening the data collected, there remains a need for further hard quantitative data to inform national policy development and implementation on a number of issues.**

Local authorities still collect only very basic information (using P1E forms) on the causes of homelessness. The P1E is designed to monitor the decisions and actions of local authorities under the homelessness legislation, rather than to provide detailed information on homeless households. This form of data collection limits our understanding of homelessness in England, and of the scale and nature of interventions required. A major survey of 2,500 homeless households has been commissioned by the Directorate for 2005, which is intended to improve the evidence-base for its policies. A review of the statistics on homelessness has also been announced in "Homes for All".

**33 Tackling homelessness strategically as a symptom of social exclusion, not just of lack of a roof, is complex and multi-faceted.**

The Directorate has embarked on a number of pilot projects, research programmes and evaluations across a wide field of issues and in collaboration with a number of different agencies. The lessons from this work, as well as that carried out by the voluntary sector, need to be brought together and analysed so that priorities can be set to build on the success in reducing the scale of rough sleeping and use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. For example the Directorate has commissioned an evaluation of homelessness prevention work which may help achieve this. We found that the expertise of the Directorate and the quality of its support was well-regarded by local providers of services to the homeless but that they would welcome a lead on where their future priorities should lie. "Homes for All" provides this lead, setting a challenging new aim to halve the number of households in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010.

**34 The Directorate needs to work further with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and the Housing Corporation to make the most of opportunities to secure housing for the homeless.**

- NASS makes use of leased accommodation to house asylum seekers whilst their request for asylum is being assessed, but its current contract arrangements with landlords do not provide for this accommodation to be used by local authorities to house the homeless. With the recent reductions in asylum applications, some of this property is under-utilised, and NASS is closing down some contracts with providers. The Directorate and NASS are working together to make better use of empty NASS properties and need to establish whether the under-utilised properties are in the right locations to be used to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- In an increasing number of areas, local authority housing departments retain strategic responsibility for meeting housing need but social housing is provided and managed by Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) or Arm's Length Management Organisations. Some local authorities told us that Registered Social Landlords at times refuse to house individual homeless households (which are often economically inactive and may require support to sustain their tenancy) and the Directorate has recently published good practice guidance to help improve cooperation in this area. There is a lack of hard evidence on how real or widespread is the problem of Registered Social Landlords acting unreasonably or failing to meet the regulatory requirements placed upon them.

## Developing services locally

**35** The statutory requirement to review local services to the homeless and develop a strategy by July 2003 has raised the priority that local authorities and other agencies give to homelessness services. The great majority of local authorities believe the requirement to produce a strategy in combination with the setting of targets has raised the profile of homelessness issues and the need to tackle them. The majority of community and voluntary sector bodies working with the homeless agree. In the localities we visited the profile had been raised not just amongst local authority staff but more widely amongst public service agencies and local politicians.

**36** There has been increased liaison between local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and other public sector agencies in planning for homelessness services. Many disparate services are in contact with homeless people or those at risk of it in any one local authority area. Basic co-ordination of services is vital to enable sharing of information to target need and avoid duplication. We found that the requirement to draw up a strategy had helped to strengthen local partnerships.

**37** In drawing up strategies, local authorities have reconsidered how best to approach homelessness in their area. Many local authorities have identified potential new and novel approaches in their strategies. Some have used targeted central funding to restructure their services. Around 85 per cent have placed a new emphasis on preventing homelessness.

**38** The homelessness strategies of many local authorities do not set out specific and measurable ways in which their intentions are to be turned into reality and concrete improvements in services brought about.

An evaluation commissioned by the Directorate found that very few authorities had set themselves 'SMART' objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-related) in their first strategies, although many authorities have been required to do so, as a condition of their grant funding. Many local authorities have not identified the resources required for their plans. Some authorities have developed homelessness fora, which have a role in monitoring the strategy and flagging up areas of concern, but more could be done to involve the full range of service users in shaping service development.

**39** Some local authorities would have benefited from earlier feedback on their strategies, although the Directorate told us that this would have been difficult to achieve in practice. While all authorities received formal feedback from the Directorate in Summer 2004, some authorities completed an early review of progress without the benefit of being able to address common issues identified by the Directorate.

**40** Systems to collect and spread good practice in the provision of services to homeless people could be improved, and are currently over-reliant on local and informal networks. More could be done to identify and spread good practice in the provision of services to the homeless. There is little definitive evidence about what works cost-effectively, and preventive efforts are particularly difficult to evaluate. The Directorate's current evaluation and proposed good practice guide on prevention should address this.

**41** The nature and extent of regional bodies' role in tackling homelessness is varied. Government Offices in the regions have a potentially important role in ensuring local solutions take account of regional issues. We found differences in their approaches, for example in the amount of assistance that they give to local authorities, and the extent to which homelessness is reflected in regional housing strategies.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

**42** The Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate has made good progress in improving the effectiveness of services for homeless people. To help ensure further progress is made, we make the following recommendations.

To strengthen its strategic role the Directorate should:

- a** **Develop a timetabled plan for improving data on the causes, patterns and nature of homelessness and repeat homelessness.** Collecting such data is not easy given the sporadic and fragmented nature of contact by many of the homeless with service providers. But the evidence gap hinders effective identification of priorities. Local authorities have identified difficulties over data availability as an issue where further guidance would be welcome in developing homelessness reviews and strategies.
- b** **Be clearer about the outputs and outcomes it expects from its liaison with other central government bodies.** The Directorate is engaged with a wide range of departments and agencies across government, but needs to clarify the outcomes to be achieved from this work.
- c** **Disseminate cost-effective strategies for preventing homelessness.** While many local authorities have devised homeless prevention schemes, they would welcome more shared knowledge about what works well and which schemes offer best value for money. The Directorate has commissioned an evaluation of best practice, and should ensure that it is properly disseminated perhaps by sponsoring a dedicated website for practitioners.
- d** **Clarify the Government Offices' role.** At present, they are taking different approaches and providing varying levels of assistance to local authorities. The Directorate therefore needs to be clear about what it expects from the Government Offices' involvement.

To build on the success of the achievement of targets the Directorate should:

- e** **Set out in the new homelessness code of guidance the minimum standards expected for temporary accommodation, and evaluate whether these standards are met.** Since the quality is variable, local authorities and households placed in temporary accommodation need to be given clearer guidance about minimum acceptable standards.
- f** **Encourage local authorities to extract the lessons learnt from moving families out of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, and apply them to other groups in temporary accommodation.** The Directorate has had considerable success in using targeted funding and offering specialist advice to help local authorities move families with children out of Bed & Breakfast hotels. Some local authorities have used this opportunity to re-evaluate their provision of temporary accommodation to other priority need groups.
- g** **Establish the extent of problems in accessing move-on accommodation for former rough sleepers and other hostel residents.** More needs to be done to ensure that the route from hostel to settled accommodation is as efficient as possible.



To further promote more co-ordinated approaches the Directorate should:

- h** Establish whether there is hard evidence that Registered Social Landlords are failing to meet the statutory and regulatory obligations placed upon them to co-operate with local authorities in providing accommodation for homeless households. Some local authorities believe that Registered Social Landlords are able to avoid these obligations, and that nomination agreements, which are designed to reserve a fair share of housing for homeless people and others in housing need, could be made clearer and more enforceable.
- i** Work with the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to identify whether there are under-utilised NASS properties, of the right type and in the right places, to house homeless people. Existing NASS contracts preclude the use of leased accommodation for any group apart from asylum seekers. The Directorate should take forward its planned project with NASS to explore opportunities for more flexible use of empty asylum accommodation where this is appropriate and cost-effective.

### National Asylum Support Service

- j** The National Asylum Support Service should develop a system to promote better case working and information exchange with local authorities. This would allow local authorities to better estimate demand, and work more closely with NASS and other landlords to make provision for former asylum seekers given Leave to Remain in the UK, so that they do not have to make homelessness applications in the first place.

### Department of Health

- k** The Department of Health should nominate a lead officer with responsibility for co-ordinating work on homelessness issues to provide a central reference point for homelessness. Despite various pieces of work being taken forward, in general, liaison on health issues could be improved.