

# Homelessness and Resettlement Strategy

Final Version to Policy and Strategy Committee  
June 2009

**2009 -2013**

## HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2009 - 2013

ITEM	HEADING	PAGE
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1	Homelessness in Aberdeen	4
1.2	Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy 2003	4
1.3	Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy 2009 – 2013	5
1.4	Legislative Background	6
1.5	Five National Outcomes	7
<b>2</b>	<b>COUNCIL AND PARTNERS' VISION, AIM AND OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	Vision - End Homelessness in Aberdeen by 2012	8
2.2	Administration Policy Statement	8
2.3	Homelessness Policy Document	8
2.4	Homelessness and Resettlement Service Delivery Plan Summary 2009 – 2013	9
2.5	Risk Management Assessment	9
<b>3</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1	Focus Groups	10
3.2	Theme 1: Accommodation	10
3.3	Theme 2: Interventions	11
3.4	Theme 3: Public Policy	12
3.5	Tenancy Sustainment Workshop	12
<b>4</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS IN ABERDEEN</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1	Homeless Presentations	13
4.2	Homeless Presentations as a Percentage of the Population	13
4.3	Reasons for Presentations	14
4.4	Time spent in the Homelessness System	15
4.5	Priority Need	16
4.6	Section 11 Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003	17
4.7	Intentionally Homeless Households	17
4.8	Rough Sleepers	17
4.9	Age Profile and Family Composition of Homeless Applicants	18
4.10	Minority Ethnic Communities	20
4.11	People with a disability	20
4.12	Homelessness Journey	21
<b>5</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>ACCOMMODATION FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>22</b>
6.1	Housing Supply	22
6.2	Temporary Accommodation	23
6.3	Demand for Housing	24

6.4	Demand for Supported Accommodation	25
6.5	The Types and Levels of Support Needed	26
6.6	Direct Access Accommodation	26
6.7	The Private Rented Sector	27
<b>7</b>	<b>INTERVENTIONS FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>28</b>
7.1	Advice and Information	28
7.2	Legal Advice, Advocacy Services and Casework	28
7.3	Practical Assistance	29
7.4	Housing Support Services	30
7.5	Substance Misuse, Addictions and Homelessness	31
7.6	Education, Training and Employment	32
7.7	Health and Homelessness	33
7.8	Health and Homeless Directory	35
7.9	Health and Homelessness Young People	35
7.10	Single Shared Assessment	35
7.11	Child Protection	36
<b>8</b>	<b>PUBLIC POLICY</b>	<b>37</b>
8.1	Improved Joint Working within the Council	37
8.2	Evictions and Housing Management	37
8.3	Domestic Abuse	38
8.4	Violence Against Women	39
8.5	Young People Leaving Care	39
8.6	Gypsy/Travellers	39
8.7	Antisocial Behaviour	40
8.8	People Leaving Prison	40
8.9	Criminal Justice, Sex Offenders, Violent Offenders	41
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>Membership of the Homelessness Strategy Advisory Group</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>ACTION PLAN</b>	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Homelessness in Aberdeen

With the rising number of homeless households (2,504 presentations in 2007/8) and a decreasing supply of affordable housing, Aberdeen City faces tough challenges in tackling homelessness.

Providing a permanent home for all those unintentionally homeless by 2012 creates pressure on supply which the city will struggle to deliver. However, the city remains committed to the vision of ending homelessness by 2012. Partnership working across the city has to be further developed to achieve our vision.

There is lack of new investment in housing, which to some extent is being addressed by the Council's new build programme and affordable housing policy.

We will refocus resources on preventing homelessness occurring and making sure that people who have been housed are able to sustain their tenancy. There is a need to provide a range of services to assist with tenancy sustainment; often the most effective intervention is direct access to services that provides advice, casework, representation and practical assistance.

This strategy will target people with housing problems who are at risk of homelessness, or people who are homeless and make sure that the services are accessible to everyone, including people with 'specific needs', with a focus on preventing repeat homelessness

We remain committed to ending homelessness and as a city we are confident that this strategy provides a framework for ensuring that this happens.

### 1.2 Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy 2003

The first Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy published in 2003 set the context of the homeless problem in the City, and examined the nature and extent of homelessness alongside provisions and plans to address homelessness. This Strategy highlighted the commitment to work in partnership with all relevant agencies to implement the changes in legislation and policies; to ensure that more homeless people than ever before had the right to permanent accommodation, and the right to at least temporary accommodation as well as advice and assistance. The overarching aim was to achieve the former Scottish Executive's now the Scottish Government's target to ensure that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless person would be entitled to permanent accommodation.

The Strategy sought to:-

- prevent homelessness;
- intervene when homelessness occurs;
- resettle those who have experienced homelessness; and,
- achieve these main aims through effective partnerships and joint working.

The Action Plan which formed part of the Strategy contained about 150 actions. The Strategy also contained the Health and Homelessness Action Plan with a further 33 actions. In that respect it was unfocussed and unlikely to be completely fulfilled. Nevertheless, few actions remained unachieved by early 2008. A review in 2008 refocused the Action Plan and sought to galvanize activity around 3 key themes: Accommodation, Interventions and Public Policy

### **1.3 Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy 2009 - 2013**

The Homelessness Strategy 2009 - 2013 seeks to build on the achievements of the first homelessness strategy.

Current Government advice in the local housing strategy guidance, June 2008 suggests that it is no longer necessary to have a separate Homelessness Strategy. However, it will still be necessary to have a working strategy document for the City, which enables the agreement in the Concordat between the Council and the Government's single outcome agreement Section 10, to be achieved (that all unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012); which accords with the Community Plan and the Council's vision for the City (Vibrant, Dynamic, & Forward Looking).

The strategy and action plan has been developed with the Aberdeen Homeless Strategy Advisory Group (AHSAG) in consultation with a wide range of service providers. Representation on this group includes statutory and voluntary organisations including the NHS Grampian, Grampian Police, voluntary sector service providers, Registered Social Landlords and representatives from a range of Council services all with a common aim of ending homelessness in Aberdeen.

The new strategy aims to set out a clear vision of ending homelessness in the city, placing much greater emphasis on early interventions to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place. Only through working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies and the implementation of effective steps to prevent homelessness will the City be in a position to achieve this challenge.

The strategy also seeks to establish a more effective approach to helping people who do become homeless. This approach emphasises the need to ensure that people can access the help they need to address the underlying problems that caused their homelessness.

The availability of social rented housing continues to decline through the Right to Buy. The acute shortage of social rented housing and affordable homes is getting worse, whilst homelessness is increasing. Steps such as the introduction of Pressured Area Status to reduce the loss of housing stock through the Right to Buy together with ambitious plans by the City Council and RSLs to deliver new affordable housing will contribute to maximising the availability of affordable housing and social rented housing. However this may not meet the need which will be identified by the Housing Need and Demand Assessment which is currently being prepared in conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council and other partners.

Affordable housing is broadly defined as housing of reasonable quality that is affordable to people on modest incomes. The main ways affordable housing is provided are through social rented property, available from either a local authority or a housing association; low-cost housing for home ownership; and some private sector rented accommodation, available at lower cost than market rents.

Opportunities which can be provided by the private rented sector also need to be maximised where tenancy security, rent levels and property condition can provide appropriate housing.

#### **1.4 Legislative background**

In line with the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce the reporting requirements of local government, housing and related strategies have been rationalised. Under recent guidance produced by the Scottish Government the Local Housing Strategy, will now be the sole strategic document on housing, homelessness and support issues.

The Council has statutory duties towards people affected by homelessness, paying due regard to the Code of Guidance on Homelessness, Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the 2001 and 2003 Acts and the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. In practical terms, the Council must:

- take reasonable steps to ensure that accommodation does not cease to be available;
- carry out an assessment of a household's homelessness;
- ensure the provision of temporary accommodation for all homeless households, irrespective of whether they are in priority need;
- work with partners to ensure that advice and information about the prevention of homelessness, and any services which may assist in the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in the authority's area;
- ensure temporary accommodation at least meets minimum standards in the best interests of children;
- securing provision of permanent accommodation to all homeless households (by 2012).
- ensure all unintentionally homeless households are provided with permanent accommodation by 2012.

One of the biggest challenges now facing local authorities and their partners is the need to meet the "2012 target". The aim being that by 2012, all unintentionally homeless people are entitled to permanent accommodation.

Working in partnership with services and agencies across the city is key to achieving our vision of "*ending homelessness by 2012*". We will focus on:

- Assisting households to access secure and sustainable housing
- Working to prevent homelessness, by ensuring that households can access advice, casework and representation.
- Making greater use of the private rented market to provide homeless households with the widest range of housing solutions possible.

- Working together to prevent long-term or repeat cycles of homelessness by providing housing support and access to other services to address underlying issues.
- Ensuring that those who experience homelessness are able to secure sustainable solutions, including access to employment, education, training and volunteering and by encouraging positive social networks

## **1.5 Five National Outcomes**

In complying with the above, the Council will contribute to meeting the Scottish Government's national outcomes. The Scottish Government's five national outcomes for homelessness services are:

- No one need sleep rough
- Existing homelessness becomes more visible
- Sustainable resettlement is secured for people who have become homeless
- Fewer people become homeless in the first place
- The duration of homelessness is reduced.

The City's progress towards the five national outcomes was published in the Homelessness Annual Report which was launched in November 2008. The report highlighted the progress made to achieve these outcomes, most notably the commencement of the Council's New Tenancy Support Team who support households who have experienced homelessness to settle into their tenancies, and the Council's continued commitment to introduce or support a number of schemes to provide additional advice and information to potential service users as well as a significant reduction in the length of time taken for individual cases to be resolved. These national outcomes have been linked to the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2009 – 2013.

## **2. COUNCIL AND PARTNERS - VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 Vision - End Homelessness in Aberdeen by 2012**

The long term vision of the Homelessness Strategy remains to end homelessness in Aberdeen.

Achieving this vision requires us to understand all the varying needs of those affected by homelessness as well as those who may be at risk of homelessness; it requires that we work together in partnership and share the responsibility to coordinate the delivery of the services that are needed.

The commitment to resolving homelessness is a pro-active commitment that requires all those involved in the delivery of services to take on a responsibility to do everything within available resources to work on client's behalves until they can confidently sustain any accommodation they have secured.

### **2.2 Administration Policy Statement**

The Council's Administration Policy Statement sets out the policies which we believe will deliver Aberdeen City's Vision, to be "a city which is vibrant, dynamic, forward looking - an even better place to live and work, where people can expect high-quality services that meet their needs". Those specifically related to the revised Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan are:

- All unintentionally homeless households will be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012.
- Working jointly with services and partners in compliance with our statutory duty to homeless persons and to achieve the Government's 2012 target.

### **2.3 Homelessness Policy Document**

Updated in January 2009, this policy statement sets out how Aberdeen City Council will deliver services to contribute to the achievement of these strategic goals within the legislative framework and Code of Guidance enacted through the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003. There were a number of changes made to the policy most notably was the commitment to improve on prevention measures, a key factor being the availability of information, advice and representation, this has been recognised within the updated policy,

### **2.4 Homelessness and Resettlement Service Delivery Plan Summary 2009 – 2013**

The Council's Service Delivery Plan for Homelessness and Resettlement continues to build on the improvements identified following the Communities Scotland Inspection in 2005. It also details the service objectives and key targets for continuous improvement in service delivery through to 2013. This will be included in the Council's overall Housing Service Plan.

## **2.5 Risk Management Assessment**

Aberdeen City Council's policy is to operate a comprehensive risk management framework. The Homelessness Service has undergone a risk assessment process and has identified actions to reduce the likelihood of primary causes of risk from occurring. The main risks identified were around failure to meet our legislative/regulatory responsibilities, evictions and abandonments, customer service and partnership working. The assessment and progress of actions is reviewed through the Homelessness Service Improvement Team meetings which are held on a monthly basis.

## 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

### 3.1 Focus Groups

In May 2008 the Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy Advisory Group discussed how best to undertake a review and preparation of a revised strategy.

It was agreed that three Focus Groups involving members of the Advisory Group and representatives from the statutory and voluntary sector should meet to take forward three topics. These groups would invite key organisations to assist with their deliberations by presenting issues around homelessness from their perspective.

The three main themes identified were:

- Accommodation
- Interventions
- Public Policy

### 3.2 Theme 1: Accommodation

Aberdeen suffers from an acute shortage of affordable social rented housing in a market that faces increasing demand for housing across all tenures. Difficulties in obtaining loans, high house prices, increasing mortgage costs and a growing demand for housing means many more households will experience problems in paying for their homes or finding a new home that better suits their needs. Increasing the supply of affordable homes is a major priority if the City is to succeed in meeting the requirement to ensure all homeless people have access to housing by 2012.

The following key issues were identified:

- Increasing the supply of accommodation in the city is a priority. It is widely acknowledged that this is an issue that the homelessness strategy cannot address directly, although the data gathered will assist in helping to identify future housing needs.
- The future requirements for and supply of temporary supported accommodation will be based on projected need and planned accordingly.
- Increasing the availability of family accommodation to homeless applicants in the city should be a priority. Steps have already been taken to address this issue most notably is the increase of points to statutory homeless families on the Council's waiting list.
- A comprehensive review of the Council's Scheme of Allocations is required in particular looking at ways in which the scheme could do more to facilitate homeless applicants, promote existing family and other social support networks and provide lettings that will help the new tenant by keeping these intact.

- The future use of Section 5 referrals or the continued use of a nomination process to ensure homeless households are housed by all RSLs needs to be fully considered and appropriate actions taken.

### **3.3 Theme 2: Interventions**

Early interventions are key to achieving our vision of “ending homelessness by 2012”.

Rent Management Teams are often the first point of contact for vulnerable families and single households. The pattern set by this first contact can impact on probable outcomes, most importantly how the tenant engages with the local authority, registered social landlord or other services. The Council’s early intervention processes have been incorporated within the recently reviewed Rent Collection and Vulnerable Tenant Policies and are a key element of the Tenancy Sustainment Action Plan. The resources required are presently being considered as part of the realignment of service delivery.

Not all homeless people have associated problems but it is clear that many people affected by homelessness often have a plethora of other problems. It has therefore been accepted that early contact and appropriate referrals are critical. Vulnerable tenants often cannot cope with working with multiples agencies and need to be able to deal with one person who understands the relevant issues and can provide effective help. The Council will work towards securing a single referral mechanism where one individual agency will take the lead and co-ordinate actions. This will be achieved through agreed protocols and Service Level Agreements with all appropriate agencies.

The following key issues were identified:

- Intervention through improved assessment and referral process, identifying vulnerable tenants as early as possible.
- Following Court action (whatever the outcome) follow-up visits should be made to tackle the underlying issues, not just the urgent issues which provoked the crisis.
- The Council should review and develop procedures to check records on Housing Benefit and Council Tax entitlement and assist households to maximise income before taking action.
- The Advice & Information Strategy should be improved, finalised and implemented.
- There is a critical need for people threatened with or affected by homelessness to be able to access information, advice and advocacy services at the appropriate level.
- More advice and information services should be provided from a variety of sources. All services commissioned should be, or achieve accreditation, in Information and Advice Standards.

### **3.4 Theme 3: Public Policy**

The Council along with all other agencies in the City must work together to achieve the overall aim of preventing and alleviating homelessness.

The following key issues were identified:

- Reduce the number of evictions and court actions pursued by the Council through the Tenancy Sustainment Action Plan. Any evictions should be a last resort and should only proceed if all possible actions have been taken.
- Improved links between Social Work, Homelessness and wider housing services should be addressed with clarity on roles and responsibilities.
- The Homelessness Strategy must compliment the Council's Integrated Children's Services Plan and other Council strategies.

### **3.5 Tenancy Sustainment Workshop**

Staff from across frontline and strategic Council services attended a workshop in June 2008 to consider the most important factors influencing tenancy sustainment.

The factors identified were similar to those identified through the Homelessness Strategy Focus Group meetings with the need for early intervention and ongoing support, more generic working, financial issues such as debt and benefit problems, internal exchange of information and communication, resources and the lack of voids.

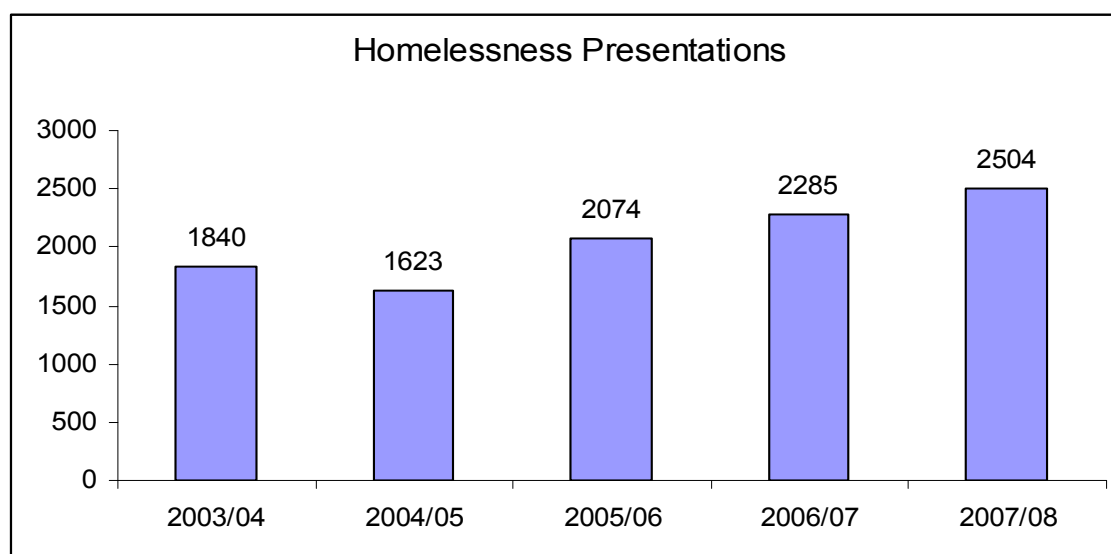
The need for training was identified for both new and existing staff and improved understanding and communication between sections within the Council. More integrated working methods and improved communication between management and front line staff is needed.

The outcomes from the workshop are being taken forward by the Rent Arrears Service Improvement Team through the Tenancy Sustainment Action Plan which will help take forward some of the issues identified through the Focus Group meetings.

## 4. HOMELESSNESS IN ABERDEEN

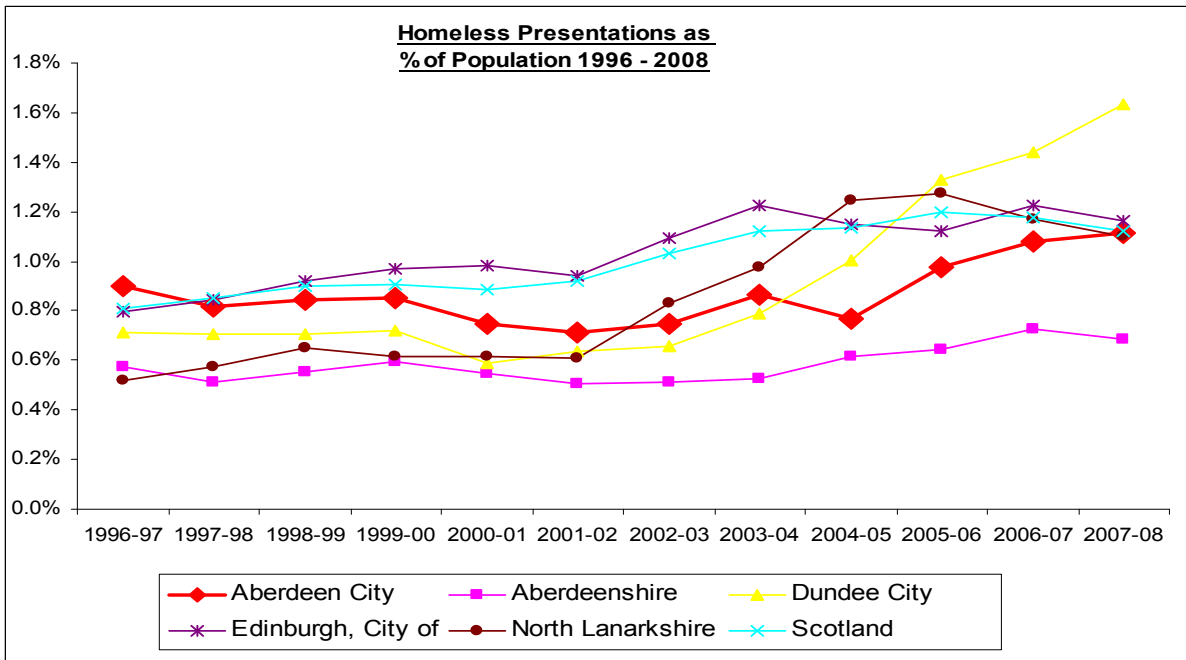
### 4.1 Homeless Presentations

Homeless applications in Aberdeen increased from 1,840 in 2003/4 to 2,504 in 2007/8. The gradual upward trend over the past few years has continued with a 10% increase in presentations during 2007/08. From April to November 2008 approximately 230 households per month presented as homeless and if the current trend continues it will result in a 10% increase again this year.



### 4.2 Homeless Presentations as a Percentage of the Population

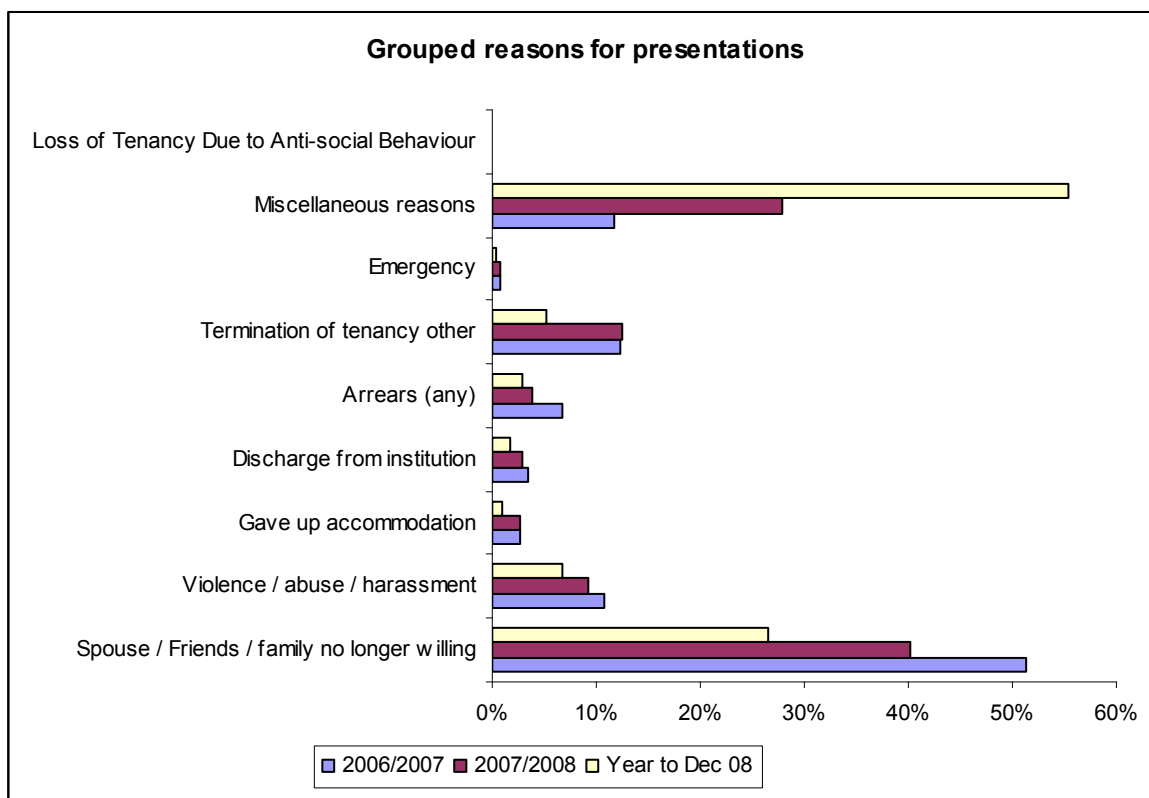
Whilst any increase is undesirable, the proportion of the Aberdeen population applying as homeless has been low, and had been consistently below the Scottish average until 2006/07. Since 2004/05 the number of presentations has gradually increased in Aberdeen and is now similar to the Scottish average.



### 4.3 Reasons for Presentations

The major reasons applicants give for presenting as homeless have been grouped together and are shown in the table below. The differences in the annual figures reflect the changes in the HL1 recording systems that were introduced in April 2007. It must also be noted that the figures for this year only cover the period April to December 2008.

There has been a significant increase during 2008/09 in the number of miscellaneous reason for presentations. The detailed statistics show 60% indicating “other reason for leaving accommodation”, with 32% providing “no answer”. The number of approaches to the Homelessness Service as a result of people being asked to leave by their spouse, friends or family is showing a gradual decline from 51% in 2006/07, 40% in 2007/08 and for the year to December 2008, 27%.

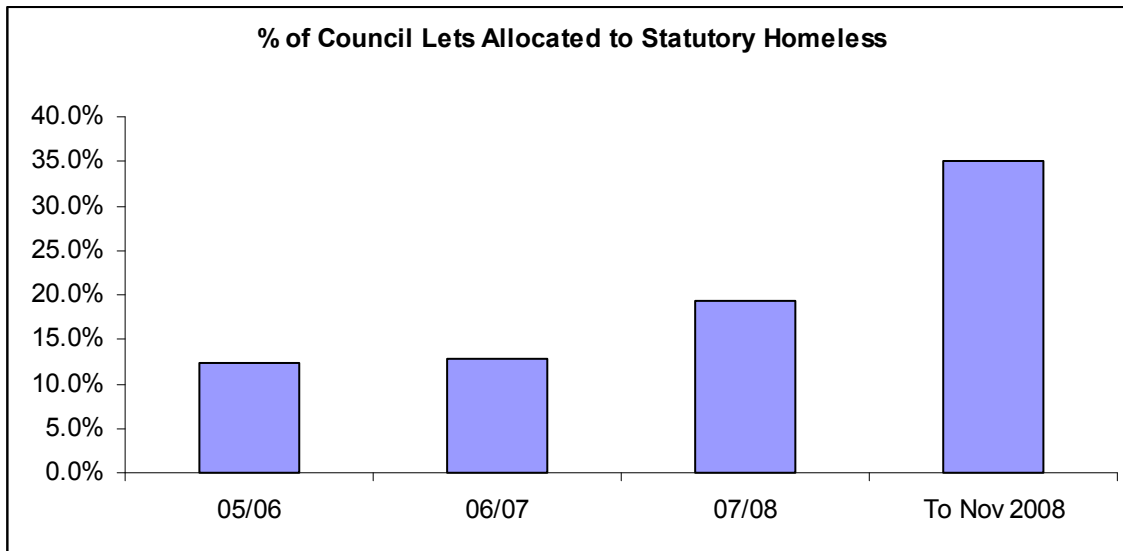


Grouped reasons for presentation	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009 (to Dec 08)
Spouse / Friends / family no longer willing	1197	1006	529
Violence / abuse / harassment	253	233	134
Gave up accommodation	62	68	21
Discharge from institution	82	74	35
Arrears (any)	156	97	57
Termination of tenancy other	289	311	104
Emergency	16	18	9
Miscellaneous reasons	275	697	1102
Loss of Tenancy Due to Anti-social Behaviour	3	0	0

#### 4.4 Time spent in the Homelessness System

The longer households are in the homelessness system, the greater the impact to the household and the higher the cost to the public purse. It is therefore vital to reduce the time taken to discharge the Council's duty. Permanent accommodation must be found (the Council's, other registered social landlords, or possibly in the private rented sector following changes to Section 32A) much more quickly than at present. The decisions taken in the Council's Transformation report in October 2007 to increase the proportion of Council and RSL lets to homeless households will assist in this duty. An additional 25 points have been awarded to homeless families since April 2008 (although not intentionally homeless families), thereby increasing lets to homeless households, this

should also reduce the length of time homeless families have to wait to be offered secure accommodation. In turn, this will release temporary accommodation for others to use. However it should be noted that there remains a desperate shortage of affordable accommodation within the City, especially family-sized accommodation.



Notwithstanding Aberdeen's pre-eminent position within Scotland for accommodating people quickly following the decision, the average time to discharge the Council's duty rose throughout 2007/8 from 70.5 days in April 2007 to a peak of 101.8 days in January 2008. For the period April to November 2008 the average time has reduced to 80.9 days. The improvement has been made through the concerted effort by staff to reduce the time between presentation and statutory interview. Delays have reduced although there is still a long way to go to further improve the average time. In November 2008 households were remaining in temporary accommodation, or on homelessness waiting lists, for an average of 64.3 days. However, a few households have been in temporary accommodation for over nine months.

#### 4.5 Priority Need

The major goal is to ensure that by 2012 all unintentionally homeless people have access to permanent housing. At the moment homeless people who are found to be in a category of 'priority need' (who are unintentionally homeless and who have a local connection) have the right to permanent accommodation. This right will be expanded to include all unintentionally homeless people, by abolishing the test of priority need. As an interim target, Councils must aim to reduce the proportion of non-priority assessments by 50% by 2009. In Aberdeen, the target is 82% by 2009. The Council made an early decision to extend priority need to those aged up to and including 26 years from April 2008. As a result the Council has achieved 86.5% for the period from April to November 2008.

#### 4.6 Section 11 Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003

Other elements of legislation will be enacted in the coming months which will change the obligations on the Council toward potentially homeless households. In April 2009 one of the provisions which may have the largest impact on the Council is the implementation of Section 11 of the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003 which places a requirement on all private and social sector landlords and creditors (such as mortgage companies) to inform local authorities when Notices of Proceedings for eviction or repossession are raised (Section 11 of the 2003 Act). The regulation prescribing the form and manner of the notice has been laid before Parliament. Local authorities will then use this information to help prevent and alleviate homelessness.

The implementation of this legislation is likely to have a significant effect on homeless service provision. With over 11,500 private sector properties in the city registered with the Landlord Registration Scheme and the current financial climate, the number of notices received could be considerable.

Council draft guidelines and procedures are out for consultation with colleagues across services, to clarify what actions will be taken in response to notifications and identification of illegal actions being taken by landlords.

CAB have identified that a number of letting agents and private landlords in the city who are allegedly illegally evicting tenants. CAB continues to monitor the situation and information is being passed on to the Private Landlord Registration Unit. A co-ordinated response to illegal evictions will be developed involving CAB, the police and Council services.

#### **4.7 Intentionally Homeless Households**

The duties of the Council towards people affected by homelessness extend to people who are found to be intentionally homeless. Although there is no statutory obligation to find permanent accommodation for intentionally homeless households, the Council must still ensure that these households have access to support and assistance to help them overcome any barriers which are preventing them from securing accommodation and provide resettlement support to help sustain their tenancies. This means that the Council will have to provide advice and assistance to find somewhere else to live, and temporary accommodation while the applicant looks for a new home. The Council are considering the option of using SSST's to meet the housing needs of intentionally homeless household, particularly around vulnerable adults and households with children.

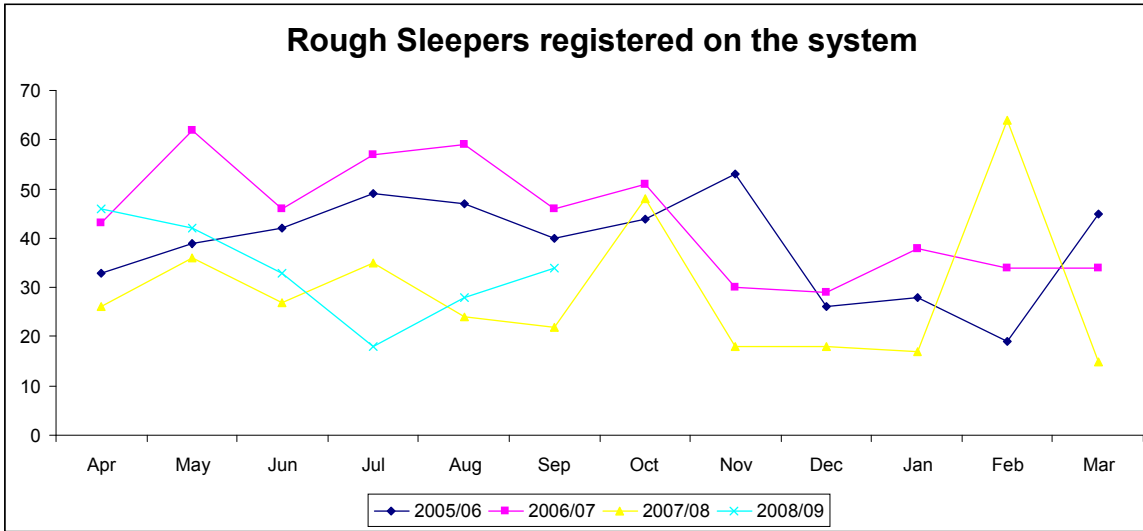
#### **4.8 Rough Sleepers**

Other major issues in 2008 included a very high number of people claiming to have slept rough, the length of time taken from the time people approach the Council for help, to the time the formal interview took place and the overall length of time people remained in the homelessness system.

In Aberdeen, there is a perception that there are many homeless people sleeping rough. However, repeated counts by staff from the Police, the Council and Aberdeen Cyrenians reveal a different story. This exercise is carried out several times a year usually consisting of three teams of three people. At the last count in August 2008 no one was

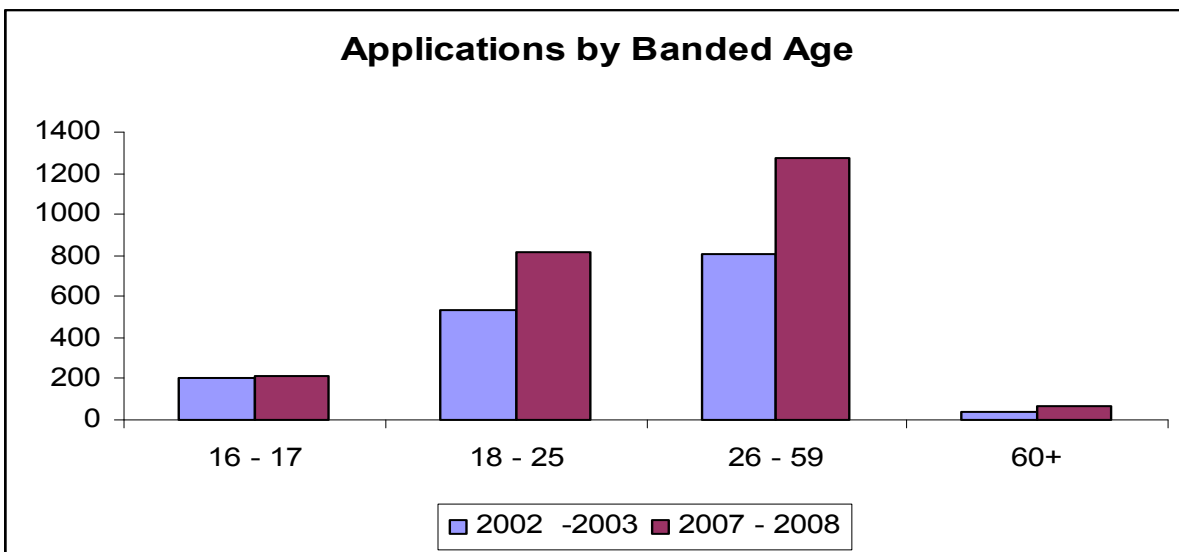
found sleeping rough and the previous count identified only one person was found sleeping on the streets. This contrasts with “official” but unverified figures, provided by applicants when they first present to the Homelessness Section showing 377 people claiming to have slept rough on the night preceding their application during the period October 2007 to September 2008. We believe that people think that it will help their application if they tell us they are sleeping rough. The Council will continue to take part in these counts and also part funded a two week pilot Winter Care Shelter Project being run by The Bethany Trust.

**Number of people claiming to have slept rough the night before presentation**



**4.9 Age Profile and Family Composition of Homeless Applicants**

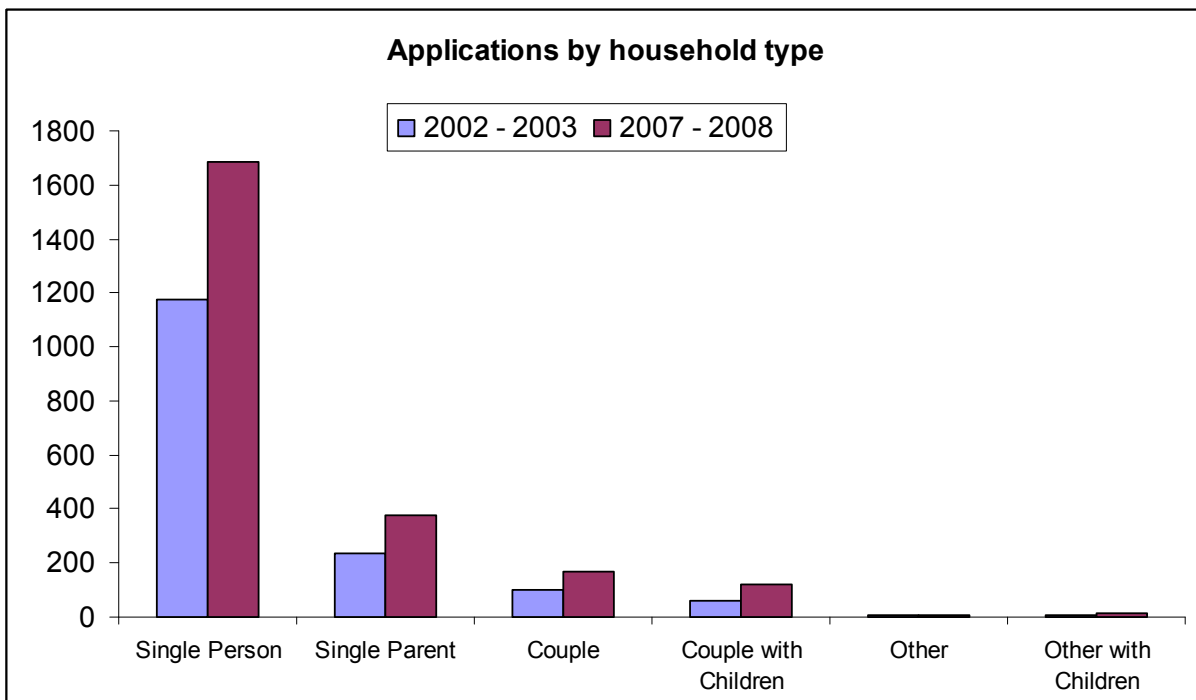
The age profile of households presenting as homeless shows an increase of 52% in the 18 to 25 year age group since the publication of the last strategy and an increase of approximately 59% in applicants in the 26 to 59 years category.



There has been a significant change in the family composition of homeless applicants since our first strategy.

The number of single person household applications has increased by 44% from 1,176 in 2002/03 to 1,689 in 2007/08. The number of couples presenting as homeless increased from 101 in 2002/03 to 169 (67%) in 2007/08 but the number of couples with children has more than doubled from 61 in 2002/03 to 124 in 2007/08 applications.

The increase in single household applications over this period is replicated throughout Scotland. The Homelessness etc (2003) Act is one of the key drivers of this increase, as single applicants benefitted most from the legislative changes.



#### 4.10 Minority Ethnic Communities

We continue to receive low numbers of homeless presentations from the minority ethnic communities. According to the 2001 census 3% of the total Aberdeen City population was from the black and minority ethnic community, with homelessness presentations being 1.5% in 07/08. In Scotland as a whole 3% of all homeless presentations are from ethnic minority communities, therefore Aberdeen sits below the Scottish average. A range of leaflets on Council services in other languages are widely available and on display in public areas. Access to interpretation and translation services can be arranged for clients as required.

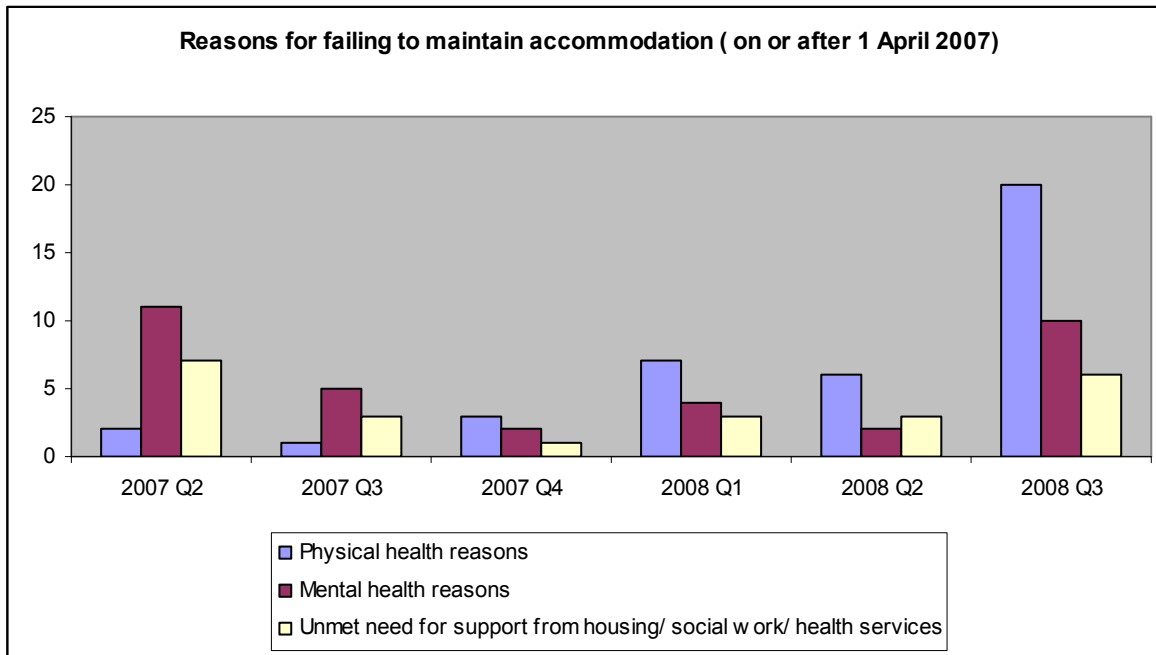
#### 4.11 People with a disability

The number of people presenting with physical health reasons for failing to maintain their accommodation has risen significantly since April 2007 as shown in the table below.

This is possibly due to the changes introduced by the Council in March 2008 on the eligibility criteria for accessing adult services. The council made a policy decision that only those citizens with needs that have been assessed as emergency/urgent or high level will be eligible for Adult Care Services.

People assessed in the medium and low bands who do not meet the eligibility criteria are provided with information and advice on other sources of help where possible.

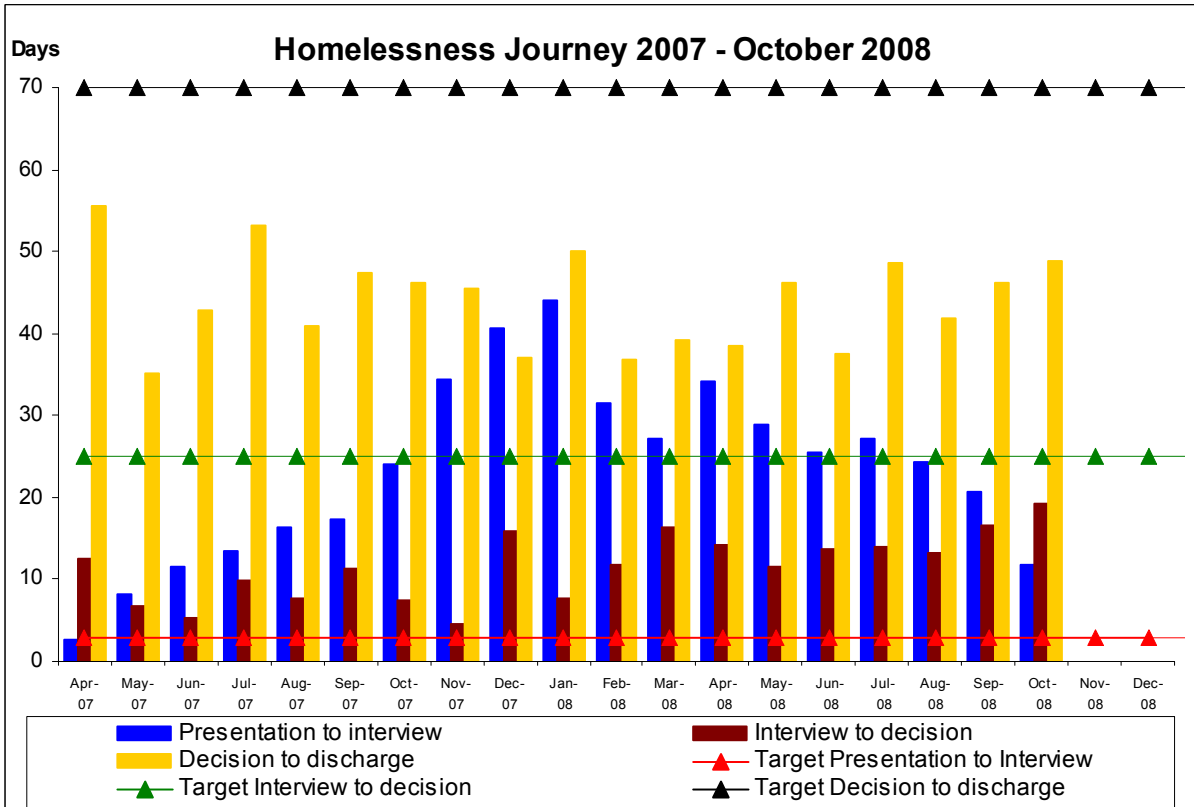
Monitoring systems will be required to check the effects on homelessness services due to this change in policy.



#### 4.12 Homelessness Journey

The homelessness journey is broken down into various stages and timescales. By presenting the information in this way it is possible to see trends and blockages. The target for presentation to interview is 3 days, from interview to decision 25 days and decision to discharge of duty is 70 days.

In the second half of 2007 the time taken to interview people rose significantly. This was caused by the increasing number of households presenting and staffing shortages. Now that the staffing issues are being resolved, it is expected that the figure should drop to or below 2006/07 levels.



Significant efforts have been made by the homelessness service to reduce the time between presentation and interview as this is a key element in the process. Current indications are that this improvement is being maintained and will be closely monitored; a review of target times will be agreed through the Homelessness Service Improvement Team monthly meetings.

## 5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

The three focus groups covered high level issues on Accommodation, Public Policy and Interventions. A series of meetings were held and although there was an element of overlap in the discussions, a number of key themes emerged on the issues we need to address. These key themes form the basis of the Homelessness Strategy and action plan.

Work is required on pathways and interventions through actual cases which will assist in identifying what is not happening and from this map out new process, policies and service requirements. Tackling homelessness has to be embedded in the culture, and job descriptions where necessary.

## 6. ACCOMMODATION FOCUS GROUP

### 6.1 Housing Supply

Housing supply is a major factor in the current housing and homelessness situation. Put simply, there is not enough social rented or affordable accommodation in Aberdeen. With a shortage of these types of accommodation it is unsurprising that many people reach crisis point and experience homelessness.

There has been a low level of supply of new build housing, both in the private and the public sector in recent years. Recently this has been attributed in part to the “credit crunch”. Indeed, whilst the focus groups were meeting, various developers announced plans to reduce staffing and close local offices.

The decline in new build housing may also be due in part to the lack of available land for development and it will take time for new land releases from the adopted Local Plan to filter through and provide new housing.

This slowing of new building not only impacts on the immediate provision of new homes for sale, but reduces the ongoing provision of new affordable housing through Section 75 agreements. These agreements are a mechanism for the provision of affordable housing through developer contribution.

The changes to Housing Association Grant funding to make more efficient savings in the development of affordable housing may make financing of new developments by RSL’s more difficult as they will have to increase private borrowing. It has proven very difficult for RSL’s to buy sites on the open market due to high land values; with changes in the market there may well be short term opportunities for RSL’s to buy completed units or sites from developers. The Council is also considering the disposal of some surplus Council sites to RSL’s.

In December 2008 the Council made a commitment for the Housing Revenue Account to borrow £43 million for the provision of 344 new affordable homes. The Scottish

Government announced in November 2008 it would make £25m available to local authorities for the provision of new affordable housing and the Council submitted a funding bid in January 2009 for £2.8 million to help build 92 affordable housing units. In March 2009 it was announced that the initial bid was unsuccessful and a subsequent bid has been made. Whatever the outcome the council has made a commitment to have these houses on site in 2009/10. The difference will be that if the Council bid is unsuccessful this will mean a higher rent premium for the new houses, but they will still remain affordable.

The Council applied for Pressured Area Status (PAS) in June 2007 for 41 letting areas of the City. The Scottish Government in September 2007 designated 35 of these areas for PAS. During 2007/08, 462 Council properties were sold.

A Housing Needs and Demand Assessment is being progressed jointly by the City and Aberdeenshire and its findings should be available by mid 2009.

The private rented market has grown considerably over recent years but high demand means that current market rents are the highest in Scotland making it difficult for homeless households to access this sector. The Council is currently exploring ways to make this sector more accessible.

Increasing the supply of accommodation in the city should be a priority, but is not one that the homelessness strategy can address directly, but the strategy can emphasise the need for affordable housing by providing up to date information on the current homelessness situation.

## **6.2 Temporary Accommodation**

The Council has increased the number of furnished properties used as temporary accommodation from 6 flats in 2002/03 to 120 flats in 2008/09 flats, including properties suitable for people with mobility difficulties. A decision has already been made that this number may increase to 300 by 2010 if need continues to rise. However, each property taken out of the stock for temporary accommodation reduces the opportunities for permanent lets.

The Council also has 3 accommodation units providing 79 bed spaces.

There is currently a lack of temporary accommodation in the City and in some cases homeless people can be in this accommodation for up to 18 months until appropriate rehousing options can be found. The Council needs to improve the turnover of temporary accommodation by ensuring the earliest possible rehousing of homeless households.

The ongoing use of bed and breakfast is an issue which needs to be tackled. Not only is this inappropriate accommodation for most people it is also the most expensive for the public purse. The increased provision of temporary homeless flats should assist in the reduction of use of B&B's.

Some facilities managed by the voluntary sector have closed recently which has increased pressures on the demand for accommodation. Refuge accommodation

provided by Aberdeen Women's Aid has closed albeit on a temporary basis and negotiations are continuing with a view to making this accommodation available at the earliest possible opportunity.

Being placed in temporary accommodation without support does not suit everyone. Some people benefit from social contact and linking in with others of similar interests. This is where hostel type accommodation may be more suitable. Current hostel accommodation provided by the Council needs to be reviewed to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose into the future.

A paper produced by the Chartered Institute of Housing provides details on the physical standards that should be applied to temporary accommodation to meet client's needs. This paper will form the basis for the review of the hostel accommodation.

There is also a need to provide appropriate specialist accommodation to meet future demand in the City. This will include accommodation with access to support services for people with substance misuse and addictions as it may not be appropriate for them to access temporary flats, B&B's or Women's Aid accommodation.

The future requirements for and supply of temporary supported accommodation needs to be planned. The Council must therefore develop a temporary accommodation strategy for the City which will address the types and amount of accommodation along with a formal process for accessing this type of accommodation.

The Council must be mindful of budgetary limitations and be realistic about achieving this objective in the current economic climate.

A number of homelessness people from outwith Aberdeen are living in temporary accommodation within the City. Regular discussions are being held with Aberdeenshire to address this and other homelessness issues.

### **6.3 Demand for Housing**

Accommodation supply problems and lack of turnover of the Council's and RSL's housing stock has had a significant impact on the provision of housing to homeless people.

The proportion of lets in Council accommodation to homeless applicants has been low in comparison with other Scottish authorities. Aberdeen let the lowest proportion at 14% in 2006/7 with a Scottish average of 34%. In 2007/08 the City figure increased to 20% which was still well below the Scottish average. To help address this additional points have been awarded to homeless families since April 2008. During the period April to November 2008 this helped increase the average lets to homeless households to 41.1%.

Although the majority of homeless applicants are single, there is an increasing number of larger households who require accommodation for whom there is a very limited supply. Increasing the provision of accommodation to homeless applicants in the city continues to be a priority and a comprehensive review of the Council's Scheme of Allocations will be undertaken.

Like most other local authorities in Scotland the Council has taken a policy decision to revise the eligibility criteria for providing Care services, to ensure that citizens in the greatest need or at most risk are prioritised. This has resulted in an increase in people with medium to low level care needs taking the homeless route, the consequence of this is a delay in being able to secure suitable support packages prior to re-housing and is putting additional pressure on temporary accommodation provision and local authority funding. In this respect Social Work and Homelessness Teams are looking to find more effective ways to put in place housing support packages.

The future use of Section 5 referrals or the continued use of a nomination process to ensure homeless households are housed by all RSLs is currently under review. The Council is working closely with all RSLs to review and improve protocols, procedures and reporting mechanisms. HomehuntNES use the Choice Based Letting system to allocate its void properties; this method of allocating properties through a choice based bidding system has led to a significant increase in the number of lets to statutory homeless applicants.

#### **6.4 Demand for Supported Accommodation**

It is widely acknowledged that there is a need for both residential and independent supported accommodation in Aberdeen. This is not just for homeless households; there is a general need for these types of accommodation.

There is evidence to substantiate that there are still a number of people who do not want to or are not ready to live independently and having access to a range of residential services continues to be a vital link in assisting homeless people to work towards independence.

Recommissioning of services to increase the range of accommodation options for all homeless people will be undertaken. These are likely to include:

- Residential accommodation where referrals are made and planned admissions are carried out.
- Increased direct access accommodation
- Supported accommodation with support on site.
- Possibility of shared tenancies with either on site support or visiting support.
- Supported accommodation where the support is visiting support.
- Independent accommodation with support
- Accommodation for older homeless people which is not a nursing home or sheltered housing accommodation.

#### **6.5 The Types and Levels of Support Needed**

Support at all levels is important for assessing need and encouraging clients to move on towards independence with services provided in a variety of ways via a hostel type situation or in the client's own home. The provision of support delivered by both the council and voluntary sector varies from 24 hour, needs assessed, holistic support on a

wide range of issues to low level support. The Council's New Tenancy Support Team provides support to clients in the Council's temporary accommodation as required and resettlement support during the early stages of their tenancy. The Council acknowledges the importance of early intervention and the provision of support in the sustainment of tenancies.

Experience has shown that people moving from residential accommodation to their own independent accommodation often fails due to the lack of appropriate support. Interim accommodation options are required with all levels of support being on offer.

In general people, particularly those with lower level housing support needs, often don't want support that is too invasive, they want help as and when required, rather than having to sign up to an ongoing support package. Often the most effective support intervention is direct access to a service that provides advice, practical assistance, and representation.

Support can be delivered through the following models listed below:

- 24-hour support for people who are very chaotic, vulnerable or unable to live on their own for whatever reasons.
- High level supported accommodation with support on site
- High level supported accommodation with varying levels of support on site
- Low level supported accommodation with varying levels of support on site
- Support in the community with varying levels of support depending on individual needs.
- Access to a support point or project for those living in the community in times of crises

A review of the existing provision is being undertaken to ensure that best use is being made of current resources, their adequacy and how they meet demand. Any gaps identified will be addressed through the commissioning process.

## **6.6 Direct Access Accommodation**

Direct access means homeless people "being able to directly access accommodation in a crisis situation", where they can feel safe and begin to engage with a range of support needs and issues giving rise to or contributing to homelessness, where staff are sufficiently skilled to enable people who are considered vulnerable to be assisted. This should include vulnerability resulting from crime, substance misuse, and long term homelessness.

In June 2008 a direct access service was established in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and The Foyer to provide three direct access places and is acknowledged as a success in the provision of accommodation for young homeless people.

The focus group did not fully discuss the need for direct access accommodation; but it will be fully considered during the development of the Temporary Accommodation Strategy.

## **6.7 The Private Rented Sector**

In August 2008 figures from the Private Landlord Register shows that there are approximately 11,500 private rented properties in the City.

In June 2008 The Scottish Government issued a paper “Consultation of Regulations under Section 32A of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987” in which it proposes to make better use of the private rented market to provide housing for homeless people.

The outcome from this consultation exercise will impact on the housing options available to homeless people through the private rented sector.

The main proposals include:

- A minimum of a 12 month short assured tenancy be used rather than a 6 month short assured tenancy normally used by private landlords.
- The tenancy is affordable and minimises the risk of the tenant being excluded from employment opportunities and caught in the benefits trap.
- A housing support assessment is carried out and, where support needs are identified, that a package of support is in place to meet any needs identified.
- The person has given written consent that they are satisfied with private rented accommodation as suitable accommodation.

Discussions have taken place with Aberdeenshire Council around the development and commissioning of services from the private rented sector. Private sector leasing and rent deposit schemes will potentially be an outcome from this. The councils are investigating private sector and RSL options for the deliverability of a private sector leasing scheme in Aberdeen City and Shire.

## **7. INTERVENTIONS FOCUS GROUP**

### **7.1 Advice and Information**

This is a key intervention, that can make the difference to whether someone keeps their home or not. If effective advice and casework is provided early, court action can be avoided. The availability of advice and information is also critical to ensuring a supportive and quality service to those seeking housing. The Council supports a network of advice and assistance across the city and continues to see this as a priority.

An effective mechanism is required to monitor clients' progress through services and agencies and address gaps in communication systems between services within the Council and external agencies.

Information sharing is a core principle that will be adopted by homelessness services with a shared database accessible to network members and staff. Information sharing protocols will be developed and become mandatory for Council funded services, and definitions of key terms universally agreed and adhered to. Examples include "support", "advocacy", "advice" and "information". This will establish better working practices between agencies.

Homelessness services require staff with a range of disciplines so they can be proactive to clients needs and prevent the client being passed between services and agencies. Partnership working is necessary to prepare a plan and support package for clients at the beginning of the homelessness journey with input from staff with necessary expertise.

Improved advice and information services will be provided from a variety of sources and all services commissioned through the finalised Advice and Information Strategy will be working towards, or will already meet the Information and Advice Standards Framework produced by the Scottish Government. Regular meetings between agencies will assist with progress towards accreditation in the standards and encourage the sharing of best practice at a local level. The funding of independent housing advice and the commissioning of new services will be identified and progressed through the Advice and Information Strategy.

### **7.2 Legal Advice, Advocacy Services and Casework**

The threat of eviction or repossession is a crisis point for many tenants and homeowners. In some cases this can act as a catalyst for positive change. Appropriate assistance can often save the tenancy and improve the financial and other circumstances of the tenant. However, if the tenant does not have the ability to repay the debt and if they are unable to access effective advice, support and advocacy, eviction or repossession can follow.

Currently CAB is the main agency in the City providing this level of advice, casework and representation for tenants with a staff complement of 2.5 posts. They do not have

capacity to deal with the volume of requests for assistance and there is a shortage of solicitors to provide help with legal aid cases. The implementation of Section 11 of the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003 in April 2009 will also add to the workload of legal advice and homelessness services.

An additional high level post at CAB was proposed by Focus Group members to provide support at the crisis end mean time, but this could have a negative impact on resources elsewhere. It was also identified that there was a need for the Legal Services Authority to provide a service in the City for access to free legal advice and representation. The LSA has made funding available and recruited two solicitors who are currently seeking premises to set up an office in the City. Details of this service and how to access it will be made available to all colleagues working in front line services across the City as soon as it becomes available.

Figures provided in the Aberdeen Sheriff Court Summary Report August 2008 showed that during 2007 there were 4,962 “callings” of cases for recovery of possession by Aberdeen City Council with the majority of these repossession actions for rent arrears. This level of demand on advocacy services from potentially homelessness households means that people are only being seen at absolute crisis point limiting the level of intervention that can take place.

The Council aims to reduce the level of people going through the homelessness system but it will take time for interventions leading to the prevention of homelessness becoming the norm.

Often delays in Housing Benefit being awarded results in new tenants falling into arrears at an early stage of their tenancy, approximately 45% of referrals to CAB have fallen into rent arrears for this reason. In order to address this issue a review of signing up procedures is being taken forward through the council’s Tenancy Sustainment Action Plan and arrears procedures will be reviewed to ensure a more proactive approach is taken to addressing any benefits issues that are identified prior to eviction proceedings being raised.

### **7.3 Practical Assistance**

Clients can be under tremendous pressure especially if they are moving from a homelessness situation and may lack the organisational skills needed when taking on a tenancy.

A dedicated Family Support Worker provides support in temporary accommodation to assist families through the homelessness journey. The worker can provide structured individual work or structured group work with children depending on assessed need. Based at the Deeside Family Centre the worker is one of three family support workers in the DASH Project Team (Domestic Abuse, Substance Misuse and Homelessness), previously known as the CYPEDA team, the remit is to work with children aged birth to sixteen years who live with or are affected by domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or homelessness.

The Council provides a highly successful furnished tenancy grant scheme which has a

tenancy success rate of approximately 95% after the first year. Practical assistance is also provided through the Tenancy Support Workers based in the Neighbourhoods and the New Tenancy Support Team which were created to deliver support to those households who are threatened with homelessness and do extensive work in the prevention of arrears, resettlement and antisocial behaviour.

The Key Project run by Castlehill Housing Association is very effective in providing a range of support services and practical assistance to existing and new tenancies. Castlehill staff meets with tenants, identifies their needs and arrange a plan of assistance. Full and partial furniture packages are also available from all RSLs which help people access their properties more quickly.

Further development is required to assist clients once they have been housed to help them maintain their tenancy. For example home visits should be made to tenants where it has been identified that they have literacy problems to assist with the completion of official forms such as housing benefit review forms. Advice alone is not enough and policies need to address support for vulnerable clients with more proactive assistance provided. Engagement with this client group must be improved and more joint working is required.

Consideration will have to be given to the role of the Council's housing assistant to encompass working on prevention of homelessness and assisting tenants in maintaining their tenancy.

Literacy and numeracy skills are not assessed or recorded by landlords when leases are signed. This means that people may not be able to read or understand official letters and are not responding to arrears communications leading to the loss of their tenancy. A review of official letters issued by the Council should be carried out and the introduction of colour coded rent arrears letters may be established to assist clients who have literacy problems.

A review of public sector landlords' signing up processes should be carried out to ensure that the applicant's are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, where to seek help if they need it and to ensure that benefit forms are completed at lease signing.

#### **7.4 Housing Support Services**

Supporting People funding is no longer ring-fenced and services commissioned by the Council are under review. The importance of low level housing support services to ensure households are given the assistance they needs to maintain their accommodation and prevent homelessness as well as support to households who are housed after a period of homelessness was seen as vital to future prevention and intervention strategies.

#### **7.5 Substance Misuse, Addictions and Homelessness**

Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland, a report produced and published by the Scottish Government in July 2008 provides a review of evidence on effective substance misuse services for homeless people and provides best practice in other countries to establish lessons for Scotland.

The report highlighted that the relationship between substance misuse and homelessness is complex and there is strong evidence that they are mutually reinforcing. It identified three groups of homeless people who are characterised by higher substance misuse problems than the general population, they are young homeless people, people with experience of sleeping rough and lone homeless people.

The report also found a strong association between presence of mental health problems or severe mental illness among homeless people with substance misuse problems and it recommends that realistic service outcomes need to be set which will be higher for some service users than others.

The report found that harm reduction models appeared to meet with more success and were more effective at retaining engagement, although goals were more limited, and it highlighted the requirement to provide a mixture of service interventions that could go on for some time, creating a need for a secure funding base.

The draft Wraparound Care paper say that: "Drug users coming into treatment will often have chaotic living conditions, rent arrears, living with other drug users etc." Practical work can be done by housing staff to help stabilise this situation. Some clients coming in will be homeless and can face more complex barriers to accessing services and may need additional support. Once clients have stabilised their drug use and housing situation the task is then to support the client to maintain their accommodation and prevent future problems such as arrears, evictions, anti-social behaviour etc – this may include a range of skills such as literacy, numeracy etc. Practical work can be undertaken.

Alcohol misuse also features with regard to homelessness, with links to domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour. The homelessness strategy links in with the new national and local Alcohol Strategies.

Staff from Job Centre Plus have agreed to second a member of staff in to the Integrated Community Drugs Rehabilitation Service (ICDRS) to help facilitate and improve job outcomes for those recovering from drug related issues. This is something that could be replicated for other client groups i.e. the homeless.

The Homelessness Strategy in itself can not deal with all the issues around substance misuse, closer working in the future with JADAT is therefore essential to ensure complimentary service development and delivery

In response to the report and to address the needs of this client group the strategy acknowledges that:

- The City requires a mixture of services, or a flexible service model that can accept when harm reduction and semi-independent living are the only realistic goals but have capacity to pursue abstinence and independent living as appropriate. Intensive substance abuse treatment services with support are more likely to succeed.

- Stable accommodation is a key element to successful drug treatment, and the moves towards wrap around care/integrated case management, including housing issues, emphasises the need for increased involvement by housing staff and providers. The balance between this client group and the rights of other residents must also be taken into consideration and may be addressed through improved partnership working.
- For many clients facing eviction, especially those with families, Short Scottish Secure Tenancies could be offered as an alternative. This is not an option for the client to bypass responsibility but it does recognise that the client is having particular problems and is seeking to address them through treatment and support. Simply put this could be a more effective way of tackling the cost of eviction, meeting our corporate commitment to prevent homelessness, address the 'revolving door' problem facing homelessness services and refocus financial resources on support, advice and advocacy for homeless and vulnerable people”.
- The use of closure orders to exclude a tenant from a property can be used but we need to ensure that appropriate support systems are in place during the exclusion period.
- Staff training is required for frontline staff in order to provide the best approach to homeless people with drug problems.

The Council is contributing £650,000 towards integrated drugs service accommodation provision at Timmer Market. The new service will be located alongside a new affordable housing development being provided by Grampian Housing Association.

## **7.6 Education, Training and Employment**

Education, training and employment were seen as critical by members of the focus groups and it was agreed that it was important that an element of support to explore opportunities in these areas is provided to homeless people. Future commissioning specifications should include where appropriate, services that will help meet this objective

The Foyer recently implemented a National Pilot Learning Programme “Learning Power Award” targeting its tenants who are perhaps deemed furthest from the labour market. An open learning programme was awarded accreditation by City & Guilds. This provided excellent building blocks to allow individual to progress to other more employment focussed opportunities.

This initiative also included an accredited training programme for staff who are perhaps more familiar with a caring and support culture and not necessarily confident about using educational tools.

The Cyrenians currently provides the ‘Leaving Home and Housing Education Programme’ where they provide preparatory education for young people on leaving home and housing. The continued provision of a housing education programme for young people will be progressed through the commissioning process.

There should be a learning culture in all commissioned services. Those working with people affected by homelessness should ensure that educational entitlements are available alongside homelessness interventions.

Homeless people are entitled to support from Careers Scotland, Job Centre Plus and other agencies with regard to education, training and pre-employment support and these organisations encourage and assist individuals to move toward and into employment.

Some forms of employment patterns such as irregular agency work or term-time working (for example school dinner ladies with no wages during the school holidays) are actually a risk factor that cause rent arrears and can lead to homelessness. Secure employment is vital in moving people forward so it is important to assist homeless people into employment and help them stay in work. There are significant employment opportunities in the city that should be maximised and there is an urgent need for an Employability Strategy for the City.

Self esteem, life skills and confidence make a big difference to people's chances of retaining accommodation therefore pathways need to be developed to promote a wide range of education, training and employment opportunities for homeless and disadvantaged people.

## **7.7 Health and Homelessness**

In February 2005 the then Scottish Executive published the Health and Homelessness Standards against which the healthcare provided by all NHS Boards would be measured. Delivery of the Standards would, in the main, be through Community Health Partnerships.

The Standards are intended to be challenging and the Scottish Executive recognised that it would take some time before NHS Boards were able to meet all aspects of each standard. In seeking clear evidence of progress, the Scottish Executive reported the findings of its 'One Year Survey' of Health Boards. According to the Scottish Executive's method of assessing compliance, NHS Grampian was reported to have the highest overall compliance across the six Standards. This demonstrated the considerable distance travelled by local partners, but should not be construed, as full implementation.

In support of this, the Homelessness Strategy and the Health and Homelessness Action Plan are reflected within wider corporate strategies and plans. The health needs of homeless people are incorporated in NHS Grampian's initial strategic framework for health inequalities, are reflected in specific plans including the City's Joint Health Improvement Plan, and are most clearly stated in the Health & Homelessness Action Plan. NHS Grampian works closely with the Council and other partners to ensure a sound basis for the provision of services with a fundamental principle being, ultimately, support from within mainstream services.

Formal assessment of need in the city led to major capital investment in a new Homelessness Practice, the Marywell Healthcare Centre. This came on stream in March 2006 and positive action has been taken to break down the barriers which prevent homeless people's health needs being met.

Revised objectives to reflect local progress, and to dovetail with the national Health and Homelessness standards for NHS Boards have been agreed. A revised action plan is also being developed.

The key objectives are to:

- Co-ordinate the collation and sharing of data relating to the profile and health needs of people affected by homelessness.
- Promote and maintain appropriate access to health and social care services to address the health and wellbeing needs of people affected by homelessness.
- Promote and maintain a shared understanding of the needs of people affected by homelessness.
- Work actively with partner organisations to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

The Council will maintain and continue to develop links with the Health and Homelessness Team at the Marywell Healthcare Centre in order to promote a common understanding of roles and encourage a good working relationship. Two way communication between the Council and the practice will assist in keeping staff up to date with changes or developments within services, in legislation or policies affecting homeless people and changes in personnel.

Staff at Marywell Healthcare Centre would benefit from having a named key person in each relevant service within the Council so they know who to contact when issues or problems arise with clients. It is important that there is a flow of information between Social Workers, Care Managers, Occupational Therapists and the Marywell Healthcare Centre.

It is also important that Council staff are aware of the services available at Marywell Healthcare Centre and are able to signpost clients appropriately... The Health and Homelessness team will participate in induction training for relevant staff, their roles and functions, and will support staff by providing awareness raising sessions for partnership organisations regarding health related matters affecting homeless people. Likewise the Council staff will participate in any induction required for new staff members to the Health and Homelessness Team.

Time is of the essence when dealing with homeless clients at Marywell Healthcare Centre due to their transitional nature and often complex needs. Any delays in progressing their referral may result in the client being denied the assistance they require as they may have moved on or do not return to the practice.

Given the chaos that surrounds a homeless person's lifestyle, there is a duty of care to the individual involved. It would be beneficial for the health practice to have assistance in dealing with transport issues as clients left to their own devices will not be able to get themselves to either their assessment appointment or their admission to hospital.

## **7.8 Health and Homeless Directory**

The Health and Homeless Directory, a joint initiative between NHS Grampian and Aberdeen City Council was launched in October 2007 to help staff, across agencies, in accessing relevant information to support their clients. The directory holds detailed information on over 125 services in Aberdeen, as well as providing the latest news,

events and documents relevant to the sector. The directory is designed to allow service providers in Aberdeen to signpost clients to the most appropriate services and is developed with the user in mind, enabling staff to find the information required as quickly as possible.

It is important that this information system is used to its full potential by staff and is continually updated and maintained. Further developments are planned which will help ensure that information is widely available and up to date for those working with homeless households. ([www.healthandhomeless.org](http://www.healthandhomeless.org))

## **7.9 Health and Homeless Young People**

Young people can be a difficult group to target in relation to health and may not see registering with a GP as a priority.

Following the closure of some residential services for 16 to 25 year olds, there is concern that there will be an increase in rough sleeping and over crowding. This could result in major implications on health.

Where young homeless people could previously have been guided by support staff at these residential units, and access services provided by the community nurse specialist, these services have been diminished. However health services are still provided at the Aberdeen Foyer.

The effects of these closures may result in the community nurse specialist increasing street working or finding other ways to access these hard to reach individuals, identifying their health needs and facilitating access to health services.

## **7.10 Single Shared Assessment**

The development of a SSA in electronic format with specialist assessments for homeless people continues to be developed and will be beneficial but issues about collation, maintenance and access to the information need to be agreed with all service providers and external organisations. A central repository system for holding information is required and information would be reviewed on a regular basis as clients' circumstances change. This issue has been recognised at national level. It is important that all housing staff are able to access the joint data store.

Links could potentially be developed between this information, the Healthy Living Network and the Council's new customer service management system.

## **7.11 Child Protection**

Child protection awareness and training is seen, recognised and accepted as a priority factor by all staff and management working in homelessness services.

There is a need to ensure staff are aware of child protection issues, the importance of information sharing when children are involved and attend training, all Council and health care staff should be aware of the information sharing protocol.

It would be advantageous to staff at the Marywell practice to have access, if not directly via the Care Manager or Social Work, to Care First to inform the Health and Homelessness team of social work involvement with a family. This would also assist the community nurse specialist with necessary interventions in relation to advocating on behalf of families if their tenancy is to be terminated.

## **8. PUBLIC POLICY**

### **8.1 Improved Joint Working within the Council**

Improved joint working has been widely discussed through all Focus Groups highlighting the working relationships within housing services and between Housing and Social Work. The Social Work inspection report published in June 2008 also identified the need for improved working arrangements between services and noted that less than half of social work staff questioned about their perceptions on working with other agencies agreed that their team had a good working relationship with housing services.

Work has been progressing through the Improvement Teams to produce protocols for services, but there are still significant blockages in the system. It remains a key priority for the Council to clarify roles and responsibilities, improve information sharing and recording and strengthening joint working practices.

Better use of 'case conferences' is required to ensure risk management principles are applied to those who are at risk of eviction or loss of their current home. This will contribute to improving joint working across involved services.

It was suggested at the Focus Groups that it would be beneficial for housing services to have Social Work staff working with them to assist with identifying housing support needs, carry out assessments and provide support. It may not necessarily be a fully qualified Social Worker to carry out all of these functions but would require someone with a strong social work background.

It has been found that people are being referred to the homelessness section who could be dealt with by other agencies or services within the Council. This has resulted in increased pressure on Homelessness staff. This issue will be addressed through Housing Service's transformation programme by the introduction of new proactive customer focused housing management work practices. The Housing Services transformation programme sits within Aberdeen City Council's broader strategic aim of modernising its services to provide a customer focused service which is fit for purpose.

### **8.2 Evictions and Housing Management**

The Council uses evictions as a last resort and steps are taken by Arrears Officers to contact tenants by letter or in person to advise and assist tenants in making arrangements to pay off their debt. A review of the arrears policy on eviction is required to ensure it reflects the Council's corporate responsibility to prevent homelessness.

The fundamental purpose of action to evict should be to get people to engage with services. It is usually a failure to engage and acknowledge issues that leads to eviction. This should not detract from the underlying aim to reclaim money owed and collect rent. Any evictions should only proceed if all possible actions to prevent have been taken. Formal protocols are required between relevant Council services to ensure all necessary

attempts are made to prevent eviction.

Where households are evicted there is a significant cost to the public purse especially where children are involved. Estimates of the cost of eviction are very hard to provide, but a recent research report published by Shelter in December 2008 “Evictions by social landlords in Scotland” has highlighted examples of eviction costing up to £20,000 per family, once legal, administrative, support and temporary accommodation costs are taken into account.

More flexibility is required in the eviction of families with children. Some local authorities do not evict families where there are children but may impose conditions and convert the tenancy to a SSST with support. Further research is needed into the best way of dealing with this to ensure homelessness is minimised for children and where it does occur that effective solutions are delivered to reduce the impact on the children’s welfare and education. A mechanism for re-housing families following eviction should be developed.

Current systems for the implementation of the Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) need to improve and the Council should consider setting up a dedicated SSST team in the City. RSL’s are using SSST and also providing additional support to prevent evictions being taken forward. If the Council were to increase the amount of SSST’s then this would have to be properly resourced to provide the necessary monitoring and support.

Housing assistants currently have about 1,000 properties in their patch but do not have overall responsibility for all tenancy management functions. This is being addressed through the Transformation Programme and a move towards more generic working is planned. To achieve this a review of resources and the number of properties they are responsible for managing will have to be reduced. RSLs who already have generic work practices in place manage about 300 properties per patch.

### **8.3 Domestic Abuse**

In Aberdeen most refuge provision is based on a communal model. Work has commenced to review existing accommodation to ensure adequate provision is in keeping with national guidance as well as local preference. This is likely to require new provision to address supply and changes to the types of refuge provision with a move towards more core and cluster accommodation. The location of temporary or permanent accommodation is an issue for this service user group as they may require to be near educational facilities for children but a distance away from the abusive partner.

Families in refuge accommodation in the City appear to remain there for considerable periods of time due to either a lack of suitable mainstream accommodation or they are not ready to move onto mainstream accommodation.

Many victims and their children require support and this is currently being provided by a number of agencies through Supporting People funding.

### **8.4 Violence Against Women**

The Violence against Women project run by Aberdeen Cyrenians takes a lead role in working with vulnerable, homeless women of all ages who have experienced or are currently experiencing physical, emotional or sexual abuse, who may be victims of violence or who may be involved in prostitution. The project offers practical and emotional support to women, helping them to deal with a range of issues, including personal safety, home security, health, substance misuse, criminal justice, self esteem and confidence building.

This project has led to greater partnership working with local organisations providing a more holistic joint-working approach to meeting the needs of this client group. Cross referrals with other agencies and services has led to greater support being made available to women and children experiencing domestic abuse and enables women to be referred on for specialist support.

## **8.5 Young People Leaving Care**

The Council as corporate parent should be assisting this group to get the best start in life but there is an increasing amount of young people leaving care being channelled through the homelessness system.

The closing of accommodation units is exacerbating the problem within this sector. There is a need for residential units that provide support as it has been found that often moving young people into flats without support can lead to repeat homelessness which causes barriers to securing alternative permanent accommodation.

The Social Work Inspection Agency report (SWIA) identified that there was a lack of suitable accommodation options for young people leaving care and a lack of commitment to joint working from housing providers.

An in depth review has commenced to provide services to young people leaving care to ensure a planned and integrated approach to their future housing need. Social Work is leading on this.

## **8.6 Gypsy/Travellers**

The Gypsy/Traveller Education and Information Project North East (GTEIP) estimate that they work with around 70 – 100 families in Aberdeen City in a year. They estimate that there will be more families than this living in the area but GTEIP tends to work with those most in need. Some gypsies/travellers do move into houses for all or part of the year and report that they often experience hostility and harassment from neighbours and feel unsupported resulting in the tenancy being terminated and abandoned. Additional support is needed for some gypsies/travellers who have little previous knowledge of managing a tenancy and budgeting. In December 2008 Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council commissioned Craigforth Consultants to produce a report on the Accommodation Needs of Gypsies/Travellers. This report will be published around May/June 2009 and actions required to address the needs of this socio-economic group will be identified through this report and taken forward accordingly.

## **8.7 Antisocial Behaviour**

The Anti Social Behaviour Strategy follows the PIER approach (prevention, early intervention, enforcement and rehabilitation) in tackling antisocial behaviour and has a range of services in place which contribute to reducing antisocial behaviour. Although this has proved very successful with very few evictions recorded due to antisocial behaviour this may be masked by rent arrears actions and abandonment levels and needs to be explored further.

Consideration is always given to voluntary solutions, where these have been exhausted or are not appropriate then enforcement measure may be applied. A combination of tools can be used to solve a problem for example combining enforcement measures such as an ASBO with support services.

Episodes of antisocial behaviour are often highlighted in former tenancy reports resulting in a SSST becoming a condition of tenancy. There needs to be clearer guidelines to define standards across neighbourhoods as we seek to establish a more consistent approach to what is “unacceptable behaviour”.

The use of the SSST with support as a condition of the tenancy is an option that is used but due to the various services being involved it can be a slow process. In order to meet our statutory duty to house unintentionally homeless households, the process has been reviewed and the New Tenancy Senior Support Worker is now taking the lead in the assessment of support for these households.

The New Tenancy Support Team is involved in resettlement for a short period of time. The assessment process identifies the most appropriate provider for longer term support to meet a service user’s needs.

## **8.8 People Leaving Prison**

Not all people when they are liberated face homelessness, with many ex-offenders returning to the family home. Interim supported accommodation is provided at St Fitticks for medium to high category offenders who are homeless when they are released from prison and the Council are considering a range of options available in terms of other supported accommodation for this client group.

In August 2008 arrangements were put in place for a Homelessness Officer to visits Craiginchies prison to assist prisoners with accommodation issues as they enter prison and to work towards a planned approach to their release.

This was in direct response to the delays in people who were leaving prison accessing accommodation in the City and the resultant increased pressure on the Homelessness Service. We will continue to monitor this arrangement and expand this service if there is a need to do so.

It is acknowledged that the needs of this client group are challenging but must be addressed to reduce re-offending behaviour.

## **8.9 Criminal Justice, Sex Offenders and Violent Offenders**

Funding for the delivery of the Criminal Justice service comes from central Government and it is a service which is under funded. To address this the Council needs to ensure the most effective use of this fund which includes purchasing services through voluntary organisations and providing a more integrated approach.

The National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders requires the Council and RSL's to co-operate and link with the MAPPA process to ensure that registered sex offenders are housed safely in the community. Standards protocols and procedures are currently being drawn up.

Working with prison services needs to start early in order to identify housing requirements of sex offenders with mechanisms put in place to hold suitable accommodation until the prisoner is released (i.e. measures to cover payment of rent until release etc.) and also ensuring that the wider community safety issues are dealt with properly.

The Council needs to ensure the Sex Offender Liaison Officer (SOLO) responsibilities are fully embedded to discharge functions and needs to look at accessing appropriate accommodation and support. There is a lack in supply of suitable accommodation and the Council is looking at options to address this issue.

In the next 18 months it is expected that the arrangements for the accommodation of sex offenders will be extended to include violent offenders. This will result in increased requirements for housing and RSL staff to participate in ensuring the safe management of this group.

## APPENDIX A

### Member of the Aberdeen Homelessness Strategy Advisory Group:

Cllr. A Malone	Aberdeen City Council
Cllr. B Crockett	Aberdeen City Council
Cllr. A Donnelly	Aberdeen City Council
Cllr. J Kiddie	Aberdeen City Council
Cllr. G Leslie	Aberdeen City Council
Lynn Cargill	Langstane Housing Association
David Lappin	Castlehill Housing Association
Paul Hannan	Aberdeen Cyrenians
Ken Milroy	Aberdeen Foyer
Dr Linda Leighton-Beck	NHS Grampian
Val Tweedie	Public Health Lead Aberdeen City CHP
Superintendent Mark McLaren	Grampian Police

### Officers:

Christine Cook	Homelessness Strategy Officer (JS)
Pete Leonard	Corporate Director for Neighbourhood Services (Central)
Charlie Lynch	Senior Homelessness Officer
Alison MacKinnon	Homelessness Co-ordinator
Susan Pirie	Homelessness Strategy Officer (JS)
Craig Stirrat	Head of Planning and Policy (Housing)
Graeme Stuart	Strategist, Planning and Policy Housing
Allan Whyte	Head of Service, Shelter and Environment