



Stratford-on-Avon District
Homelessness Review and
Strategy

2008 – 2011

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Contents

page

- Foreword by Gillian Roache, Portfolio Holder for Revenues and Housing	6
- Executive summary	7
- Methodology	9
<u>- Homelessness Review</u>	
1 Introduction	10
2 Profile of the District and assessment of needs	10
3 Review of Homelessness in the District	35
4 The Council's approach	49
<u>- Homelessness Strategy</u>	
5 The new strategy and Action Plan	57
6 Appendices	63

Foreword

Gillian Roache, Portfolio Holder for Revenues and Housing

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is serious about its responsibilities as a strategic housing authority and its approach to addressing homelessness. This approach has been recognised as effective by the Audit Commission when they inspected the service in October 2006 and awarded the Council 2 stars ("good") with promising prospects for improvement.

The Council is committed to addressing housing and homelessness issue. It was one of the first local authorities nationally to recruit a homelessness prevention officer when the post was created in 2003. It has included targets relating to housing and homelessness in its Corporate Strategy 2005 – 08 and housing continues to be a corporate priority. It has committed funding from its own reserves to support its work in relation to housing and homelessness.

The Council has also recognised the importance of working in partnership with both statutory and voluntary agencies as there are significant benefits in this approach for both the Council and the many users of its housing service.

The Council's first homelessness strategy was produced with partners in 2003 and was assessed as "fit for purpose" by the government, with elements of it being highlighted as "good practice".

I am determined that the Council and its partners will continue to refine and improve upon the District's approach to homelessness prevention and housing options, and that this new homelessness strategy will be the roadmap to enable delivery of these ambitions.

Executive Summary

The mission statement for this Stratford-on-Avon District Homelessness Review and Strategy 2008 – 2011 is to work in partnership to prevent homelessness and to increase and improve housing options for households that are experiencing housing difficulties.

This Review and Strategy was put together by

- Undertaking extensive consultation to identify local housing issues
- Considering what the Government expects housing authorities to do
- Looking at known housing and support needs
- Considering all existing regional, county and local strategies and plans

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that the Council carries out a review of homelessness in its District in order to assess the levels and likely future levels of homelessness in its area.

The consultation carried out as part of the review of homelessness has highlighted a number of areas which have been identified as major issues for housing and homelessness. Below is a summary of these key messages, and actions within the action plan are intended to address these issues.

- 1) **Affordability.** It is clear that affordability remains a problem in this District. The Council is already committed to the delivery of new affordable housing in its Housing Strategy and this continues to be a corporate priority.
- 2) **Shortage of affordable homes.** This is being addressed as above. The Council has also introduced a strategy to tackle empty homes and has recruited an Empty Homes Officer to address the issue of vacant dwellings in the District. Grants are available to return empty properties back into use on condition that the property is then let at an affordable rent.

- 3) **Debt problems and shortage of debt advice.** The research has shown growing concern about the impact of future debt on households and insufficient resources to meet the increased demand for debt advice.
- 4) **Rough sleeping and lack of accommodation solutions.** There is no direct access hostel accommodation in Stratford-on-Avon District.
- 5) **Sofa surfing.** Anecdotal evidence suggests this is a growing problem but it is hard to measure the extent of this in the District.
- 6) **More housing options needed for older people.** The District has an aging population and research shows there is concern about the future housing needs of this group.
- 7) **Second homes.** The impact of these on housing availability in the District has not been assessed.
- 8) **Homes for local people.** There is a perception that homes are being occupied by households who have no connection to Stratford-on-Avon District.
- 9) **Homelessness prevention.** More work needs to be done on improving and developing housing options to prevent homelessness.
- 10) **Overcrowding.** The government expects local authorities to do more to address the needs of overcrowded households.
- 11) **Mediation.** There is a need to improve on the provision of mediation services locally to address homelessness.
- 12) **Effective partnership working.** There is a need to ensure that all agencies have a joined up and holistic approach to housing difficulties.

Existing data, and new research conducted as part of this Review has been incorporated into an options appraisal to determine what the aims of this Strategy should be and what the Council and its partners should focus on.

The overarching ambition of this new Strategy is to work in partnership to prevent homelessness whenever possible. To achieve this, the Strategy has the following aims:

Aim 1: To increase the range of housing options and improve existing options

Aim 2: To ensure that a high level of customer care and access is maintained

Aim 3: To ensure that the Council and its statutory and voluntary partners work in a joined up and planned way to address housing difficulties throughout the District

Strategic actions have been developed to address these aims and these can be found on page 62.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out on the strategy to ensure that the proposed actions meet legal requirements and Council equality policies.

Monitoring of this Strategy

The Council's Housing Advisory Panel is responsible for implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the Strategy. A quarterly report will be presented to show progress of the actions. The Panel will identify any necessary corrective action and address any resource issues. Strategy outcomes will be monitored annually and the strategy will be reviewed annually from April 2009.

The Strategy was agreed by full Council on 21 April 2008.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to obtain information for this homelessness review and strategy.

The Council has used its own existing data, data collected by other agencies, and specially commissioned research which include questionnaires, surveys and interviews.

Homelessness Review

1 Introduction

Homelessness is not a word that is readily associated with Stratford-on-Avon District. Stratford-upon-Avon is world famous for its associations with Shakespeare. Situated in beautiful south Warwickshire countryside next to the scenic River Avon, Stratford is seen as an idyllic and affluent town.

However there are real issues relating to housing and homelessness in Stratford-on-Avon District. Much of these centre around problems of affordability both in the private rented sector and mortgaged property market. Despite the Council's continued success with enabling new affordable housing over the last 10 years, there is a continued mismatch between the supply of affordable homes and the demand for these. A shortage of affordable housing puts pressure on the Council's housing waiting list and can be a contributing factor for those becoming homeless.

The public face of homelessness has traditionally been that of people sleeping rough on the streets. While our research shows that there are some rough sleepers in Stratford-on-Avon District, the reality is that there are many other forms of homelessness and reasons why people lose their homes. People can face homelessness due to the breakdown of their relationship, loss of accommodation with friends or family, the ending of a private tenancy or due to mortgage repossession.

The Council continues to work to understand the root causes of homelessness locally and to use this understanding to develop solutions with partners to prevent homelessness whenever possible. It is also committed to improving and increasing the range of housing options available to those who face housing difficulties.

2 Profile of the District and assessment of needs

Stratford-on-Avon District is predominately rural, and covers 979 square kilometres. There are about 250 towns and villages, and 80% of the population lives outside the main town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Accessing and delivering services is an issue for people in this rural area.

2.1 Population

Source: ONS midyear population estimates, Warwickshire Observatory and Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire 2006.

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The resident population of Stratford-on-Avon District as estimated in mid 2006 was 116,100 of which 49% were male and 51% female.

Significant levels of net in-migration from other parts of the U.K. contribute to the mid-2006 population of 116,100. Approximately 90% of the district's population increase between 2005 and 2006 was due to net internal migration from elsewhere in the UK.

Revised 2004 based population projections provide an indication of expected trends in population growth for the period 2004 to 2029 should recent demographic trends continue into the future.

Population growth in Stratford-on-Avon District is projected across all age groups except for those aged 30-49 years. This age group is set to decline slightly by 1.6% between 2004 and 2029.

Percentage population change by age group 2004 to 2029			
Ages	Stratford-on-Avon District	Warwickshire	England
0 - 4	12.1	10.1	6.5
5 - 14	8.9	3.6	-1.3
15 -29	12.7	5.3	2.0
30 - 49	-1.6	4.8	2.0
50 - 64	9.2	11.3	16.4
65 - 74	54.3	47.3	43.3
75 - 84	89.5	68.2	51.2
85+	150.0	138.8	109.6

Source: Revised 2004 based sub-national population projections, ONS

Within Warwickshire, Stratford-on-Avon district is projected to experience the largest rate of population growth in all groups aged 65 and over. The number of people aged 85+ in Stratford-on-Avon district is predicted to increase by 150% between 2004 and 2029.

The housing needs of older people cover a population span of two or more generations. The Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire 2006 highlighted the fact that lifestyles and expectations of the younger generation of older people are likely to be very different to the older generation of older people. In this district more people aged over 75 years live alone than do people aged 60 to 74 years. This has implications for care and support

services, and housing advice, as a high proportion of people over 75 may not benefit from care and support within the home from another member of their household.

2.2 Ethnicity

Source: ONS and Warwickshire Observatory

The 2001 census shows that 98.7% of the population of Stratford-on-Avon district is white. Figures for England are shown for comparison. There is no one significant Black and Minority Ethnic group.

Percentage of population by ethnic group as per census 2001		
	Stratford-on-Avon District	England
White	98.7	90.9
Mixed	0.5	1.3
Asian or Asian British	0.4	4.6
Black or Black British	0.1	2.3
Chinese or other ethnic group	0.3	0.9

In October 2007, the Office for National Statistics updated the 2001 census figures by releasing population estimates by ethnic group for 2005. However, it should be noted that the 2005 figures are as yet unverified.

Population estimates by percentage of all ethnic groups in Stratford-on-Avon District 2005	
White: British	93.9
White: Irish	1.0
White: Other White	2.2
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	0.3
Mixed: White and Black African	0.1
Mixed: White and Asian	0.3
Mixed: Other Mixed	0.2
Asian or Asian British: Indian	0.7
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	0.3
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.1
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	0.2
Black or Black British: Black Caribbean	0.3
Black or Black British: Black African	0.2
Black or Black British: Other Black	0.0
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group: Chinese	0.3
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group: Other	0.3

According to the 2005 figures 97.1% of the population of Stratford-on-Avon district is white. After 'White British' the largest groups are 'Other White' and 'White:Irish'.

2.2.1 A8 Migrant Workers

The term migrant worker is defined as "an overseas national who has the right to work in the UK". For this document, because of the nature of the data available, the term is used generically for those from the 'A8' accession states which joined the European Union in 2004 and included Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, The Czech Republic and Slovakia. From 2007, Bulgaria and Romania also joined the EU.

In August 2006 the Home Office produced figures indicating that approximately 600,000 migrant workers entered the UK between 2004 and 2006 and although it is difficult to establish an accurate figure, it is widely accepted that this is an accurate estimate¹.

Nationally it is acknowledged that migrants face difficult housing conditions including overcrowding and insecurity¹. The emergence of this new community also impacts on the wider housing market as migrant households compete with the indigenous community to obtain housing.

Locally there is a significant presence of migrant workers. New allocations of National Insurance numbers to A8 nationals within Stratford-on-Avon District totalled 360 in 2004/5 and 660 in 2005/6. The Housing Advice and Private Sector enforcement functions come into contact with the community in a range of different ways but particularly when their housing arrangements are insecure, overcrowded or begin to have an impact on surrounding communities, for example in cases of noise nuisance.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council commissioned a report in early 2007 to examine the socio-economic implications for the district of these new migrants.

The findings of the report note a number of significant factors in the context of housing:

- 1) The majority of migrants originate from Poland.
- 2) Migrants are predominantly employed in the following sectors: agriculture/market gardening; care homes; cleaning; construction; hospitality/tourism; manufacturing; restaurants and hotels; retail; and warehousing.

- 3) Migrant workers appear to have higher property occupancy levels than the settled community.
- 4) The majority of the migrant community have settled in the private rented sector.
- 5) The arrival of significant numbers of migrants does seem to 'force' some competition for vacant properties.
- 6) The migrant worker community is centred on Stratford-upon-Avon town.
- 7) It is likely that migrant workers will occupy accommodation provided by an employer including; caravans, houses in multiple occupation and hotel and restaurant provided accommodation, or in privately rented accommodation.
- 8) Approximately 60 of South Warwickshire Housing Associations 6000 tenants identify themselves as White: Other. It is possible that a number of these will be nationals of A8 accession states, however further detailed analysis is currently unavailable.
- 9) Some rough sleeping has been noted by the Salvation Army (two cases in the 18 months preceding the research).
- 10) Multi-occupancy arrangements of all-earning households can lead to rent inflation.
- 11) The CAB have access to a Polish speaking advisor.

¹ - Commission for Rural Communities – Tackling Rural Disadvantage (January 2007)

Analysis of the Housing Waiting list shows that there are a number of households on the Housing Register who originate from A8 accession states. Table 1.1 below indicates the family make up and nationality of these households.

Table: 1.1

Nationality	Household Group	Single Person	Two Adults	One Child Households	Two Child Household	Three + Child Household
Polish		9	13	16	6	2
Lithuanian				2		
Latvia			1			
Estonia				1		
Details extracted from Orchard Housing Register 17 December 2007						

A mapping exercise has been undertaken to establish where this community is currently living and where their application forms indicate they wish to live, as detailed in the tables below.

Table 1.2

Nationality	Currently residing in	Number of households
Polish	Stratford-upon-Avon	37
	Shipston	2
	Snitterfield	1
	Chipping Campden	1
	Abbots Salford	1
	Alcester	1
	Studley	1
	Leamington Spa	1
	London	1
Lithuanian	Oxhill	1
	Stratford-upon-Avon	1
Latvia	Stratford-upon-Avon	1
Estonia	Coventry	1

Table 1.3

Nationality	Where they wish to live	Number of households
Polish	Stratford-upon-Avon	33
	Shipston	3
	Wellesbourne	7
	Bidford	6
	Alcester	5
	Clifford Chambers	3
	Salford Priors	2
	Wilmcote	2
	Luddington	1
	Studley	1
	Henley	1
	Snitterfield	1
	5 or more areas	11
Lithuanian	Kineton	1
	Stratford-upon-Avon	1
	Shipston	1
	5 or more areas	1
	Tysoe	1
Latvia	Stratford-upon-Avon	1

Nationality	Where they wish to live	Number of households
	Wilmcote	1
	Luddington	1
Estonia	Bearley	1
	Claverdon	1
	Wilmcote	1
	Stratford-upon-Avon	1

Note: households are able to specify as many areas of choice as they like

The evidence provided by National Insurance Number allocations clearly indicates that a considerable number of A8 state nationals are receiving their NINOs from the Stratford-upon-Avon office. It is reasonable to assume that many of these will initially seek employment in the Stratford-on-Avon District.

While it is not yet clear whether these households intend to remain or are transitory, it can be demonstrated that a number of households, some including children are applying to access affordable housing in the District and this does imply that their intention is to settle more permanently.

2.3 Tenure

The 2001 census shows that 76% of households are living in owner-occupied accommodation, 12.6% live in housing association properties, 7.8% rent privately, and the remaining 3.6% are in other accommodation including living with family and friends.

2.4 Existing dwellings

There were 53,115 dwellings in the district as at April 2007. The stock in the district is very varied with more detached and semi-detached properties, and far fewer flats and maisonettes than the national average.

Percentage of dwelling types in Stratford-on-Avon district	
Detached	43.5
Semi- Detached	28.2
End Terrace	8.1
Mid Terrace	9.6
Mid Terrace + passage	2.6
Flat	7.5
Maisonette	0.4

A comprehensive independent district wide house condition survey and energy efficiency survey was completed during 2003. A new private sector stock condition survey is scheduled to be completed by December 2008.

There are no areas of low demand for housing in the district, and all properties are expected to meet the Government's decent homes standard by 2010.

As at April 2007, 1.5% of the 53,115 dwellings in the district had been empty for more than 6 months.

2.5 Employment

Source: ONS Annual Business Inquiry 2005 and Warwickshire Observatory

In 2006 the resident working age population of the district was 68,200 or 59% of the total population of the district. The equivalent figures are 61% for the West Midlands and 62% for Great Britain. The numbers and type of employment available in an area determine the levels of wages that will be paid, which in turn will affect the tenure, size and location of housing sought by households.

Service industries provide the predominant source of employment in Stratford-on-Avon district, and account for more than three-quarters of the employed population. The finance, IT and other business activities is the largest economic sector of activity in this district and employs over 15,000 people. The distribution, hotels and restaurant sector is almost as large and employs over 14,000 people.

Distribution of employment in Stratford-on-Avon District 2005		
Source: ONS annual business inquiry 2005, Warwickshire Observatory		
	Number of employee jobs	Percentage of total employee jobs
Finance, IT, other business activities	15,100	27.1
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	14,100	25.3
Public admin., education & health	9,100	16.2
Manufacturing	6,500	11.7
Other services	3,200	5.7
Construction	3,100	5.5
Transport & communications	2,100	2.8

Notes

1. The total number of employee jobs is 55,800.
2. The figures in the table exclude the self employed, government-supported trainees and HM forces. According to the Warwickshire Economic Profile 2004 agriculture, mining and utilities account for less than 5% of employees in Stratford-on-Avon district.
3. There are 3,100 tourism-related jobs in the District which account for 11.2% of all employee jobs.

In September 2007 the unemployment rate in the district was 1.2% as measured by the number of unemployed people claiming Job Seekers Allowance. This compares to a 2.2% unemployment rate for Great Britain.

2.6 Household income

Source: PayCheck household income data for Warwickshire 2006 CACI Ltd

The average household income in Stratford-on-Avon District in 2006 before tax and deductions, and including income from all sources e.g. benefit payments, is £36,200 per annum. This is higher than both the national average of £32,400 and the Warwickshire average of £34,000.

The high average income in this district is misleading as a relatively small number of very high earners pull up the average. Therefore the median (that is the middle value in a set of numbers in their ascending order) household income is often used to better reflect the income of the typical household. In Stratford-on-Avon district the median household income is £30,800.

2.7 Housing costs

2.7.1 House prices

Source: Land registry and CLG live tables

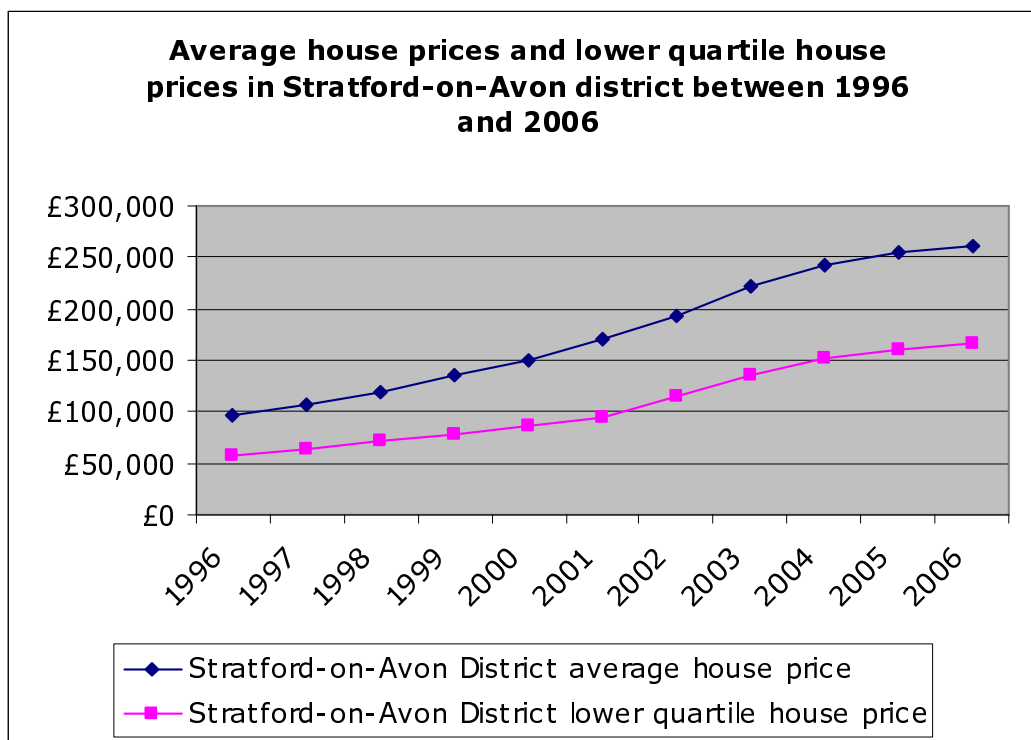
Between 1996 and 2006 the average price of a property in Stratford-on-Avon District increased by 269% from £97,433 to £261,828 in 2006.

Over the same period, cheaper properties at the lower end of the market, which are frequently bought by first time buyers, increased in price even more than other properties. Lower quartile house prices in the district increased 284% from £58,500 in 1996 to £165,875 in 2006.

'Lower quartile' prices are determined by ranking all prices in ascending order. The lowest 25% of prices are said to be below the lower quartile; the highest 75% of prices are above the lower quartile.

In 2006 the ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile income in Stratford-on-Avon District was 9.53.

The chart below shows the rise in average house prices and lower quartile house prices in this district over the last ten years.



Nationally the housing market is currently facing a downturn, but as at September 2007 the market was still fairly buoyant in Stratford-on-Avon district. Although there has been a fall in the number of sales, the average price of a property in this district between July and September 2007 was £276,668. The lower quartile property price over the same period in this district was £175,000.

2.7.2 Cost of private rented accommodation

A snapshot survey of privately rented properties in the district, which were advertised as available for letting, was carried out in April 2007. Luxury properties were excluded from the survey. The results of the survey are shown below.

Stratford-upon-Avon Town: 26 properties in total	Room in shared property	1 bed including bedsits	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed
Number of properties	8	1	10	6	1
Average rent per calendar month	£302	£360	£667	£850	£950

Stratford-on-Avon District excluding town of Stratford-upon-Avon: 21 properties in total	Room in shared property	1 bed including bedsits	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed
Number of properties	1	2	15	3	-
Average rent per calendar month	£340	£460	£584	£643	-

Although the sample was small, average private sector rents in this district follow past trends, and are greater than the amount of housing benefit that can be generally paid.

2.7.3 Cost of housing association rented homes

Source: CORE 2006 – 2007

The average rent of the approximately 400 housing association properties in the district that were let during 2006 – 2007 was £318 per calendar month.

2.7.4 Cost of housing association New Build HomeBuy (shared ownership) homes

Source: CORE 2006 – 2007 and Council's own affordable housing data 2006 - 2007

'New Build HomeBuy' is the Government's new name for shared ownership. New Build HomeBuy is where a person pays rent to a housing association for part of a property and then has a mortgage on the rest of the property.

In 2006 - 2007 in this district, 61 households bought existing homes (re-sales) or new homes via the New Build HomeBuy

scheme. The average market value of these 61 homes was £167,577.

The cost of newly built homes under the New Build HomeBuy scheme varies, but some typical examples of costs in 2006 -2007 are given below.

- *Rural scheme which included 5 New Build HomeBuy homes*

The market value of the 3 bed houses was £186,000. To acquire one of these properties householders had to purchase a 50% share of the property i.e. fund a deposit / mortgage of £93,000 and to pay £286 rent per calendar month to a housing association on the remaining 50% unsold equity.

- *Scheme on the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon town which included 9 New Build HomeBuy homes*

The market values of the homes ranged from £230,000 for 2 bed houses through to £257,000 for 4 bed houses. Householders purchased 35-40% shares of these properties, and had to pay 2% rent per calendar month on the unsold equity to a housing association.

Both the above New Build HomeBuy schemes were very popular. Further examples of the cost of New Build HomeBuy schemes are included in the Council's Housing Waiting List application packs.

2.7.5 Cost of Open Market HomeBuy homes

The Government's Open Market HomeBuy scheme was launched in 2006. The scheme allows people on limited incomes to access equity loans to buy homes on the open market. Typically householders need to raise 75 % of the value of a property through an approved mortgage lender or via savings. The remaining 25 % of the value of a property is funded by equity loans.

The scheme is not as generous as a previous Government scheme, and property prices are high in this district. Consequently, it is perhaps unsurprising that in 2006 – 2007 only one household in this district purchased a home under the Open Market Homebuy scheme. This compares to 15 households in 2005 -2006 who were able to buy homes under the previous more generous scheme.

2.8 The need for affordable housing

The Council has a good track record in delivering affordable homes. Between 1997 and 2007 the Council worked with housing associations and local communities to provide 1,035 additional affordable homes.

However, the lack of affordability of market housing in this district continues to be highlighted in various reports and studies. One of the most comprehensive and recent reports is the Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire which was completed in October 2006.

The main findings of the Assessment for this district include:

- A predicted net shortage of 954 affordable homes per annum.
- Overall there is sufficient market housing to cater for demand from existing Stratford-on-Avon District households, but within this overall supply there is a shortage of 2 bed owner occupied houses.
- If in-migration from other parts of the U.K. is taken into account, there is then an overall shortfall of market housing. The research shows that there would be significant shortfall of 2-bed owner occupied housing and more limited shortfalls in respect of 3-bed owner occupied housing and 2-bed private rented housing.

2.9 Overcrowding

On 12 December 2007 the government issued details of its action plan for tackling overcrowding in England.¹

This action plan reflects a growing understanding of the links between good housing and consequent improvements in the educational attainment of children and the health and well being of all household members.

The government acknowledges that local authorities have been focussing on giving priority to homeless households and paying less attention to overcrowding. They would like to see a better use of transfers for existing tenants and feel that addressing under occupation will free up more social homes for overcrowded families.

¹ "Tackling Overcrowding in England: An action plan", CLG, December 2007

The planned introduction of the Local Housing Allowance from April 2008 will allow overcrowded families to move to larger properties in the private rented sector because the level of allowance will be based on the median rent level within the area and the size of their household.

The Action Plan confirms that the government is committed to reviewing statutory overcrowding standards as these have not been updated since 1935.

Below is a list of potential actions that could be taken locally from the government Action Plan and from good practice identified in government pilots:

- There is a need to measure the extent of overcrowding locally to understand the scale of the problem
- There is a need to review the number of new family homes being delivered to see if an increase is required
- Introduction of an accredited landlord scheme for the private rented sector is recommended, along with longer leases to provide greater security
- Make better use of allocations by giving greater priority to those who are under-occupying and are seeking a move
- Provide cash incentives for under occupiers who wish to downsize, and consider funding a packing and removal service
- Consider introducing a scheme of property improvements to allow adaptations, extensions of use of the loft space to address overcrowding

2.10 Supporting People

Supporting People is a Government funded national programme to provide housing support for vulnerable people to enable them to keep their homes and to live independently within the community.

Following recent Cabinet reshuffles the responsibility of Homelessness and Supporting People have now been grouped together and come under the remit of the Homelessness and Support Directorate within the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Department. This is an important acknowledgement of the significant links between support and homelessness.

The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs.

The programme also monitors and reviews the quality of the support provided through Warwickshire.

There are challenges associated with the programme, including the possible decommissioning of local services and movement of funding to emerging strategic priorities. New services can have long lead in times and the effective capping of housing related support funding to the County Supporting People budget, raising the need to gain efficiencies.

The National Supporting People Strategy

The Government published *Independence and Opportunity* a new national strategy for Supporting People in June 2007. The document sets the strategic direction for local Supporting People Partnerships and provides four key themes under which it sets out what is expected from local programmes;

- Keeping people who need services at the heart of the programme
- Enhancing partnership with the third (voluntary) sector
- Delivering in the new Local Government landscape
- Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy

Warwickshire Five Year Supporting People Strategy 2008 – 2013

The Supporting People Partnership in Warwickshire has produced a five year strategy. The key aims of the strategy are:

- To set a new vision for the programme in Warwickshire
- To ensure that service users are at the heart of all aspects of the programme in order to achieve the best possible outcomes
- To ensure that service provision meets evidenced and prioritised needs across the whole range of diverse groups in Warwickshire
- To strengthen partnership working across all aspects of the programme

The five year Supporting People Strategy makes it clear that in the future it is the government's intention to channel funding for Supporting People through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) arrangements and emphasises the importance of the LAA's 'Narrowing the Gap' aspirations. It is also clear from the document that the Supporting People Partnership needs to realign the programme and that this is likely to be achieved by the targeting of resources where there is most need.

The most recent needs analysis work at County level has provided three priority groupings carrying equal weighting, as follows:

- Priority Grouping A – Homeless People and People Fleeing Domestic Violence
- Priority Grouping B – Offenders, People with Mental Health problems and People with Substance Misuse Problems
- Priority Grouping C – Young People at Risk, Young People Leaving Care and Teenage Parents

The Warwickshire Supporting People Commissioning Body has agreed that new services for the following client groups are immediate (12 months) commissioning priorities in Warwickshire.

- A countywide generic floating service
- A service for young people
- A service for young people with physical and sensory disabilities

These commissioning priorities will be progressed to a tendering stage.

Following a decommissioning decision, the Supporting People team will tender for a floating support service for people with mental health problems in South Warwickshire, a floating support service for homeless people in Nuneaton and Bedworth and a women's refuge service in Nuneaton.

Local Strategic Support Priorities

Across the County, the voluntary sector, Housing Associations and a number of other organisations and individuals have become key players in the prevention of homelessness by helping to provide diverse and holistic services to homeless households and those struggling to maintain tenancies. Within Stratford-on-Avon District this includes:

- Generic floating support services
- Floating support services for those with alcohol problems, people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems
- Accommodation based support services for young people at risk (16 to 25 years only), offenders or people at risk of offending, people with mental health problems, and people with alcohol problems

The Council's Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011 and Homelessness Strategy 2003 - 2008 commit the Council to assessing the feasibility

of providing additional accommodation and support for certain groups of vulnerable people known to lack accommodation and support by June 2007.

On 15 June 2007 the Council's Housing Advisory Panel agreed that the needs evidence demonstrates that the two groups of vulnerable people with the most urgent unmet accommodation and support needs in Stratford-on-Avon District are:

- Single homeless people of all ages, including people who sleep rough
- Vulnerable young people aged 16 – 24 years

2.11 Housing and support needs

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for the South Housing Market Area of the West Midlands Region

This independent assessment was jointly commissioned in 2007 by the South Housing Market Area Partnership, which includes Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Warwick District Council, Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council and Wyre Forest District Council. The Partnership is due to sign-off the final report early in 2008.

The assessment brings together information from a variety of sources to compile a schedule of estimated pitch requirements for Gypsies and Travellers for the next five years. Local authority records were used to compile baseline information about the number of current pitches, planning histories and recorded unauthorised encampments. Using the baseline information as a starting point interviews were then carried out with Gypsy and Traveller households to determine present and future accommodation requirements, and also to gain greater understanding of educational, health and social issues.

People fleeing Domestic Violence

Victims of Domestic Violence can currently access both a refuge and the Countywide floating support service. Both services are managed by Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Service.

It appears from the SP Needs Assessment that Countywide there are omissions in service provision for male victims and other groups. However whilst some additional service provision would be

desirable, local information confirms that on the whole needs are appropriately met.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an adequate supply of support services for people fleeing domestic violence within the District¹.

The recent countywide pilot of a Sanctuary Scheme has yet to report back on its success but is likely to provide a broader range of options to this client group.

Generic support

Generic support services operate within the District providing lower level support often to homeless households occupying temporary accommodation or those starting in new tenancies. This type of service is also important in sustaining existing tenancies. The client group includes people who do not fall into a specific group, but have a range of needs.

Locally there are a considerable number on waiting lists to access this type of service.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of generic support services within the District¹.

The Supporting People Programme are currently inviting tenders to commission a new Countywide generic floating support service and it is likely a service will be initiated by April 2008.

Gypsy and Travellers

There is currently no support provided to gypsy and traveller communities in the District through the Supporting People programme. However these groups do receive some support and advice from the County Council's gypsy and traveller liaison team and the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children.

Where households from these communities settle into housing they do access generic floating Support Services within the District.

A Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment is currently underway in the South Housing Market Area and the section above specifically detailing the needs of this community should be referred to.

Evidence suggests that the needs of this community are not being fully met by the existing services.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for gypsy and traveller groups within the District¹.

The Supporting People Programme are currently commissioning a countywide floating support service for Gypsy and Travellers and a Site Warden service and it is likely a service will be initiated in 2008.

People living with HIV and AIDS

There is currently no support provided to this client group in the District through the Supporting People programme.

However whilst some additional service provision would be desirable, local information has not highlighted this as an area of significant need.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for people living with HIV and AIDS within the District¹.

Homeless People

There are currently no services specifically for either homeless families or single homeless within Stratford-on-Avon District. The Salvation Army provides hot meals and advice to rough sleepers within the town of Stratford-upon-Avon but have no facility to provide accommodation. No nightstop service providing short-term spaces to those in need is accessible within the District and often those becoming homeless and facing a night sleeping rough have to travel outside the County to gain access to emergency accommodation.

Recent research undertaken for Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Housing Strategy 2006 - 2011 revealed a need in this District for a

6 - 8 bed purpose built transitional housing scheme with specialist support for people who sleep rough².

Needs analysis by Supporting People in 2007 also demonstrated a specific omission in provision within the District. The need has been heightened by the closure of the Young Housing Project in Leamington Spa.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for homeless people within the District¹.

People with Learning Difficulties

There are a number of services providing support to those with learning difficulties within the District including both floating and accommodation based services.

Supporting People have identified 44 individuals likely to need accommodation and/or support services in 2006/7 and 47 individuals in 2007/8. It is clear from additional work undertaken that the tenure preferences vary. Difficulties in being re-housed for this group have been identified. Evidence suggests that a significant number of people with learning difficulties are living at home with their parents. This client group is at risk of becoming homeless if parents or carers are no longer able to provide this support².

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for people with learning difficulties within the District¹.

People with Mental Health Problems

Stratford-on-Avon District currently has a range of accommodation-based and floating support services for those with mental health problems including those run by the Mustard Tree Project, Springfield MIND and Stonham.

Although there is sufficient accommodation within the District higher levels of support are required in some instances. There is no suitable accommodation in this District for people with high-level or complex mental-health issues who may also have other support needs. Supporting People is investigating this issue and it is likely

that any services that will be commissioned on a countywide or at least north/south Warwickshire basis².

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an adequate supply of support services for people with mental health problems within the District¹.

Offenders (and people at risk of offending)

Stratford-on-Avon District has one service for this client group run by Stonham.

The Central Accommodation referral service estimates that there is a need for at least 3 additional bed spaces each year in this District and some floating support and accommodation for offenders who have been identified as high/ very high risk of harm².

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an adequate supply of support services for Offenders (and people at risk of offending) within the District¹.

Older People

Given the levels of older people and the predicted growth of this group there are a number of services for older people. These include Sheltered and Very Sheltered Housing and Community Alarm Services.

No services exist in Stratford-on-Avon District for the Frail Elderly or Older People with Mental Health problems and it is acknowledged that there is an undersupply of extra care type accommodation but the level of provision is shortly to be increased with the completion of an Extra Care Scheme in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The predicted growth in the numbers over 85 years old and suffering from dementia is likely to make the development of this accommodation necessary to ensure people are able to maintain their independence and not lose their accommodation.

It is important in a District with an ageing population that options for older members of the community are available and that these can be easily accessed when appropriate to ensure the minimisation of 'bed blocking'.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is the potential for an under supply of support services for older people within the District¹ in the future.

Physical or Sensory Disability

There are currently no services for those with physical or sensory disabilities within Stratford-on-Avon District. These services could provide valuable support to those suffering with mobility difficulties, sensory impairments and debilitating long-term illnesses.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for people living with physical or sensory disabilities within the District¹.

The Supporting People programme are currently inviting tenders to commission a new Countywide support service for those with physical or sensory disabilities and it is likely a service will be initiated by April 2008.

Refugees

There are no services within the District specifically for refugees. If refugees were to access a service within the District after becoming homeless it is possible that any generic needs could be catered for by the generic services available. Local information does not show a significant need for this type of service.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for refugees within the District¹.

Substance Misuse Problems

This group contains those who are homeless or who have difficulties in sustaining their accommodation or managing to live independently as a result of alcohol or drug problem.

Two floating support services operate within Stratford-on-Avon District, one for those with drug misuse problems and one for those with alcohol misuse problems.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for people with substance misuse problems within the District¹.

Teenage parents

Teenage pregnancy and parenthood is an important social and public health issue with clear linkages between this and social exclusion.

Whilst there is currently no provision of this nature within the District evidence gathered locally does not demonstrate a significant level of need. Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People programme's needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an adequate supply of support services for teenage parents within the District¹.

Young People at Risk

Within the District there are currently both accommodation and floating support services aimed at this client group which includes homeless young people (under 21) and those in insecure or inappropriate accommodation. Both service types have waiting list to access them.

There is considerable evidence of the need for additional services for young people. Recent research undertaken for the Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Housing Strategy 2006 - 2011 noted the need for accommodation and support for young people under the age of 25² in this District

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People Programmes needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for young people at risk within the District¹.

The closure of the Young Housing Project in Leamington Spa is beginning to have an impact of the availability of advice services for this client group and agencies including Stratford-on-Avon College and the Connexions Service have provided some evidence showing that younger people are dropping out of education because of accommodation difficulties.

In addition Local Authorities are being encouraged to end the use of inappropriate forms of Temporary Accommodation including B&B for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

Young People Leaving Care

This client group includes young people leaving local authority care who need support. There is currently no provision for this service group within Stratford-on-Avon District.

Using the analysis of the current level of supply against the level of need indicated within the Supporting People Programmes needs analysis, the programme feels that there is an under supply of support services for young people at risk within the District¹.

In addition Local Authorities are being encouraged to end the use of inappropriate forms of Temporary Accommodation including B&B for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010.

The table below shows the provision within the District for the above client groups as a component of that provided within the County. (Source: Supporting People Needs Analysis, 2007)

Client group	Floating Support			Accommodation Based		
	% of total max. client group spend	No. of Units	% of units	% of total max. client group spend	No. of Units	% of units
People fleeing Domestic Violence	9.5%	12	15.9%	15.5%	5	6.5%
Generic support	22.1%	34	22.1%	0	0	0
People with learning disabilities	2.7%	14.5	6.5%	12.1%	24	10.8%
People with Mental Health problems	26.3%	57	25.6%	13.8%	32	14.3%
Offenders and people at risk of offending	0	0	0	29.7%	14	26.4%
Older people	3.1%	750.5	14.3%	16.7%	681	13.0%
Young people at risk	5.5%	10	10.9%	13.5%	9	9.8%
	Floating Support – Drug			Floating Support – Alcohol		
Substance misuse	20%	11.6	20%	20%	4.6	20%

¹ Summary of Needs Analysis Information, Warwickshire Supporting People Programme and the County in Context, Warwickshire Supporting People Programme, 2007.

² Provision of Affordable Accommodation and / or Support for Vulnerable People, Housing Advisory Panel Report, Stratford-on-Avon District Council, 2007

2.12 Delivery of housing targets

2.12.1 LAA

Warwickshire Local Area Agreement 2007

Local Area Agreements are three-year agreements between central government, local authorities and other local publicly funded organisations that aim to provide local solutions to local needs whilst at the same time contributing to national priorities. The Warwickshire Local Area Agreement was formally approved by Government in March 2007. The six key 'themes' of the agreement are children and young people, stronger communities, safer communities, climate change and environment, healthier communities and older people, and economic development and enterprise.

The agreement includes two direct housing targets concerning the number of affordable homes built on land identified as public land/premises and the number of cases where homelessness was prevented. There are also two Supporting People targets which are about increasing the number of people who are supported to establish and maintain independent living, and increasing the number of people who have successfully moved on from temporary/supported accommodation.

2.12.2 Local Strategic Partnership

This is a District group which sits below the Local Area Agreement and mirrors the theme groups.

2.12.3 District Housing Forum

Stratford-on-Avon's District Housing Forum is an independently chaired group made up of support providers, and other interested groups such as the CAB. As well as having a strong voice in representing the needs of its clients, this Group has also previously been involved in producing and overseeing the Council's Homeless Strategy 2003 – 08 and gathering information to feed into the new strategy.

The main aim of the Forum is to work strategically in partnership as an independent and impartial Forum to improve the housing and support options of all people in Stratford-on-Avon District who are experiencing housing difficulties, or who are at risk of experiencing housing difficulties.

3 Review of Homelessness in the District

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to carry out a review of homelessness in its District in order to assess the levels and likely future levels of homelessness in its area.

The Council has carried out its review using extensive research in the form of questionnaires, interviews and surveys.

3.1 Housing Advice Audit

The provision of accurate and timely housing advice is essential if homelessness is to be prevented and for housing options to be explored by households who are experiencing housing difficulties.

In October 2007, the Council conducted a Housing Advice Audit of all agencies who may be giving advice, including advice on housing issues, to their clients. This audit was intended to record the number of clients being given advice and to show how many agencies are providing this service. It also gathered information about types of client groups and their current housing situation. Agencies were also asked to identify whether they thought there were any gaps in services not currently met by either themselves or other agencies in the District.

The table below shows the main agencies who are delivering housing advice in Stratford-on-Avon District area and where available figures have been provided of the number of clients seen annually.

Agency	Date and source of information	Number of clients
Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Housing Advice Team	April 2006 – March 2007 Council performance information	34,248 (telephone calls, interviews)
Citizens Advice Bureau	2006 – 2007	1053

Agency	Date and source of information	Number of clients
Community Alcohol Service	April 2006 – March 2007	694
Salvation Army	2004 – 2007 Housing Advice Audit	186
Bromford Floating Support	Ongoing caseload	82
Springfield	Ongoing caseload	30 - 35
Stonham	Ongoing caseload	36
Mustard Tree Project	Ongoing caseload	25 -30
WDVSS	April 06 – March 07	25
GHA		No information provided
Jephson		No information provided
Orbit		No information provided
Sanctuary		No information provided
SWHA		No information provided
Warwickshire Rural		No information provided
Social Services		No information provided
Probation		No information provided
Stratford College		No information provided
Age Concern		No information provided
CVS		No information provided
Connexions		No information provided

Agencies reported that the following tenure types sought advice from their service: owner occupiers, private tenants, Housing Association tenants, service users.

Of the nine agencies that provided information, six reported giving housing advice. Agencies also reported giving specialist advice on

the following issues: life skills; help with drug problems; help with alcohol problems; help with mental health problems

Several of the organisations confirmed they had accreditations from outside bodies for their services.

Advice agencies were asked to identify any gaps in provision and reported the following:

- Lack of supported housing for those suffering from Asperger's Syndrome
- Lack of suitable housing for young people
- Insufficient information on private rentals or the Council's Rent Express Scheme for landlords and estate agents
- Lack of services for clients with mild learning disabilities
- Limited emergency accommodation – clients often need to go to Coventry
- Lack of solicitors in the District offering legal aid housing advice

3.2 Research and Monitoring

The Council has carried out research to establish what issues are considered to be the most important in terms of housing and homelessness. Questionnaires were sent out to:

- i) All applicants on the Council's Housing Waiting List:
- ii) The Citizens Panel (a group of over 1,000 residents who the Council regularly consults)
- iii) All residents via the District Council's Your Review magazine
- iv) District Council staff and elected Members

Frontline staff have been interviewed for their views, along with staff from housing association partners and support and advice agencies.

The Council has also conducted a survey of users of the Salvation Army's hot food project to obtain the views of this particular client group which includes those who currently sleep rough and who have slept rough in the past.

Further facts and figures relating to this research can be found below at Appendix 1.

3.2.1 Questionnaires

i) Housing Waiting List applicants

The Council sought the views of its housing waiting list applicants with regard to housing and homelessness.

3000 questionnaires were sent out, with 689 being returned, a response rate of 23%.

Analysis of the results of this survey showed that the most important housing issues were identified as:

Shortage of housing association properties to rent	31.3%
Private rents/ open market house prices too high	29.6%
Time taken to be rehoused from the housing waiting list	21.3%

30.5% of respondents said they were concerned about the impact that household debt may have on their housing situation in the future.

This debt was identified as follows:

62.4% other debts
23% Council tax arrears
21.3% rent arrears

The other debt identified by respondents breaks down as follows (89 responses):

34 credit cards
20 other loans
15 bank loans

7.9% reported they had slept rough in the last 3 years, with 40.4% of these sleeping rough between 1 month and 6 months, and 26.9% for longer than six months.

22.1% have relied on friends to help them with somewhere to stay in the last 3 years, with 42.4% for between 1 month and 6 months, and 24.5% for longer than six months.

24.5% had approached the Council as homeless.

The reasons for homelessness were:
31% due to relationship breakdown
24.7% for other reasons

23.4% asked to leave by family
15.8% evicted by private landlord

Of the other reasons, given by 39 respondents:

8 were homeless because of affordability problems
6 homeless due to flooding
5 homeless due to family reasons

As well as being on the housing register, the following actions were also taken to find alternative accommodation:

67.2% looked for privately rented accommodation.
32.3% looked for accommodation in another area
26.7% applied to another local authority for Council or Housing Association accommodation.

46.4% of housing waiting list applicants use the internet and they access this as follows:

69.1% at home
21% via friends and family
19.9% at the library

Of the 53.6% who do not use the internet, they gave the following reasons:

70.8% no access to the internet
37% prefer to talk to someone
34.6% not good with computers

ii) Citizens Panel

During the summer of 2007, the Council conducted one of its Citizens Panel surveys which included questions relating to housing and homelessness. A total of 1284 surveys were sent out, with 575 being returned – a response rate of 45.9%.

15% of respondents were worried about the impact that household debt might have on their future housing

8% of respondents had experienced housing difficulties while living in Stratford District.

47% of respondents would go to the Council if they had a housing difficulty with 26.2% saying they would go to the CAB.

Of those surveyed who were over 50 years old, 32.3% thought that in the future they may need adaptations and 26.1% were concerned about problems due to lack of access to transport.

From a selection of statements relating to housing and homelessness, the following were selected most often by respondents:

76.5% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "there is not enough affordable housing for local people."

64.4% agreed/strongly agreed that "there were too many people coming into the District from outside the area"

50.3% agreed/strongly agreed "there are not enough housing options for elderly people in the District."

iii) Survey of District residents via Your Review magazine

In 2007 the Council conducted a survey of its residents for the homelessness strategy. A survey form went out to every household in the District with the Your Review Council magazine.

473 responses were received, and these broke down into the following household types:

71.6% Owner occupier
14.5% housing association tenant
9.2% private tenant
2.8% living with family or friends
1.7% other
0.2% lodger

52% of respondents knew that the Council had a housing advice team although only 28.5% of respondents had ever experienced housing difficulties.

Nearly one third of respondents (29.8%) were worried about the impact that household debt may have on their housing situation.

When asked where they would go for advice if they had a housing problem, most respondents indicated the CAB and the Council's housing advice team.

When asked to identify the main causes of housing problems in the District, the following were identified as the most important:

- Open market house prices too high
- Shortage of housing association properties to rent
- Private rents too high

When asked to choose from a list what could be done to reduce homelessness in the District, the most popular responses were as follows:

- Work to bring empty properties back into use
- Provide an accommodation service to homeless people which helps with work, training and education

Prevent homelessness through advice and support.

iv) Survey of all District Council Staff and elected Members

The Council sought the view of staff and members with regard to housing and homelessness. There were 81 responses out of a total of 387 staff and 53 members, a return of 18%.

The following were identified as the most important housing issues in Stratford-on-Avon District:

- lack of affordable housing (54)
- high housing costs (10)
- more housing for local people (3)
- homelessness (2)

Respondents were asked what could be done to reduce housing difficulties or homelessness in Stratford-on-Avon District, and the following were identified:

- More affordable homes (24)
- More shared ownership (3)
- Discourage second homes (3)
- Tackle empty homes (3)
- Provide more support (3)

3.2.2 Interviews

i) Interviews with front line staff

The Council's Housing Advice Team is the first point of contact for many who are threatened with homelessness or would like advice about their housing situation. During 2006/07 (the last year for which complete records exist) they conducted 958 interviews, took 33,290 telephone calls, conducted 276 homeless investigations and

accepted 73 households as homeless. They also prevented homelessness for 116 households during 2006 - 07.

The team consists of 3 Housing Advisers, 3 Assistant Housing Advisers and a Homelessness Prevention officer. The work of the team is varied and includes:

- Running the District's common housing register (waiting list)
- Processing homeless applications
- Providing advice on housing options
- homeless prevention
- Running the rent deposit scheme (Rent Express)

The work of the Homelessness Prevention Officer includes the provision of training and education to partner organisations, other colleagues within the Council, and work in schools and colleges.

Front line staff are often in a good position to know which are the most important issues and the Council wanted to take account their views and experiences.

The Team were interviewed individually and their responses can be summarised under a number of broad headings as follows:

- 1) Homelessness Prevention
- 2) Housing Options
- 3) Partnership Working
- 4) Customer Care
- 5) The need for a planned approach

1) Homelessness Prevention

- There appears to be a need for improved links between the Housing Advice Team and housing association partners to work more effectively on homeless prevention.
- There appears to be a need for improved links between the Housing Advice Team and the Council's Anti Social Behaviour team to improve homeless prevention measures.
- Mediation – there needs to be a review of arrangements and seek to provide a more localised scheme to improve success rates.
- There is concern about the housing market in general, with private landlords selling up and thus making tenants homeless
- Rent Express Scheme – need to look at the long term viability of the Scheme.
- Increase in debt problems – due in part to rising interest rates and shortage of debt advice

- Recording of preventions – are these being accurately reported?
- Mortgage rescue – possible gap in service.
- Debt - CAB unable to meet demand.
- Prevention training – there is a need for a rolling programme both at the District Council and other organisations.

2) Housing Options

- There is a need to review the amount of options available to increase them if possible.
- There needs to be an investigation into the likely impact of the new local housing allowance for private tenants.
- There needs to be a hostel in Stratford-on-Avon District and would appear to two main client groups – 16/17 year olds who need supported housing; and older non priority homeless applicants
- Lack of housing options, especially for single under 25 year olds
- There is a need to improve links with private landlords and seek to introduce a landlords' accreditation scheme
- There seems to be an increase in single person households and for this household type there is a shortage of affordable housing
- There seems to be an increasing number of sofa surfers

3) Partnership Working

- There is no local presence of housing associations in the District (except for South Warwickshire Housing Association). This seems to lead to dislocation and results in their tenants having no clear point of contact in the District, with tenants often attending Housing Advice Team surgeries for advice
- Social services – there is a need for improved linkages. Need to develop a protocol for dealing with 16 and 17 year olds. Need to improve relationships more generally to better enable positive experience of referrals
- The planned reduction of temporary accommodation is a worry and there is concern about what will happen when it is reduced
- A holistic approach is needed from all agencies who have contact with those experiencing housing difficulties. Housing does not have all the answers and there needs to be a more effective and holistic approach with improved links between housing, social services, health (drugs etc) and education.

4) Customer Care

- There is a need to review the customer experience to ensure that the housing service is accessible to all and that the service is not process driven
- There is a need for a more holistic approach to households' problems
- There is a need to measure the impact of changes to working methods to better manage workloads

5) Planned approach

- More long term strategies are needed to look at trends and solutions
- There is a need for a more planned and joined up approach from all agencies
- There is a lack of clear procedures – these need to be kept up to date to ensure a consistent approach and to minimise the disruption caused by existing members of the team having to spend time training new members of staff

ii) Interviews with housing association partners

Interviews were conducted with members of staff from housing association partners. Key issues that came out of these discussions were as follows:

- Lack of intensive support for the most vulnerable tenants in order to sustain their tenancy
- Need for a more joined up approach between the Anti Social Behaviour and Housing Advice Teams at the Council as their work may be in conflict
- Need for more liaison between the District Council and Social Services in the case of young people and for a more developed multi agency approach with difficult cases.
- Need for multi agency approach with young people in order to sustain their tenancies.

iii) Interviews with other agencies

Rural issues

Stratford-on-Avon District is a large rural area. The Council employs a Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) who assists local communities with assessing their housing needs and identifying suitable locations for small housing developments to meet identified need. The RHE is a

good source of information about what is happening locally and contributed the following views to the homeless strategy research:

Issues:

- Down sizing for older people - there is a need for bungalows and those that do become available are expensive to buy. There is a risk of homelessness for older home owners who cannot manage their current accommodation due to financial issues and disabilities and are unable to access suitable accommodation.
- Young people seeking their own accommodation have problems due to lack of affordable housing

Upcoming issues which need more work:

- Sofa surfing and hidden homelessness in rural areas. Anecdotally, there is an increase in this but it is hard to substantiate as housing needs surveys do not always pick these up
- Need to increase awareness of the housing waiting list in rural communities as most people who complete housing need surveys are not on the list
- Need to improve the image of affordable housing
- Affordability of shared ownership needs to be reviewed as increases in house prices have rendered this option unaffordable for some
- Impact of second homes on local people needs to be assessed
- Are people who have literacy problems discriminated against by having to complete a written housing form?

Issues from support agencies:

Broadly, agencies were happy with their relationship with the Council in general and specifically with the housing team. It was felt that the Housing Advice Team surgery at the Refuge was well liked by clients and the Citizens Advice Bureau felt supported by the Council.

Issues that were highlighted:

- A need for support agencies to be involved with the choice based lettings process
- There appeared to be an issue around housing associations not referring tenants to support agencies or housing advice quickly enough for homelessness to be prevented

- private landlords in the area seem unwilling to accept tenants who will be in receipt of housing benefit
- There is sometimes a problem getting appointments with the Housing Advice Team in time to prevent homelessness
- There is a lack of affordable housing, private rented and social, in the District
- The Council needs to be aware that its preventative approach could be perceived as "fobbing people off"
- A direct access hostel in the District is sorely needed

Warwickshire Domestic Violence Support Service staff mentioned that move-on from the Refuge was an issue. Bromford Floating Support Service staff mentioned that they need to expand their service to meet the demand for support because funding only allows them to support 82 clients while they have 40 more on their waiting list.

Citizens Advice Bureau staff mentioned they did not have sufficient resources to meet the demand for debt advice.

iv) Survey of users of the Salvation Army Hot Food Project

These surveys were completed by Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Homelessness Prevention Officer, following interviews with service users at the Council's outreach surgery to the Salvation Army's Hot Food Project during June 2007.

A total of 14 service users were interviewed.

The survey asked this client group to identify the three most important housing issues in the District in order of importance. The following were identified:

- 1) Private rents too high
- 2) Time taken to be housed from the Council's waiting list
- 3) Shortage of housing association properties to rent

Of the 14 clients interviewed, 13 said they had slept rough. Of these, six had slept rough for longer than six months, five between one month and six months, and two for less than a week. Of these 14 clients, 10 had slept on a friend's sofa or floor. Four of these for longer than six months, and three between one month and six months.

When asked if they would use a hostel if there was one in Stratford, 10 respondents said they would.

v) Single Homeless monitoring

The Council carried out monitoring exercises of single people experiencing housing difficulties in May 2005, November 2005 and June 2007. The aim of the exercise was to identify the housing and support needs of single people in Stratford-on-Avon District. Single people under 60 years make up 35% of the nearly 3,000 households on the Housing Waiting List, and are the largest household type on the List. It is important to note that most single people are not entitled to permanent accommodation under homeless legislation.

The exercise was overseen by the multi agency Stratford-on-Avon District Housing Forum. Local organisations were asked to complete monitoring forms for all housing enquiries from single people in May and November 2005, and June 2007.

The main reasons given for people having housing difficulties in the 2005 research were as follows:

- asked to leave by family friends
- seeking independence
- non violent relationship breakdown

The most common unmet support needs were:

- Housing support
- Help with benefits
- Drugs misuse
- Training/employment
- Mental ill health
- Alcohol misuse

This exercise was carried out again in June 2007. The main reasons for people experiencing housing difficulties were:

- Asked to leave by family friends
- Debt/ rent arrears
- Non violent relationship breakdown

Of the 65 people experiencing housing difficulties:

55 people had support needs
10 people had no support needs

The most common unmet support needs were

- Housing support
- Help with benefits
- Alcohol misuse
- Drugs misuse
- Training/ employment

vi) **District Housing Forum**

At the District Housing Forum meeting on 13 June 2007, the Group considered a number of important issues relating to homelessness in the District to determine the three most important priorities.

Following discussion, the Group voted on the priorities it considered to be the most important and these were:

- Lack of emergency access accommodation
- Shortage of affordable homes to rent privately for vulnerable clients
- Time taken to be housed from the Council's waiting list.

3.3 Key messages from this review

The consultation carried out as part of this review of homelessness in the District has highlighted a number of areas which have been identified as major issues for housing and homelessness. This is a summary of these key messages. Tasks within the action plan are intended to address the issues that have been raised.

- 1) Affordability.** It is clear that affordability remains a problem in this District. The Council is already committed to the delivery of new affordable housing in its Housing Strategy and this continues to be a corporate priority.
- 2) Shortage of affordable homes.** This is being addressed as above. The Council has also introduced a strategy to tackle empty homes and has recruited an Empty Homes Officer to address the issue of vacant dwellings in the District. Grants are available to return empty properties to use on condition that the property is then let at an affordable rent.
- 3) Debt problems and shortage of debt advice.** The research has shown growing concern about the impact of future debt on households and insufficient resources to meet the increased demand for debt advice.
- 4) Rough sleeping and lack of accommodation solutions.** There is no direct access hostel accommodation in Stratford-on-Avon District.

- 5) **Sofa surfing.** Anecdotal evidence suggests this is a growing problem but it is hard to measure the extent of this in the District.
- 6) **More housing options needed for older people.** The District has an aging population and research shows there is concern about the future housing needs of this group.
- 7) **Second homes.** The impact of these on housing availability in the District has not been assessed.
- 8) **Homes for local people.** There is a perception that homes are being occupied by households who have no connection to Stratford-on-Avon District.
- 9) **Homelessness prevention.** More work needs to be done on improving and developing housing options to prevent homelessness.
- 10) **Overcrowding.** The government expects local authorities to do more to address the needs of overcrowded households.
- 11) **Mediation.** There is a need to improve on the provision of mediation services locally to address homelessness.
- 12) **Effective partnership working.** There is a need to ensure that all agencies have a joined up and holistic approach to housing difficulties.

4 The Council's approach

4.1 Homeless legislation

In order to understand how homeless people are dealt with it is necessary to know a little about homeless legislation.

The Council's Housing Advice Team is responsible for both homelessness and managing the Housing Waiting List. There is separate legislation and guidance covering how people who are homeless are dealt with, and how people on a Housing Waiting List are let housing association properties. The two pieces of legislation do, however, overlap. Homeless people will be put on the Housing Waiting List if they are not, like the majority of people who become homeless in this District, already on it.

A brief overview of homelessness legislation is set out below. The legislation is complex, and is constantly changing as a result of people challenging the legislation through the courts.

It is often assumed that all homeless people are automatically entitled to immediate and permanent housing. This is wrong. Under homeless legislation only some people are owed what is commonly known as the full homeless duty and are entitled to permanent

housing. These people are sometimes referred to as the “statutory homeless”.

In determining what duty is owed to a homeless person, the Council is required in each case to investigate and make a decision as to whether the person:

- **Is eligible**
This refers to the person’s immigration status and to where that person usually lives
- **Is homeless**
This is whether the person has any ‘suitable’ accommodation, and is homeless now or threatened with homelessness in the *next 28 days*
- **Is in priority need**
That is whether the person is
 - A pregnant woman
 - Part of a household with dependent children
 - Vulnerable as a result of old age, ill health or disability, or some other special reason.
 - Homeless in an emergency, for example because of flooding
 - A 16 or 17 year old (except for those who have been in care and who are the responsibility of social services)
 - A former care leaver aged 18 – 21 years
 - Vulnerable as a result of being in the services, prison or custody, violence or threat of violence.

People who do *not* fall into one of the above categories will not be in priority need.

- **Is intentionally homeless**
That is whether the person has *deliberately* done or failed to do something which causes them to lose their accommodation, and it would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy that accommodation. An act or

omission in good faith by someone who was unaware of any relevant fact *cannot* be treated as deliberate.

For example, someone who is evicted for rent arrears but who at the time was incapable of managing their affairs because of old age, mental ill health or disability must *not* be treated as intentionally homeless. Wilful and persistent refusal to pay rent or mortgage payments, anti social behaviour, voluntarily giving up adequate accommodation in this country or abroad, disregarding advice from qualified persons would, however, be classed as intentional homelessness.

➤ **Has a local connection**

That is whether the person lives or works locally, has family locally or whether the person needs to be near special medical or support services.

Which homeless people are entitled to permanent housing?

Only a person who is eligible, homeless or threatened with homelessness, in priority need and not homeless intentionally is entitled to permanent housing under homeless legislation. Such people who do not have a 'local connection' will be referred to the area where they do have a local connection.

Single people, or households without children, who are in good health, have no disability and who are neither young or old will generally not have a priority need. This means that they are only entitled to advice and assistance under homelessness legislation, rather than permanent housing.

If a person disagrees with a homelessness decision they can ask for the decision to be reviewed. Council legal services staff, who have not been involved in the original decision, undertake these reviews. If a person is still unhappy with a decision following a review they have the right to appeal to the county court; but only on a point of law.

4.2 The Housing Advice Team

4.2.1 Audit Commission Housing Inspection

In January 2007, the Audit Commission issued its report following its inspection of Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Strategic Housing Service. The full report can be viewed on the Council's

website on the Housing pages. For a full website address, please see Appendix 1.

The Audit Commission judged the service “two stars with promising prospects of improvement” which at the time made the Council’s Strategic Housing Service one of the most highly rated in the country.

Along with commending the Council for having easily accessible services and for its use of customer surveys to assess satisfaction with services, it also highlighted the Council’s work in meeting rural housing needs as positive practice, stating that “the Council has taken a robust approach to assessing needs and developing policy to address the need for affordable housing in rural areas.”(p44)² The Audit Commission also commended the Council for developing a “substantial proportion of affordable housing..without public subsidy.”(p44)

As far as housing advice and homelessness services were concerned, the Inspection report stated that strengths outweighed weaknesses in this area. In summary, it noted the service was focussed on preventing homelessness, featured strong partnership working and that that temporary accommodation was of a good standard with support mechanisms in place.

4.2.2 Customer satisfaction

As noted by the Audit Commission, the Housing Service has a strong track record of using customer surveys to assess satisfaction and of listening to its customers when looking to improve services or introduce a new initiative. Examples of this have been the introduction of a twice-yearly newsletter for waiting list applicants and a text messaging service.

The Council has robust data on customer satisfaction and the information below provides a summary of results for the current year:

April – Sept 2007 - Overall service offered by the Housing Advice Team in relation to homelessness and housing options– very good 66.7%;Fairly good 33.3%

April – Sept 2007 – Overall service offered by the Housing Advice Team in relation to the housing waiting list – Very good 75%; Fairly good 18.1%

² Audit Commission report following inspection of Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s Strategic Housing Service, January 2007

4.2.3 Best Value Performance Indicators

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are a statutory set of measurements introduced by government departments to measure the performance of all local authorities. They derive from the duty on local authorities to provide "best value" in achieving continuous improvement by having regard to the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of their service delivery.

The table below shows the BVPIs which relate to housing and homelessness:

BVPI 64	Number of private sector dwellings returned to occupation
BVPI 183a	Average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation of households that are unintentionally homeless and in priority need
BVPI 183b	The average length of stay in hostel accommodation of households that are unintentionally homeless and in priority need
BVPI 202	The number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the authority
BVPI 203	The percentage change in the average number of families placed in temporary accommodation
BVPI 213	The number of households who considered themselves as homeless who approached the local housing authority's housing advice services and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation
BVPI 214	Proportion of households accepted as statutory homeless who were accepted as statutorily homeless by the same Authority within the last two years

The Council has performed well in this area and the table below provides a summary of results.

BVPI	2005/06 result	2006/07 target	2006/07 result	2007/08 target
64	26	30	60	30
183a	1.04 weeks	0 weeks	1 day	0 weeks
183b	0 weeks	0 weeks	0 weeks	0 weeks
202	0-10	0-10	0-10	0-10
203	- 7%	- 20%	-44.09%	- 20%
213	48 preventions	60	116 preventions	60
214	1.96	2	1.37	0-2

4.3 Homelessness data

The Council has to report its homelessness figures to the government at the end of every quarter. These figures provide a useful illustration of the types of household accepted as homeless by the Council, and the reasons why they have become homeless.

Homeless Decisions

The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of homeless decisions taken by the Council between April 2001 and the end of September 2007. It shows how many households were accepted as homeless.

Year	Total decisions	Acceptances	% acceptances of decisions
2007 – 08 _(2 quarters)	142	69	48.6
2006 – 07	276	73	26.4
2005 – 06	330	153	46.3
2004 – 05	227	103	45.3
2003 – 04	223	161	72.1
2002 – 03	227	166	73.1
2001 – 02	185	134	72.4

4.4 Rough sleepers

The government has been taking action to eradicate rough sleeping which it sees as a very visible sign of homelessness nationally. In 1998 the Prime Minister Tony Blair set a target that by 2002 the number of rough sleepers should be reduced by two thirds (from 1,850). The target was met in 2001 and has been sustained with a level of just under 500 in 2007. The Government is committed to sustaining this target and reducing levels of rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible.

As has been seen above, the single person monitoring conducted by the Council in 2006 and 2007 has shown that rough sleeping is an issue in this District. In order to measure the scale of the problem, the Council has been working closely with the Salvation Army in Stratford who provide monthly figures on numbers sleeping rough. While it is accepted that not all those who sleep rough may be contacting the Salvation Army, they are providing support, clothing and food to rough sleepers and through their own contacts are the most reliable source of information relating to rough sleeping in the

District. Research for this strategy also shown that rough sleeping was not considered to be a problem in the rural communities of the District.

In order to more proactively engage with rough sleepers, the Council decided to operate an outreach housing surgery on a weekly basis at the Salvation Army's hot food project in Stratford. Since 2005 an officer from the Council has attended the surgery and given advice on housing options. The Council also introduced a commitment in its Housing Strategy to engage with people sleeping rough each year and to add rough sleepers to the housing waiting list. The targets for these actions were met in the year 2006-07.

4.5 Homeless prevention

The government has stated that a preventative approach is at the heart of delivering its sustainable communities agenda and plays a key role in the government's aim of reducing numbers in temporary accommodation by 2010.

4.5.1 Options based approach

The Council has enhanced its Housing Service, with the Housing Advice Team providing a Housing Options service to the public. Housing options include:

- general advice about their housing situation
- referral to a floating tenancy support service
- benefits and welfare advice
- advice about accessing the housing waiting list
- liaison with private landlords in the case of threatened homelessness
- accessing the private rented sector via the Council's rent deposit scheme (Rent Express)

4.5.2 Prevention data

Stratford-on-Avon District Council has embraced the prevention agenda.

1) Homeless Prevention Officer

In 2003 Stratford-on-Avon District Council became one of the first Council's in the country to employ a Homelessness Prevention Officer. This post has evolved over the last 4 years and the role now provides four main functions:

- to provide and present information relating to homeless prevention to partner agencies and District Council colleagues
- to develop new preventative initiatives
- to assist with the provision of a comprehensive housing service
- to assist with the collation and reporting of statistical information relating to homelessness and local and national performance indicators

2) A Preventative approach

The Council's Housing Advice Team has adopted a preventative approach, looking to do all it can to prevent a household's homelessness.

Homeless can be prevented by:

- mediating with family and friends to allow the person to stay
- mediating with a private landlord to resolve issues to allow a new tenancy to be issued
- mediating with a mortgage lender to provide a solution to a homeowners problems
- liaising with a housing association landlord to resolve issues

The table below shows the number of homelessness preventions achieved by the Housing Advice Team since 2005.

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08 (3 quarters)
Number of preventions	48	116	80

3) Root causes of homelessness

In order to focus preventative work, the Council has been looking at the main reasons why households become homeless. The government, as part of its prevention agenda, has identified five main causes of homelessness as follows:

- parental eviction
- eviction by other relatives or friends
- end of an assured shorthold tenancy
- relationship breakdown due to violence
- non-violent relationship breakdown

By understanding the main local root causes, policies and strategies can be developed and focussed. For example, if the ending of assured shorthold tenancies is the main issue locally, more work could be done with working with private landlords to reduce this.

The following table shows the relative positions of the main causes of homelessness from 2001:

Year	End of Assured shorthold tenancy	Relationship breakdown due to violence	Parental eviction	Relations breakdown - non violent	Other homelessness reasons	Eviction by other relatives or friends
2001/02	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
2002/03	2 nd	3 rd	1 st	5 th	4 th	6 th
2003/04	3 rd	4 th	1 st	6 th	2 nd	5 th
2004/05	4 th	5 th	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	5 th
2005/06	4 th	3 rd	2 nd	5 th	1 st	6 th
2006/07	3 rd	2 nd	1 st	4 th	4 th	5 th
2007/08 (2 quarters)	2 nd	4 th	3 rd	5 th	1 st	6 th

Analysis of this table shows that the three homelessness reasons which are consistently seen at a high level are: parental eviction; end of assured shorthold tenancy; and violent relationship breakdown. Eviction by other relatives or friends would seem not to be a big issue in this District.

Interestingly, the growth over recent years of "other" homelessness reasons would suggest that work tackling the main causes has been successful. Further work now needs to be carried out to examine these other reasons to establish any trends and to target homeless prevention measures at these other areas.

Homelessness Strategy

5 The new Strategy and Action Plan

This Review of Homelessness in the District has shown a number of key areas which require work to achieve the desired outcomes. Consequently, an action plan has been developed to focus work to deliver the improvements that have been identified in the Review.

There are also a number of actions carried forward from the previous Homelessness Strategy, as well as existing commitments as detailed below.

5.1 Actions carried forward from Homelessness Strategy 2003 - 2008

In October 2006, the Council reviewed its progress with the old Strategy. As most of the actions had been met, a revised action plan was agreed by the Housing Advisory Panel. The action plan can be viewed on the Council's website at:

www.stratford.gov.uk/files/seealsodocs/5592/Homeless%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%20update%2020%20Oct%202006.pdf

Paper copies can be provided on request.

Progress of this action plan is reported to the Council's Housing Advisory Panel. Any actions that are off target are discussed and corrective action is taken. As at October 2007, 20 actions had been achieved, with 12 due to be achieved by the deadline. Four actions had not been achieved but these had corrective measures in place.

Actions which have not been achieved or which the Housing Advisory Panel have agreed to new target dates will be carried forward into the new Strategy action plan.

Some actions have an "achieved by" date for after the end of the expiry of the first strategy. These will also be carried forward into the new strategy action plan.

Existing commitments

5.2.1 Choice based lettings

Choice based lettings is about ensuring that everyone clearly understands how housing association properties are let and to whom. It involves advertising properties and allowing people to apply for these properties. The Government expects all local authorities to have a choice based lettings scheme in place by 2010.

The Council has been working with the South Housing Market Area Partnership which includes the Council, Warwick District Council and the five local authorities in Worcestershire to develop a sub regional choice based lettings scheme. The Partnership has successfully attracted considerable Government funding to implement a sub regional scheme – see the table below.

Basis of South Housing Market Area Partnership bid for Government grant funding for a sub regional choice based lettings scheme*	
Total cost of sub regional scheme	£593,000
Government grant funding - 60%	£355,800
South Housing Market Area Partnership funding - 40%	£237,200

*The Partnership is currently awaiting a quote from the company who will implement choice based lettings. Consequently, the final cost of the scheme may change. If the cost increases the Partnership will be asked to meet 100% of any costs above the £355,800 Government grant funding that has been made available to the Partnership.

What has been achieved so far?

- Successful bid to Communities and Local Government in 2006 (details above)
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee (member group) set up in July 2007 to look at choice based lettings. This group reported in December 2007
- South Housing Market Area Partnership was created in August 2007. This is made up of the following local authorities: Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Wychavon District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Wyre Forest District Council, Worcester City Council, Bromsgrove District Council.
- contracts were signed in November 2007
- the name of the Scheme and the application form were agreed in November 2007

What still needs to be done?

- project plan implementation to deliver the scheme in Stratford District
- Formation of local implementation group
- Communicate changes to partners and users of the scheme
- Train staff and partners
- Introduce scheme

The target date for the introduction of the scheme across the sub region is between May and August 2008.

5.2.2 Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance is a change to Housing Benefit for private tenants from April 2008. The change affects how Housing Benefit is worked out and how it is paid. It does not replace Housing Benefit.

Local Housing Allowance is just a change in the way Housing Benefit is calculated for private tenants.

Who will get Local Housing Allowance?

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) will apply to:

- Private tenants who make a new claim on or after 7 April 2008
- Existing Housing Benefit claimants in private tenancies who have a break in their claim of more than a week starting on or after 7 April 2008
- Existing Housing Benefit claimants who move to a new private tenancy on or after 7 April 2008

Who will still get Housing Benefit?

Other private tenants already getting Housing Benefit (HB) will carry on getting it under the old rules until one of the above applies.

How Local Housing Allowance rates are set

LHA is set by the Rent Service which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Each local authority has been divided into areas known as Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMAs). The BRMAs are defined by postcode areas. Rent officers have looked at the range of rents charged for properties of a particular size in each area and have taken the middle point of that range as the LHA.

The Rent Service describes a BRMA as "two or more distinct areas of residential accommodation, within which a person could reasonably be expected to live having regard to facilities and services for the purposes of health, education, recreation, personal banking and shopping." A person should be able to move within a BRMA and still have access to similar services of similar standards.

This means there are different LHA rates for different areas and different LHA rates within each area depending on the size of the property. Because rent levels for similar properties may vary according to the type of area some local authorities may have more than one BRMA.

Based on number of bedrooms

LHA rates are based on the number of bedrooms; this is because the size criteria set out the number of bedrooms a claimant is deemed to need for their household.

LHAs for properties with up to 5 bedrooms will be published by local authorities. If a person claims LHA for a property with more than 5 bedrooms the local authority will ask the rent officer to set the LHA.

Rent officers will update LHAs monthly and they will be published by local authorities. But the LHA rate paid to tenants will only be reviewed annually, or when there is a change in circumstances which means a different LHA will apply.

A claimant or landlord cannot appeal against the levels of LHA set by the Rent Service.

Local Impact

The main areas that are due to be affected by the proposed changes are:

- Bidford, which is due to fall within Worcestershire South
- Alcester and Studley, which are due to fall within Worcestershire North
- North of Wotton Wawen, which is due to fall within Solihull.

It is anticipated that in certain areas the level of benefit entitlement may be affected. This will also have an impact on Discretionary Housing Payments, as it is anticipated that the Council will receive a higher demand for payments from affected areas, in addition to being asked to meet higher shortfalls between the contractual rent and the level paid as housing benefit.

However, it is difficult to assess the impact at this stage as it will depend on how many claimants move onto LHA and the Council is committed to reviewing the impact.

5.3 Homelessness Strategy April 2008 – March 2011

Strategic Action Plan

The mission statement of this Strategy is to prevent homelessness when ever possible and for those households experiencing housing difficulties, it aims to:

- increase the range of housing options and improve existing options
- ensure that a high level of customer care and access is maintained
- ensure that the Council and its statutory and voluntary partners work in a joined up and planned way to address housing difficulties throughout the District

The following Strategic Actions have been identified to deliver these aims:

- The Council commits to:
 - Working with its partners to develop its understanding of housing problems in the District
 - Developing its partnership working to make effective use of the private rented sector
 - Developing its partnership working with housing associations to maximise the effective use of affordable housing stock
 - Working with partners to increase housing options
 - Developing an approach with partners to address issues of household debt
 - Ensuring equality of access to its housing service
 - Working in partnership with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary to ensure the best outcomes

Following the consultation period, the Council will be developing operational service plans to deliver these strategic actions.

6 Appendices

Appendix 1

Details of research carried out:

1) Survey of users of the Salvation Army Hot Food Project
14 service users were interviewed.:

12 male
2 female

All were white British, and 13 were aged 25 – 39 years, with 1 aged 40 – 59 years. 13 lived in Stratford town.

2) Single Homeless monitoring

In May and November 2005, 13 different agencies returned forms. 138 different single people experienced housing difficulties in May and November 2005. Of these 63% were men and 37% women.

The ages of these individuals broke down as follows:

- Age: 33% 16 to 24 yrs 37% 25 to 39 yrs
23% 40 to 59 yrs 7% 60+ yrs
- Ethnicity: 95% were White British
- Home district: 88% Stratford-on-Avon District Council area and another 7% from Warwick District Council area.

Rough sleeping: 25 people (23 men, 2 women) slept rough at different times during May and November 2005. The majority were aged 25 to 39 years and were from Stratford District.

In June, 73 forms were completed and returned by 10 agencies with agencies dealing with 65 different people.

Of these, 71% were men and 29% were women.

93% were white British
83% were from Stratford District area, with 3% from Warwick District.

55% of people experiencing housing difficulties were housing association tenants or were living with family or friends. 16% reported that they had been sleeping rough.

Appendix 2

Audit Commission Housing Inspection report:

www.stratford.gov.uk/files/seealsodocs/6250/Stratford%20on%20Avon%20DC%20-%20Strategic%20Housing%20Services%20-%20January%202007%20-%20Full%20report.pdf

Stratford-on-Avon District Council Homeless Strategy 2003 – 2008

www.stratford.gov.uk/files/seealsodocs/2855/SDC0520JUL03.pdf

Stratford-on-Avon District Council Homeless Strategy Revised Action Plan

www.stratford.gov.uk/files/seealsodocs/5592/Homeless%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan%20update%2020%20Oct%202006.pdf

Stratford-on-Avon District Council Housing Strategy 2006 - 2011

www.stratford.gov.uk/community/community-202.cfm?source=left

Tackling Overcrowding in England: An action plan, CLG, 2007

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/Overcrowdingactionplan

Supporting People Needs Analysis, Warwickshire County Council, 2007

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/FAC1470F2C93E18E802572E30050D33A