

**NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP – 2 OCTOBER 2013**

Title of report	<b>DRAFT “PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018” AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLAN</b>
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Purpose of report	For Policy Development Group to receive information which will enable it to make recommendations to Cabinet regarding the adoption and implementation of the new Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 and associated Action Plan
Council Priorities	Value for Money Homes & Communities
<p>Implications:</p> <p>Financial/Staff</p> <p>Link to relevant CAT</p> <p>Risk Management</p> <p>Equalities Impact Assessment</p> <p>Human Rights</p> <p>Transformational Government</p>	<p>The approved budget and staffing structure 2013/14, provides the necessary capacity and resources to implement the proposed strategy and Action Plan. Should the Policy Development Group make recommendations which have financial implications these would need to be considered by Cabinet</p> <p>Private Sector Housing CAT</p> <p>Delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored through the NWL Homelessness Forum. Any risks will be included in the Corporate Risk Register as and when identified</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken by the Homelessness Forum September 2013</p> <p>Considered and none identified</p> <p>This strategy has been co-designed with input from service users, internal colleagues and a wide range of external, statutory and voluntary, partner organisations</p>
Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory.
Comments of Section 151 Officer	The report is satisfactory.

Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory
Consultees	Corporate Leadership Team, Head of Housing, Street Action Team, Housing Management Team, Stronger Safer Team, NWL Homeless Forum, Housing Choices Team, Members, service users, general public
Background papers	<a href="#"><u>Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness; s.179 Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended); Housing Strategy 2012-2015; Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England (2011); Leicestershire Together agreed strategic outcomes March 2012; Council's Delivery Plan 2013-14; Call for evidence; Information from workshop 23 November 2012 (Room 1b)</u></a>
Recommendations	<b>THAT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP CONSIDERS THE DRAFT PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013 – 2018 AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLAN, AND MAKE ANY COMMENTS THEY WISH TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET AS PART OF THE FORMAL APPROVAL PROCESS</b>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to develop and publish a homelessness strategy, every five years. The strategy should be based on a review of the local homelessness situation, to produce a strategy that addresses the causes of homelessness and to introduce and use initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible.
- 1.2 NWLDC published its first Homelessness strategy in 2003 with a review due every five years to reflect the local homelessness situation and changes in Government policies. Our last Homelessness strategy was published in 2008 and covered the period 2008 to 2013 - . hence the current need for renewal.
- 1.3 In August 2012 the Government introduced a new National Homelessness Prevention Strategy called *Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness*. Within this strategy the Government set 10 challenges for Local Authorities and their partners to deliver on. The strategy focuses on the prevention of homelessness through joined up working between services at every level in areas such as health, justice, benefits and social care. It highlights the need to identify people at risk of homelessness as early as possible and have pathways out of homelessness for those who need help. If everyone at risk of homelessness was to receive help at the earliest possible stage this could prevent them from losing their home. The ten challenges set for local government will lead to housing teams delivering a 'gold standard' of service. There is also guidance within this new strategy for a review to be carried out annually; enabling local authorities to take into account and respond to prevailing conditions both nationally and locally.

## 2.0 PROCESS

- 2.1 We commenced the review of our homelessness strategy in March 2012 and included analysis of a wide range of data and evidence collection from a variety of sources and stakeholders. The review included desk top exercises, forums, staff away days, calls for evidence and analysis of statistics. The review concluded in a successful workshop event 'Let's Side Step Homelessness' in November 2012, attended by 23 of our partners. The workshop was based around the existing work undertaken or planned by the Housing Choices team in connection with the ten challenges or "Gold Standard" as

set out in Section 5.4 of the strategy. Through a series of group discussions, we sought to identify the gaps in order to shape our priorities for the future.

- 2.2 The initial draft was presented to, and approved by CLT on 3 September 2013. It was subsequently presented to, and approved on 10 September 2013 by the NWL Homelessness Forum, a multi-agency partnership of statutory and non-statutory organisations, all of whom work with vulnerable groups. The NWL Homelessness Forum undertook an Equality Impact Assessment on the draft strategy and approved the high level Action Plan prior to these being published for wider consultation.
- 2.3 Consultation closes on 16 October 2013 and any relevant feedback to date will be reported to PDG at its meeting on 2 October 2013.

### 3.0 FINDINGS

- 3.1 Analysis of the data and subsequent meetings with partners highlighted that the Housing Choices team provide a wide range of housing options and prevention measures. A lot of work is already being done that goes some way to meeting many of the Government's **ten challenges** including:

#### Challenge

#### What we are doing

- 1 We already have corporate commitment to prevent homelessness across all Council services
  - 2 Through the use of First Contact referrals, we have begun to work more proactively with other partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
  - 3 We already offer a housing options prevention service and are planning to implement a self service facility that will include optional written advice for all customers
  - 4 We are working in partnership with all Leicestershire districts and the City Council on a *No Second Night Out* model have already implemented a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol locally to provide shelter for the street homeless during periods of cold weather.
  - 5 We have an agreed housing pathway protocol in place with Leicestershire Probation service for ex-offenders and have started working with partners to develop housing pathways protocols for other client groups
  - 6 In partnership with all Leicestershire districts and the City Council, we are developing a suitable private rented sector service for all client groups, including advice and support to landlords and clients
  - 7 We have a mortgage rescue scheme in place and have already assisted 6 families to remain in their homes
  - 8 We believe that we have developed a homelessness strategy that is proactive in preventing homelessness and that we plan to review annually
  - 9 Through the provision of alternative temporary accommodation, we aim not to place any 16-17 year old in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
  - 10 Through the provision of alternative temporary accommodation, we aim not to place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency, and then for no more than 6 weeks
- 3.2 Analysis of our statistics between 2008 and 2012 showed that the number of homelessness declarations made rose dramatically between 2009 and 2011-2012, then decreased again in 2012-13 due to housing advisors adopting a more proactive prevention approach

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
148	101	128	199	129

3.3 Main recorded reasons for loss of last settled accommodation during 2012/13 were

- |  |     | (Nationally) |
|--|-----|--------------|
| ○ Parents, friends or relatives no longer willing to accommodate | 26% | (31%)        |
| ○ End of assured shorthold tenancy                               | 20% | (22%)        |
| ○ Violent relationship breakdown involving partner               | 15% | (12%)        |

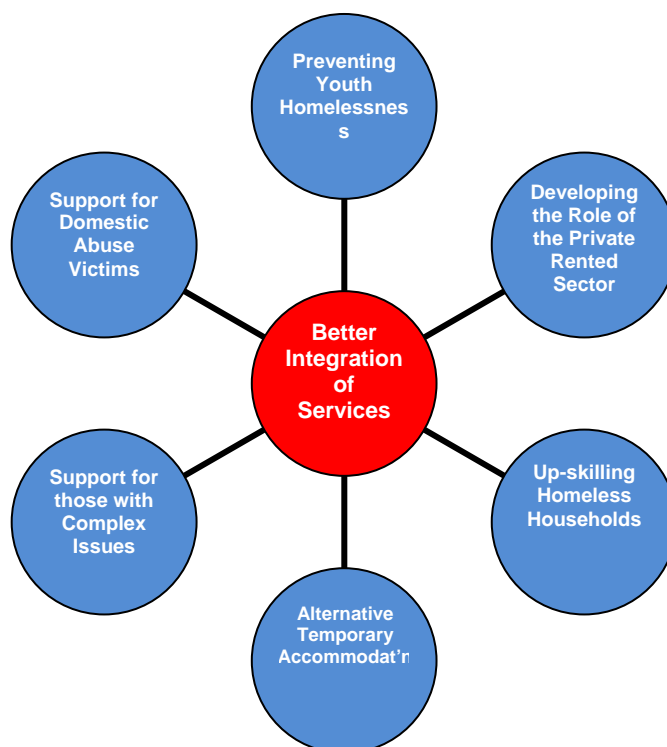
3.4 It was also evidenced that more and more of the clients both NWLDC were dealing with as well as some of our partners, were clients with multiple needs other than just homelessness (mental health, alcohol, drugs). In 2011/12, mental health issues accounted for 13% of all households accepted as homeless and in priority need. In 2009 this was just 2% of the total.

3.5 Youth Homelessness is still a problem with 64% of homeless acceptances in the District from those aged under 35 years of age. This group is specifically affected by the Housing Benefit changes and lack of shared accommodation in the area. Access to early information, advice and guidance is critical if we are to turn the tide on future homelessness presentations for this group.

3.6 Unemployment is also a prevalent factor amongst the homeless. Over the past five years, an average of 76% of all homeless applicants have been either unemployed, or unable to work due to sickness, caring responsibilities or retired etc. If we are to prevent these people from falling back into homelessness, it is important that we try to get as many of these people back into employment, education or training through referrals from our housing options service and through partnership working.

#### 4.0 NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

4.1 The 6 priority areas for improvement that we identified from the Homelessness Review will be underpinned by a central objective - *Better Integration of Services*.



4.2 **Better Integration of services will underpin all priorities** – we will improve the way we communicate and work with partner agencies involved in homelessness prevention, directly or indirectly, by developing shared protocols that support mutual clients. We will develop information sharing pathways and signposting between agencies. This is seen as fundamental to all our work

4.3 The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the actions needed to deliver on these priorities, together with a note of which of the Government's ten challenges they support. This demonstrates how we are working in partnership to achieve the Government's "Gold Standard" locally

- **Earlier intervention to prevent youth homelessness** – We need to be more proactive about early intervention and prevention through education to stem the numbers of younger people presenting as homeless and improve the understanding about the respective roles of social care and housing in relation to 16/17 year olds. **(Challenges 2 & 9)**
- **Timely support for domestic abuse victims** – existing support agencies are seeing an increase in the number of families referred to their services due to the current financial climate and fact that more people are aware of their service. At the same time, funding is being cut and waiting lists are growing. We need to work with partners to ensure timely support is available for victims. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Developing the role of the Private Rented Sector** - We need to maximise links with private landlords and provide them with appropriate support and incentives to give them the confidence to provide homes for the full range of vulnerable groups. We also need to consider provision of settling in visits and continued tenancy support for private tenants to prevent repeat homelessness. **(Challenge 6)**
- **Supporting those with complex issues**– more and more clients with complex needs including mental health problems are presenting and it is unclear what information and support is available, especially those with low level problems who don't meet social care thresholds. More time is needed to support the vulnerable with Choice Based Lettings. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Alternative temporary accommodation** – the District needs a wider range of temporary accommodation other than Bed & Breakfast, including emergency accommodation with support. We also need to consider increasing the provision of shared accommodation for young single homeless under 35 years affected by the new benefit rules. **(Challenges 9 & 10)**
- **Up-skilling homeless households** -The fact that 76% of all homeless declarations are received from those who are out of work and mostly on benefits is an area of concern and requires a more proactive and co-ordinated approach to up-skill customers and encourage them to be more independent. **(Challenge 2)**

## 5.0 NEXT STEPS

5.1 The draft strategy was published for wider consultation on the Council's website following CLT approval (3 Sep 2013) and the NWL Homelessness Forum meeting (10 Sep 2013). Consultation closes on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Consultation feedback will help shape the final draft that will be presented to Cabinet on 19 November 2013. The following timeline/tasks are proposed to conclude the approval process.

2 Oct 2013	<p><b>Policy Development Group</b></p> <p>Strategy, Action Plan and verbal update on consultation responses to date presented to Policy Development Group for consideration and comment.</p>
16 Oct 2013	Consultation closes
By 25 Oct 2013	<p>Finalise strategy and action plan based on all consultation feedback.</p> <p>Finalise Cabinet report for submission to statutory officers</p>
19 Nov 2013	<p><b>Cabinet</b></p> <p>Post consultation draft presented to Cabinet for approval</p>
26 Nov 2013	Approved version published

# Draft

North West Leicestershire District Council

Preventing Homelessness Strategy

2013 – 2018

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## Foreword

Draft text with Roger Bayliss for approval when he returns from holiday

**Councillor Roger Bayliss**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing**

DRAFT

## Signatories

The following partner organisations have all committed to playing their part in preventing future homelessness across North West Leicestershire by agreeing to assist the Council in the delivery and review of both the strategy and annual Action Plan.

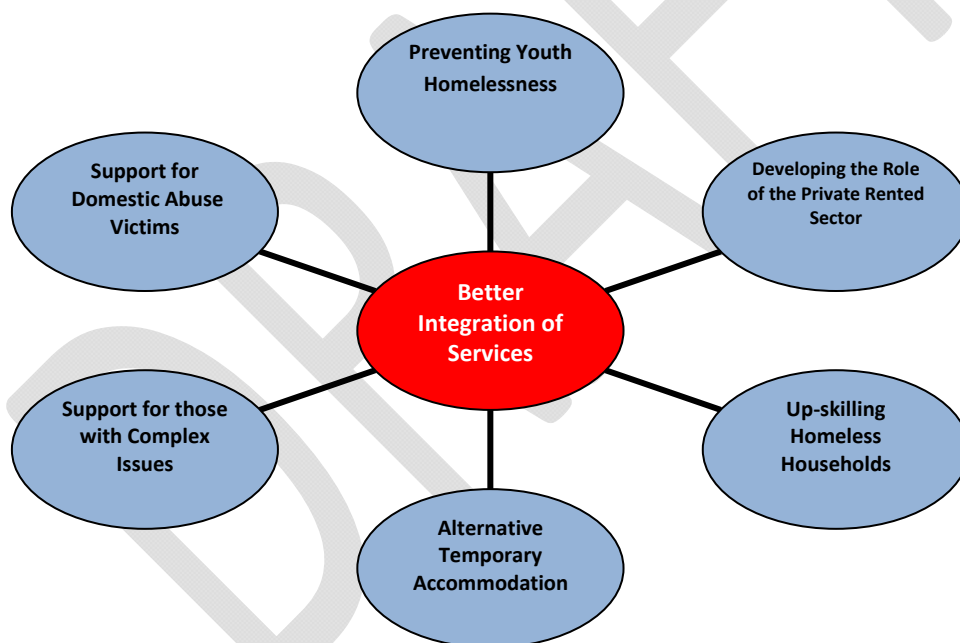
- Citizens' Advice Bureau
- East Midlands Housing Association
  - Durban House
  - Veronica House
- Leicestershire Offender Service
- Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust
- Living Without Abuse
- Mental Health Community Service (Hawthorne Centre)
- Mental Health- Bradgate Unit
- North West Leicestershire Homelessness Project Coordinator
- North West Leicestershire Council for Voluntary Services
- Nottingham Community Housing Association
- Re-think
- Sanctuary Housing Association
- Straw & Pearce Solicitors
- Strengthening Families Service (Children's Services)
- Swanswell
- The Bridge Housing Services
- Youth Offending Team

## 1. Introduction, aims and objective

1.1 This is our third, five-year homelessness prevention strategy that has been developed by the Housing Choices team in conjunction with partner organisations, our first strategy being in 2003. It sets out the position in North West Leicestershire (NWL) regarding the local homelessness situation and how the Housing Choices team, together with its partners, currently addresses the needs of homeless households in the District through its range of housing options.

1.2 The **aim** of this strategy is “to build on existing partnership work to provide a range of housing options that achieve better, future outcomes for anyone in North West Leicestershire who has accommodation issues, including those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, regardless of whether they are owed the main duty<sup>1</sup> or not<sup>2</sup>”.

1.3 Whilst our strategy has regard to all ten “Local Authority Challenges” (‘Gold Standard’) set out in the recently published “[Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness](#)” report, our over-arching **objective** for this strategy is the better integration of services, under which sit our new **six key priorities** which we have identified through working with our partners:



1.4 This strategy is being launched at a time of significant financial challenge both to the Council and many of its delivery partners. Public funding cuts along with the introduction of the Localism Act and Welfare Reform Act are likely to have implications on the level of demand for

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> s.193 Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended) - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/193>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> Local authorities are still under a duty to provide advice and assistance, free of charge, to any person in their District - s.179 Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (as amended) - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/179>

prevention services and may also dictate to some extent, the level of support the Council and its partners can provide to assist homeless households.

## 2. Legal Imperative

2.1 **Legal Imperative** - since the Homelessness Act, 2002, the government has increasingly encouraged local authorities to become more pro-active in preventing homelessness. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to develop and publish a homelessness prevention strategy, every five years, based on a review of the local homelessness situation and modify it from time to time in light of local circumstances<sup>3</sup>. Local authorities are encouraged to develop robust preventing homelessness strategies that are delivered in partnership.

2.2 North West Leicestershire District Council published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 with a review every five years to reflect changing local circumstances and emerging government policy. We published our last homelessness prevention strategy in 2008 covering the period from 2008 to 2013. Since its launch, there have been a number of successes as result of the strategic approach taken by the Council (see Section 6 on page 15). However, there are still areas for improvement, and these, along with major changes in national policy such as Welfare Reform and their unknown impacts, coincided with the need to review homelessness in NWL and develop a revised strategy.

2.3 We have developed our new draft strategy for the five-year period 2013/2018, in line with statutory government requirements having regard to the national agenda and specific legislative changes (see Section 3 on page 6). We have produced an Action Plan that we will review annually to allow us to respond to emerging policy and changing local needs.

## 3. Methodology

3.1 **Methodology** - We commenced the review of our homelessness strategy in March 2012 by issuing a call for evidence from our partners, [available here](#). This was collated, along with a review of our previous strategy (2008-2013), analysed and re-circulated to partners for information and consideration. We then held a workshop in November 2012 entitled "*Let's Sidestep Homelessness*". Along with 23 of our partners who attended the workshop we reviewed the information and shared our views in order to further develop our local approach to preventing homelessness in NWL. ([Information collected from the workshop](#))

3.2 In August 2013, by way of initial consultation, we circulated our first draft strategy to those partners who attended the above workshop, evaluated their feedback and where appropriate used it to inform this draft.

3.3 .....Complete this para when final consultation closed and final draft has been prepared – need to be clear that it reflects the views of key stakeholders including Registered Providers, residents/service users, Members, etc and those of Policy Development Group. Include methods of consultation used, timeframe etc

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<sup>3</sup> To comply with current legislation, NWLDC's homelessness strategy has been published as a stand-alone document as it is not contained within the over-arching [Housing Strategy 2012-2015](#) document

## 4. Strategic Context and Links

4.1 **National Policy Context** - Since the general election in May 2010, the Government has implemented a programme of change and reform to social housing and welfare policy. Its first national housing strategy [Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England \(2011\)](#) outlined the Government's approach to homelessness prevention, meeting the needs of vulnerable people, managing the consequences of those made homeless and addressing rough sleeping. The strategy also gives local authorities more flexibility in allocating social housing and operating waiting lists, including the flexibility to award extra priority to certain households, such as ex-service personnel.

4.2 The Localism Act introduced a raft of local government reforms across finance, planning, governance and housing, including the ability to grant fixed term tenancies. It also enables local authorities to cease their homeless duty by using an offer of private rented accommodation where an approved Private Rented Sector Offer is in place.

4.3 DCLG recently published a national homelessness strategy [Making every contact count - A joint approach to preventing homelessness \(Aug 2012\)](#). The strategy looks at how to tackle the complex underlying causes of homelessness, prevent homelessness at an earlier stage and deliver integrated services that support an individual's recovery. The strategy sets out ten challenges for local authorities, referred to as the "Gold Standard" as set out in Section 6.

4.4 The Welfare Reform agenda has meant local homelessness services needed to adapt quickly to deliver services more efficiently, and to mitigate potential homelessness impacts arising from Welfare Reforms such as those affected by the national Housing Benefit scheme in England, and the introduction of Universal Credit from October 2013.

4.5 Changes to Housing Benefit mean that working age tenants under-occupying social rented homes will have their benefit reduced so it no longer covers their full rent. The shared room rate, previously applied to single people aged under 25 years, now applies to single people aged under 35 making it much more difficult for them to find suitable accommodation in the private rented sector. In NWL there is scant availability of any shared accommodation and this is further exacerbated by the fact that we have very few one bedroom general needs units within the social rented stock.

4.6 The overall impact of the Government's reforms is a reduction in the funding available to provide new homes and to help individuals with their housing costs. Whilst the Government still provides funding for housing related support services to top tier authorities, this is no longer ring fenced and many authorities have made significant cuts to these budgets. In North West Leicestershire we haven't experience any cuts in housing related support services and the majority of services are due to receive a 1% uplift in 2013/14, unless efficiency savings were agreed as part of the original contract. Any service is at risk of losing funding as part of the tenancy related support review process. Leicestershire County Council's Adults and Communities Department social care offer has seen significant transformation over recent years. The formation of a new care pathway, the introduction of personalisation, and a shift to early intervention and prevention has had a significant impact.

4.7 **National Homelessness Context** - when the Government began its push on preventative services in the early noughties, national homelessness rates began decreasing

dramatically to an all time low of 40,030<sup>4</sup> in 2009/10. On average, 45% of all homelessness representations are found to be owed a full housing duty. (This compares closely with an average of 41% for North West Leicestershire). Since part way through 2010, the number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless has been increasing steadily– up 5% nationally from 2011/12 to 2012/13.

#### 4.8 National statistics

- In England, more than 81,000 households were found to be homeless during 2012/13
- This represented an increase of 5% in 2012/13 compared to 2011/12.’
- Over the same period, in the East Midlands region, the number of households found to be homeless decreased by 10%
- The number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless and in priority need increased by 6% in England in 2012/13
- **Main recorded reason** for loss of last settled accommodation during 2012/13 were
  - Parents, friends or relatives no longer willing to accommodate 31%
  - End of assured shorthold tenancy 22%
  - Violent relationship breakdown involving partner 12%

The above reasons *for loss of last settled accommodation* are always the top three both nationally and locally.

4.9 The number of households accepted as homeless nationally because their assured short hold tenancy ended has increased from 11% of total homelessness in 2009/10 to 22% of total homelessness in 2012/13. This figure is closely mirrored in NWL where we saw 20% of all homelessness acceptances due to the ending of an assured short hold tenancy during 2012/13.

4.10 **Households in temporary accommodation** - nationally, 50,430 households were in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2012, 5% more than on the same date the previous year. Of these, 3,960 households were in Bed & Breakfast accommodation, 40% more than the same date the previous year and the former Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, wrote to 20 councils warning them not to house families for six weeks or more in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Whilst it is preferred that every local authority should have emergency accommodation to meet the rise in demand, 62% of local authorities, including NWLDC, only have recourse to Bed & Breakfast facilities for immediate emergencies.

4.11 **Local Context** – other strategies and guidance have helped shape this strategy. In March 2012, *Leicestershire Together* agreed a cross-cutting principle which underpins its agreed strategic [outcomes](#). This principle is:-

*“A shift to prevention and early intervention in order to maximise the impact of limited resources – “spend now to save later”*

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<sup>4</sup> A total of 89,120 households claimed to be homeless or threatened with homelessness during 2009/10, but only 40,030 were found to be homeless, unintentionally so and in priority need.

Mindful of this principle, the Council works closely with every other Leicestershire local authority on its homelessness prevention agenda to maximise what limited resources are available. More details of these initiatives are set out in Section 7

4.12 The District Council’s vision for the future is set out in the [Council’s Delivery Plan 2013-14](#)

***‘North West Leicestershire will be a place where people and businesses feel they belong and are proud to call home’***

The four **Council priorities** for 2013/14 are

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Value for Money</b> We aim to provide Council services that people feel are good value for money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Homes and Communities</b> We aim to improve the wellbeing of people living in North West Leicestershire</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business and Jobs</b> We aim to make the District a better place to invest, work and visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Green Footprints Challenge</b> We aim to make people feel proud to be part of a greener District</li> </ul>

4.13 This strategy contributes to the Council’s priorities by providing a range of housing options and value for money, homelessness prevention tools that will assist people to stay in their homes close to established support networks, allowing them and their families to thrive.

4.14 The following objectives within our current Housing Strategy 2010/15, also relate directly to homelessness in the District and an annual action plan seeks to achieve these:

- The best use is made of existing housing, including empty homes and under-occupied homes.
- Households are able to move to more suitable accommodation
- People are able to afford a wider range of housing options
- People are able to make informed decisions to improve their housing circumstances
- Homelessness is prevented
- Vulnerable people are able to live independently

4.15 **Local statistics** – in North West Leicestershire the following number of households have approached the Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness during the period covered by our last strategy:

2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
148	101	128	199	129

*Statutory homelessness: decisions taken by NWLDC under the 1996 Housing Act on applications from eligible households*

- 79 of the 129 households were found to be homeless during 2012/13
- This represented a decrease of 32% compared to 2011/12 (aligning closely with the

percentage decrease in total number of decisions taken)

- Over the same period, in the East Midlands region, the number of households found to be homeless decreased by 10%
- The number of households accepted by North West Leicestershire as homeless and in priority need decreased by 4% in 2012/13
- **Main recorded reasons** for loss of last settled accommodation during 2012/13 were  
(Nationally)

○ Parents, friends or relatives no longer willing to accommodate	26%	(31%)
○ End of assured shorthold tenancy	20%	(22%)
○ Violent relationship breakdown involving partner	15%	(12%)

4.16 **Households in temporary accommodation** – on 31 March 2012 there were 6 households living in temporary Bed & Breakfast accommodation, all single. At the same date in 2013, there were only 4 households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation, again all singles, representing a reduction of 33%. The use of Bed & Breakfast is a costly option for the Council and work is already underway to secure alternative temporary accommodation for those homeless households thought to be in priority need at the point of approach.

4.17 **Mental Health issues** - as well as the three main reasons for local homelessness set out in 4.15, increasingly, we are seeing more households with a range of needs, often complex and usually including mental health issues. In 2011/12, mental health issues accounted for 13% of all households accepted as homeless and in priority need. In 2009 this was just 2% of the total.

4.18 **Youth Homelessness** - whilst approaches from 16-17 year olds initially reduced following [The Southwark case](#) in 2009, they have begun to increase again over the past two years – there were six 16-17 year olds who presented as homeless in 2009-10 compared to ten in 2012-13. In fact 64% of homeless acceptances in the District are from those aged under 35 years of age and this group is specifically affected by the Housing Benefit changes (see 3.5). Access to early information, advice and guidance is critical if we are to turn the tide on future homelessness presentations for this group.

4.19 **Unemployment** - over the past five years, an average of 76% of all homeless applicants have been either unemployed, or unable to work due to sickness, caring responsibilities or retired etc. North West Leicestershire's highest demographic of unemployment is represented by the 18 to 24 year old age group, standing at 5.5%. If we are to prevent these people from falling back into homelessness, it is important that we try to get as many of these people back into employment, education, or training through referrals from our housing options service and through partnership working.



## 5. North West Leicestershire's Housing Market

5.1 **Overview of the District** – North West Leicestershire sits in the heart of the National Forest, bordering the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire and covers an area of almost 28,000 hectares. The District is predominantly rural with two urban clusters - Coalville and Ashby De La Zouch, the former being the main administrative and commercial centre of the District. These are supported and supplemented by other conurbations, including Castle Donington, Kegworth, Measham, Ibstock and Moira. The rest of the district comprises small villages, hamlets or open countryside.

5.2 Our black or minority ethnic population of 7.3% is less ethnically diverse than the regional (13%) or national (17.2%) figures<sup>5</sup>. However, in recent years we have seen new emerging communities settling in the District as a result of European Union enlargement, linked to the location of East Midlands Airport at Castle Donington.

5.3 The District's social and demographic profile varies widely depending on the ward, with some areas showing high levels of affluence (three being in the top 10% within the county) and others showing high levels of deprivation (until recently 5 being in the lowest 10% of the county). Overall the District is ranked 219th out of 354 on the 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (1 being most deprived, 354 least deprived). Owner occupancy at 76% is higher than the national average of 69% and the regional average of 72%, with social housing lower than both averages too.<sup>6</sup>

5.4 The District benefits from close proximity and excellent road access to four major cities (Birmingham, Derby, Leicester and Nottingham) which makes the area attractive for workers in these cities. These connections to the four cities and indeed to the motorway network (M1 north/south and M42 south west/north east) makes the District extremely well-placed for road transport and, with the East Midlands Airport in the north of the District, for air travel.

5.5 Historically, the District has drawn much of its economic base from mining and extraction industries. In the last twenty years, however, this has changed significantly with less than 2% of employment now involved in mining and quarrying, 22% within manufacturing and 18% in wholesale and retail. The District has been identified at regional and county level as a potential key growth point.

5.6 **Population and demographics** – the District has an estimated population of 93,700 (2011 Census), comprising more or less a 50:50 split between males and females. 63.5% of the population is aged 16-64 – marginally lower than both the regional and national percentages. By 2031, the population of North West Leicestershire is projected to increase to 98,366, with the greatest projected percentage increase in population in the 65+ age group.

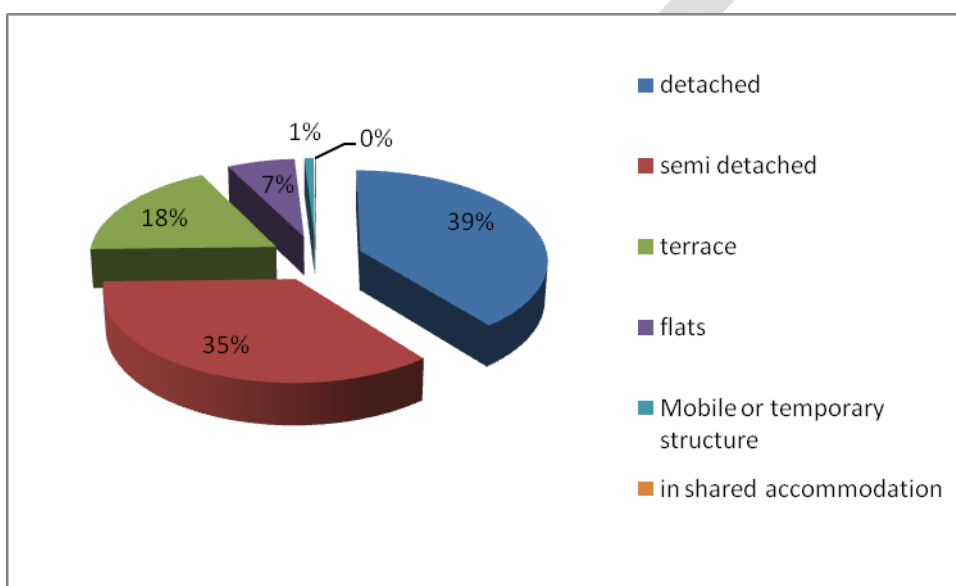
5.7 As of June 2013, the unemployment rate for North West Leicestershire is 2.4% which is lower than that for Leicestershire of 3.2% and United Kingdom at 3.5%. The percentages of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants are generally consistent across the District with higher percentage of JSA claimants in the Coalville Ward (4.3%) and Greenhill Ward (5.0%). The actual number of JSA claimants is higher in urban areas than the rural areas, principally due to the number of resident

<sup>5</sup> Local Development Framework: Core Strategy

<sup>6</sup> [Council Delivery Plan 2013-14](#)

population. North West Leicestershire’s highest demographic of unemployment is represented by the 18 to 24 year old age group, standing at 5.5%. This number is lower than the national average but is the District’s highest age band of unemployment. By comparison, the age group 25- 49 stands at 2.5% and 50 - 64 year olds at 1.4%. Those aged under 35 years in receipt of benefit will be particularly impacted by changes to the Local Housing Allowance and housing options for this group are likely to be limited as a result of low income levels and a limited supply of affordable one bedroom or shared property in the District.

**5.8 The Existing Housing Stock in the District** - Since 2000 the housing stock in the District has increased by 10% to 40,271 in July 2013<sup>7</sup>. The housing stock is predominantly either detached or semi detached properties. There are few flats and only 0.1% of properties are shared accommodation.



NWLDC Total Housing Stock July 2013

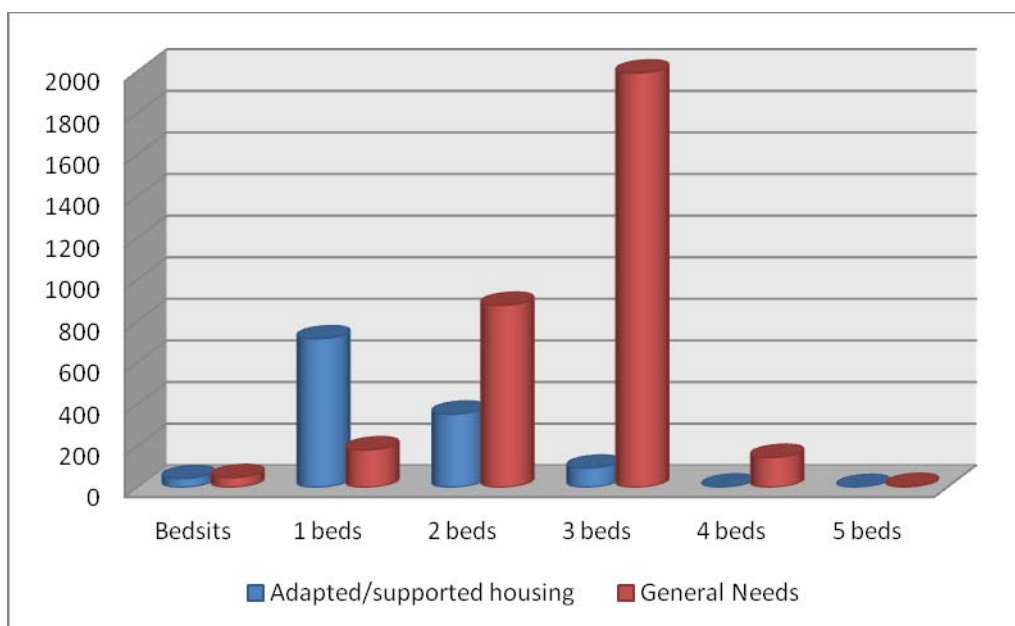
**5.9** Between 2000 & the beginning of 2012/13 the Council has sold 690 properties through the Right to Buy Scheme and despite increased Registered Provider delivery, the proportion of social housing has fallen from 17% to 14.7% - more than 1.5% less than the East Midlands average figure<sup>8</sup>.

Tenure	NWLDC	Leicestershire	East Midlands	England
Social Housing Stock (both LA & RP owned & managed)	5,970	62,140	333,760	3,993,000
As percentage of total housing stock	14.7%	15%	15.8%	17.3%

<sup>7</sup> NWLDC Banded Council Tax properties July 2013

<sup>8</sup> Hometrack

5.10 **Property types** – Approximately 50% of council-owned stock consists of larger 3 and 4 bed family homes. A further 27% of council-owned stock is designated as adapted or supported housing of which 60% are smaller bungalows and flats, some of which are former sheltered corridor schemes that are no longer popular with our elderly residents and have been empty for some time. The majority of smaller homes are designated as either adapted or supported, with just a few (around 5%) that would be suitable for single people or younger couples without children. This adds to the difficulty in finding suitable homes for the 64% of our homeless acceptances who are from the under 35 year old age group.



General Needs/Supported Housing Split August 2013

5.11 **Housing Need and Stock Turnover** - in August 2013, there were just over 1,600 home seekers on our Housing Register with an additional 30 households on average joining every week. Homes are advertised through the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme “*Leicestershire Homes*” that was introduced in February 2011. At that time there were just 473 home seekers on the housing register. The following table shows the total number of social rented lettings for the three years 2009 to 2012.

	Gen Needs	Supported	Totals
<b>09-10</b>	334	137	<b>471</b>
<b>10-11</b>	418	128	<b>546</b>
<b>11-12</b>	223	99	<b>322</b>

Total number of social rented lettings in NWL for the three years 2009 to 2012

5.12 Analysis carried out in February 2013 showed the average age of the main home seeker to be 42 years. The average time on the housing register before being housed was 33 weeks, however, this figure masks a huge range, with some being housed within a matter of days to others being on

the list for nearly 10 years prior to being housed. With the recent and imminent Welfare Reform changes, we anticipate the demand for social rented tenancies to rise. Clearly, demand for social housing outstrips supply. We continually seek to secure more affordable housing through our Planning policies, requesting between 20%-30% affordable housing provision on all qualifying private developments dependent upon the location. Recent requirements to provide essential infrastructure has resulted in less than 20% affordable housing provision on sites within the greater Coalville area. It is important, therefore, that we also continue to develop the role of the private rented sector to provide much needed decent and affordable homes.

**5.13 District House Prices & Affordability** - House prices in the District remain strong with the simple average house price currently £191,700<sup>9</sup> compared to a lower regional average of £174,700. New build house prices are much higher with an average price of £205,500 compared to a regional average of £203,000. The lower quartile house price of £126,700<sup>10</sup>, is again much higher than the regional average of £113,000.

**5.14** The average full time, gross weekly pay in 2011 was £491.80, slightly greater than the regional average of £471.90, but less than the Great Britain average of £503.10. The average house price in the District is just over 6 times the average earnings (house price to earnings ratio). This earnings data relates to a single person in full time employment but the majority of households have more than one earner. Affordability based on *household* disposable incomes reduces the ratio to 5:1 compared to a regional ratio of 5.3:1. However, the lower quartile house price to income ratio in the District is much greater with property prices on average 8 times the average income levels, often putting home ownership out of reach.

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<sup>9</sup> July figure based on sales and valuations over the last 3 months. Hometrack

<sup>10</sup> Based on sales and valuations over the 3 months to July 2013

## 6. Benefits of Prevention

6.1 **Benefits of Prevention** - Stable housing with access to relevant support networks is fundamental determinant of health and well-being. Problems, including homelessness, unaffordable housing, non-decent or overcrowded housing or accommodation miles from support networks, can significantly undermine mental and/or physical health and well-being as well as impede progress made in educational attainment, employment and training or other aspects of an individual's life.

6.2 Many people face experiences, or triggers that could lead to homelessness such as a relationship breakdown or the ending of a tenancy. In most cases, individuals cope and find suitable accommodation using their own resources, but for some, these life events tip them into homelessness. This may be because they lack the resources to resolve their immediate challenge - for example not enough money for a deposit, or because they suffer more underlying problems such as an addiction or mental health problem that makes it hard for them to deal with their situation.

6.3 It is a well-documented fact that homelessness has a detrimental effect on individuals, families and communities and can undermine social cohesion. Homelessness is often linked to alcohol and drug abuse, poor physical & mental health, crime and anti-social behaviour, poor educational attainment, debt, unemployment and the breakdown of support networks. Tackling the effects of homelessness can be costly to the public purse when compared to the costs associated with proactively seeking to prevent homelessness in the first place. Prevention services save significant amounts of public money, across statutory agencies including housing, health, criminal justice and community safety<sup>11</sup>.

6.4 The Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) recognises the importance of preventing homelessness and set out ten "Local Authority Challenges" in the recently published "[Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness](#)" report. Developing effective local strategies in partnership to *proactively* prevent and tackle homelessness is a positive step towards achieving the "Gold Standard" advocated by central government that is represented by addressing the ten challenges set out in the following box.

### Local Authority Challenges – the 'Gold Standard'

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative

<sup>11</sup> The government has recently published a report bringing together the costs of homelessness which can be downloaded using the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/costs-of-homelessness-evidence-review>

5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

6.5 The ten challenges emphasise the importance of robust local homelessness prevention strategies and a comprehensive housing options offer to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Challenge 8 specifically relates to effective local homelessness strategies to meet emerging need and we have responded to this by producing a five year strategy that has an annual Action Plan that will allow us to respond dynamically to emerging issues. For more detail on how NWLDC are addressing each of the ten challenges, [see here](#).

## 7. Local Approach and Funding

7.1 **Local Approach** - last Homelessness Strategy published in 2008, covered the period from 2008-2013 and included the following three overarching priorities:

- *prevention through better provision of support*
- *better temporary accommodation provision*
- *improved customer service standards and joined up working*

7.2 Whilst some of the actions from the last strategy haven't been progressed as fully as intended due to various operational and strategic reasons, we have carried them forward into this new strategy as they are still deemed to be priority actions given the position in NWL regarding the local homelessness situation, for example, better temporary accommodation and prevention of youth homelessness. Nonetheless, as result of the strategic approach taken by the Council and its partners over the last five years, there have been a number of positive actions undertaken that the homelessness review highlighted, most notably:

### Key successes

- Introduction of the Sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme in February 2011 to provide home seekers with choice, flexibility and transparency when securing a home.
- Agreement on a shared common Allocations policy statement across the sub-region
- Allocations Policy amended to reflect changes to Housing Benefit rules and their potential impacts on affordability and homelessness.
- The Rent Deposit & Bond Guarantee Scheme further developed to assist people to obtain private sector rented accommodation, whilst at the same time minimising the drain on public funds.
- The introduction of a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to provide shelter for the street homeless during periods of cold weather.
- Barriers to move-on accommodation minimised through provision of preference in the Allocations Policy for those living in supported accommodation who are assessed as ready to move on – in turn making available much needed scarce resources
- We have worked with countywide partners and Stonham to set up a supported lodgings scheme for single homeless aged 16 years plus
- YMCA beds spaces were funded for a period to provide accommodation and support to homeless 16-17 year old homeless people
- Negotiations commenced with social landlords about the use of socially rented property as alternative temporary accommodation to Bed & Breakfast
- Introduction of Bridge "Housing Matters" across the county – a new service to give

tenancy-related support across all tenures

- Bespoke accommodation and support for people with severe learning disabilities who needed to move out of family homes. (Daybreak scheme)
- The development of a successful Sanctuary Scheme allowing victims of domestic abuse to remain in their homes
- Introduction of the “Available Properties” website – a free ‘tenant finder’ type facility for private landlords that has driven up standards in the private sector and provided more choices for home seekers.

7.3 The Housing Choices team places our emphasis on early intervention and the prevention of homelessness. Homelessness prevention may be delivered through a range of housing options, often with the assistance of our partners and supporting agencies, such as debt advice, mediation and tenancy support. The range of options currently provided and planned by the Housing Choices team include:-

7.4 **Rent Deposit and Bond Guarantee Scheme**- a very successful scheme set up in 2006, this provides up to four weeks rent in advance and/or a Bond guarantee in the event that the tenant leaves the property in a state of disrepair or owing rent. It has enabled us to help low income households quickly access decent and affordable privately rented accommodation in an area of their choice, often in areas where local authority and housing association stock is unavailable. Families are assisted to remain in a certain area due to schools, employment and family connections. The scheme has also provided a platform for us to forge strong working relationships with local agents and individual landlords, driving up standards in the private rented sector. It operates hand in glove with our “Available Properties” website (see 6.5). **Between 2008 and 2013, this scheme has assisted 305 households**

7.5 **“Available Properties” website** - a free on-line service introduced in 2009 for private landlords and tenants looking for a privately rented home. Only homes that have been inspected by the Council and that meet the Decent Homes standard are advertised on this site, driving up standards in the private rented sector. As part of the initiative, a Landlord Forum was set up and still meets twice yearly to discuss good practice, emerging policy, case law and to provide training on key issues such as Welfare Reform.

7.6 **React -Furniture Scheme** – this scheme provides homeless customers who have found accommodation and have no possessions with the basic necessities. Furniture is delivered within a couple of days, often enabling them to move out of temporary accommodation at an earlier date, helping them to settle into their new homes and sustain their tenancies, thus preventing repeat homelessness and the ‘revolving door’ syndrome. **Between 2008 and 2013, this scheme has assisted 242 households**

7.7 **Sanctuary Scheme** - this prevention measure was first introduced in 2009 and provides low level security measures for victims of domestic abuse or other forms of violence, enabling them to remain safely in their own home. Emergency measures are provided and installed free of charge, often within a matter of hours and include such things as lock changes, window/door shock alarms, Pride Alarms and occasionally , new secure doors. **Between 2009 and 2013, this scheme has assisted 20 households**



7.8 **Mediation** - When appropriate, and for those willing to engage, the Housing Choices team will offer mediation to households experiencing conflict to prevent a member of the household being forced to leave. We intend to offer more mediation to families in conflict with the additional capacity provided by the staffing restructure that was approved for the Housing Choices team in February 2013.

7.9 **Repossession Prevention Fund** – this was a one-off grant of £28,500 from central government received in July 2009 to help prevent repossessions or evictions for households who are struggling to pay their mortgage or rent due through no fault of their own and where the long term sustainability of the tenure is financially viable. The Housing Choices team work with money advice colleagues to negotiate with landlord and tenant, or mortgagee and mortgagor, to reach an agreement, usually whereby an equal amount of the arrears is written off by the landlord/mortgagee, the Council pays a lump sum payment from the repossession prevention fund, and the tenant/mortgagor agrees to a realistic repayment plan for the balance. Payments may be made as a grant or an interest free loan up to the value of £3,000. This brings the debt to a level that prevents repossession. As this was a one off grant, we now use our Homelessness Prevention budget to fund this type of prevention initiative. **Between 2009 and 2013, this has scheme successfully assisted 14 households.**

7.10 **Mortgage Rescue Scheme** - this prevention tool was introduced by central government in 2009 to assist the increased numbers of home owning families whose mortgages were sustainable in the long term, but who had fallen into arrears through no fault of their own due to say, a period of unemployment due to the recession. It is also , aimed at some home owning families who are unable to sustain their mortgage repayments but could afford to rent the property if it were purchased by a Registered Provider, avoiding any periods of homelessness. The take up of this scheme in NWLDC has been slow nonetheless, **between 2009 and 2013, this scheme has assisted 6 households**

7.11 **Out of Hours Service** – access to emergency temporary accommodation is available to the vulnerable homeless through our out of hours service which is provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A Housing Advisor will contact the customer on the next working day to give appropriate advice and assistance. The out of hours number is publicised on all our leaflets. This service represents a cost effective and efficient alternative to paying staff stand-by and call out charges for the relatively few times it is used each year. **On average, 11 households access this service each year**

7.12 **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**– Where appropriate, Housing Advisors will encourage and assist customers to maximise their income through claims for DHP – a government funded facility that is administered by the Revenues and Benefits department in NWLDC. This helps customers meet temporary shortfalls in housing costs. Since the introduction of the new under-occupancy rules in April 2013, the Housing Choices team have been assisting more tenants to apply for this facility.

7.13 **Housing Related Support** helps vulnerable individuals to live independently through the provision of a combination of life skills training e.g. budgeting skills, DIY, help with completion of benefit forms, paying bills, personal health and well-being. Client groups include those with drug and alcohol problems, single homeless, ex offenders, those with mental health issues or at risk of domestic violence etc. Client records of people entering housing related support services funded by Leicestershire County Council, who have originated from NWL between 2009 to 2012, show a slight increase in approaches from 42 to 50. The male/female mix is about equal but figures show that most of those accessing housing related support services are young, with almost 70% aged under 35

years. This age group are finding it difficult to access suitable affordable accommodation if in receipt of Housing Benefit and it raises a question about whether more youth homelessness could be prevented where there is family conflict, through earlier intervention and awareness raising in schools and colleges.

**7.14 Supported accommodation** – we grant-fund two supported housing projects offering temporary accommodation to homeless households in North West Leicestershire. Both schemes are owned and managed by East Midlands Housing Association and situated in the District. They provide short stay, low level supported housing – Veronica House for women fleeing domestic violence (six units) and Durban House for vulnerable young people aged 16 to 25 years (eight units). In addition to these, Kennedy House in Wigston is a 56 bed, direct access hostel funded through the countywide Supporting People funding and can be used by homeless people from North West Leicestershire. However, the future of Kennedy House is uncertain as it is being de-commissioned by Leicestershire County Council soon. The Falcon Centre in Loughborough, is a new 28 bed hostel that opened in 2013 and provides much needed direct access temporary accommodation and support for under 35's for the authorities of North West Leicestershire, Melton and Charnwood. NWLDC also funds an in-house team of 7.5 full-time equivalent Support Officers, to provide floating support services to 1,300 households where the resident is either elderly (aged 60+) or aged 55+ with a support need.

**7.15 Free Money Advice** – the Council provides grant funding to the local CAB for the provision of free generalist money and debt advice. The Housing Choices team have negotiated with CAB for them to fast track potentially homeless customers and those referred for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. Customers are assisted to set up realistic payment arrangements with debtors and maximise their income to enable them to sustain existing accommodation whenever possible, thus preventing homelessness. **On average, xxx customers per year are referred by the Council to CAB**

**7.16 North West Leicestershire Homeless Project** is a scheme that provides support predominantly for single, non-priority homeless and receives a small annual grant from the Housing Choices team. The support worker helps customers complete benefit claim forms, secure accommodation, often provides basic necessities to the non-priority street homeless.

**7.17 Support for families with children under five years of age** – the Council provides grant funding to Homestart, whose support workers visit struggling parents of young families, offering help, guidance and support to those finding it difficult to cope with everyday tasks and responsibilities, enabling them to sustain their homes. Home-start assists approximately 80 to 90 families each year

**7.18 No Second Night Out initiative (NSNO)** – the Government's vision to end rough sleeping. We have already developed and introduced a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to provide shelter for the street homeless during periods of cold weather. Using grant from central government, we are also working in partnership with all Leicestershire district authorities and Leicester City Council to develop an approach to NSNO. The project is being led by the City.

**7.19 Supporting Leicestershire Families** – this initiative went live in April 2013, and is a partnership between Leicestershire County Council, all the Districts, the Police and other agencies working to improve support for families across the county. A team of support workers, based within NWLDCs main offices, work directly with vulnerable families to support them to achieve better outcomes and turn their lives around. By working together and intervening earlier, we can transform the lives of these families, reducing intergenerational cycles of debt, poverty, violence, worklessness and potential homelessness. Working together also reduces the need for families to deal with

several different agencies at any one time. **Since April 2013, 47 families, comprising 200 household members, have been supported in the District**

7.20 **Homefinder** - is a brand new website available from August 2013, for advertising privately rented homes to let. Using grant from central government, we have developed the site in partnership with all Leicestershire district authorities, Leicester City Council and private landlords across the county. The facility will initially enable landlords to advertise their properties free of charge. The site has been populated with helpful information, advice and guidance as well as links to other resources that will support and encourage landlords to let their properties in line with accepted good practice, the objective being to drive up standards in the sector whilst maximising access to private sector housing to meet demand. We anticipate the countywide site will also assist with mobility so customers can move closer to work, families and support networks etc

7.21 **HomeGuide** – this is a web-based, self-service housing options tool that the Housing Choices team are planning to implement by the end of 2013-14. Anyone looking for housing will be able to tap in their personal details on-line at any time of the night or day and receive bespoke advice, tailored to their own circumstances, about their housing options. This will provide additional capacity within the Housing Choices team for Housing Advisors to spend more time with vulnerable customers who need support and to undertake more early intervention and prevention work with households at risk of homelessness.

7.22 **Tenancy support for private sector tenants** – during 2013-14, the Housing Choices team plans to implement settling in visits during the first year that households are placed in the private rented sector through our Rent Deposit and Bond Guarantee scheme (See 7.4). This will ensure that any teething problems are addressed early on for both tenant and landlord, minimising the risk of repeat homelessness.

7.23 **Funding** – the Council receives an annual grant of £50,000 from central government towards homelessness prevention, currently guaranteed until 2015. The grant is not ring-fenced for this use, but there has always been corporate commitment to prevent homelessness and as such, the full amount is allocated for this purpose. The table below sets out the amounts set aside for the various Housing Options in 2013-14.

Homeless Prevention	194,470	(Includes Bed and Breakfast spend)
Choice Based Lettings	23,100	
Furniture Scheme	3,030	
Rent Deposit Scheme	9,300	
Out of Hours Service	4,000	
Homelessness Strategy	2,880	
Homestart	19,620	(Of which £9,000 is funded from the Housing Revenue Account)
Durban House	23,400	
Veronica House	14,020	
NWL Homeless Project	4,050	
Sanctuary Scheme	3,340	
HomeGuide	9,100	(Implementation and set up costs)
	<b>310,310</b>	

## 8. Homelessness Review and New Strategic Priorities

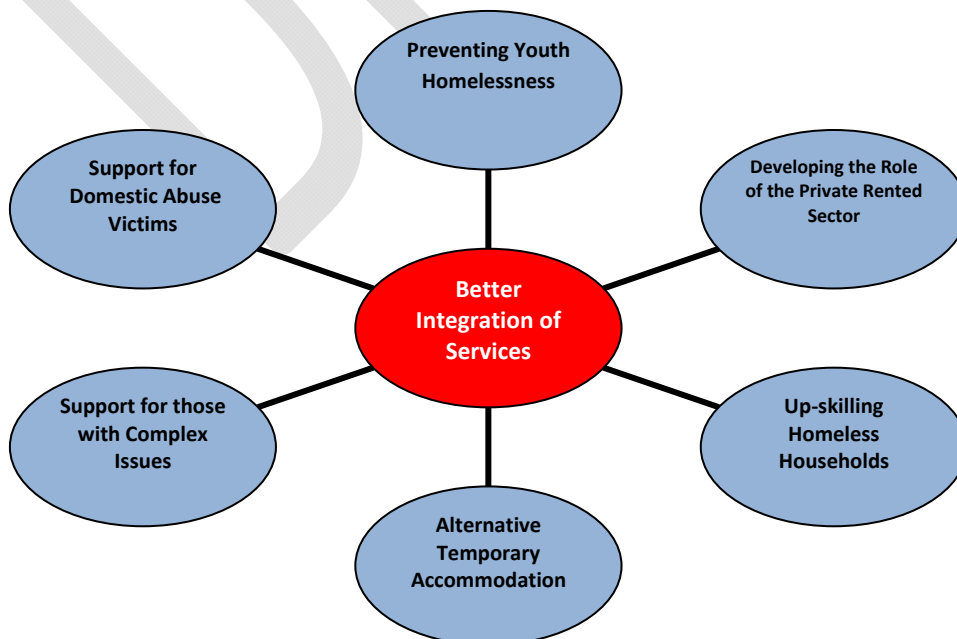
8.1 **Homelessness Review** - We commenced the review of our homelessness strategy in March 2012 and included analysis of a wide range of data and evidence collection from a variety of sources and stakeholders. The review included desk top exercises, forums, staff away days, calls for evidence and analysis of statistics. The review concluded in a successful workshop event 'Let's Side Step Homelessness' in November 2012, attended by 23 of our partners. The workshop was based around the existing work undertaken or planned by the Housing Choices team in connection with the ten challenges or "Gold Standard" as set out in Section 5.4. Through a series of group discussions we sought to identify the gaps in order to shape our priorities for the future.

8.2 The findings from the Homelessness Review workshop were timely in that they directly informed the **review of the staffing structure** that was undertaken between September and December 2012. Priorities for customers that the Housing Choices team identified were for :

- a staffing structure that would provide sufficient capacity for one case officer throughout the customer journey
- more temporary accommodation other than Bed and Breakfast
- a staffing structure that would provide sufficient capacity to provide bidding assistance for vulnerable customers; and
- a degree of tenancy support for those placed in the private rented sector through our Rent Deposit scheme.

8.3 A new structure was developed to provide that capacity and, following consultation, was approved by our Corporate Leadership Team in February 2013. Recruitment to the new structure is almost complete and staff are currently undergoing appropriate training to equip them with the necessary knowledge and tools to perform their duties as effectively as possible.

8.4 **New Strategic Priorities** - The priority areas for improvement that we identified from the Homelessness Review are as follows.



8.5 **Better Integration of services will underpin all priorities** – we will improve the way we communicate and work with partner agencies involved in homelessness prevention, directly or indirectly, by developing shared protocols that support mutual clients. We will develop information sharing pathways and signposting between agencies. This is seen as fundamental to all our work

8.6 The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the actions needed to deliver on these priorities, together with a note of which of the Government's ten challenges they support. This is intended to demonstrate how we are working in partnership to achieve the Government's "Gold Standard" locally

- **Earlier intervention to prevent youth homelessness** – We need to be more proactive about early intervention and prevention through education to stem the numbers of younger people presenting as homeless and improve the understanding about the respective roles of social care and housing in relation to 16/17 year olds. **(Challenges 2 & 9)**
- **Timely support for domestic abuse victims** – existing support agencies are seeing an increase in the number of families referred to their services due to the current financial climate and fact that more people are aware of their service. At the same time, funding is being cut and waiting lists are growing. We need to work with partners to ensure timely support is available for victims. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Developing the role of the Private Rented Sector** - We need to maximise links with private landlords and provide them with appropriate support and incentives to give them the confidence to provide homes for the full range of vulnerable groups. We also need to consider provision of settling in visits and continued tenancy support for private tenants to prevent repeat homelessness. **(Challenge 6)**
- **Supporting those with complex issues**– more and more clients with complex needs including mental health problems are presenting and it is unclear what information and support is available, especially those with low level problems who don't meet social care thresholds. More time is needed to support the vulnerable with Choice Based Lettings. **(Challenge 5)**
- **Alternative temporary accommodation** – the District needs a wider range of temporary accommodation other than Bed & Breakfast, including emergency accommodation with support. We also need to consider increasing the provision of shared accommodation for young single homeless under 35 years affected by the new benefit rules. **(Challenges 9 & 10)**
- **Up-skilling homeless households** -The fact that 76% of all homeless declarations are received from those who are out of work and mostly on benefits is an area of concern and requires a more proactive and co-ordinated approach to up-skill customers and encourage them to be more independent. **(Challenge 2)**

8.7 It's clear from the contents of this strategy that homelessness is not something that the Council's Housing Choices Team, nor any voluntary or community sector organisations, can tackle alone. We will work with our partners on the NWL Homelessness Forum to develop a joint Action Plan to address our new priorities. Whilst the Homelessness Prevention Strategy will be for the period 2013 – 2018, we will review the Action Plan annually to enable all signatories to this strategy respond more quickly to changing policy, prevailing circumstances and local issues.