

THE EXECUTIVE

12 AUGUST 2003

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING & HEALTH

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY	FOR DECISION	
<p><i>This report concerns issues affecting the Council's discharge of statutory duties to homeless people and the requirement to produce a Homelessness Strategy.</i></p> <p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>The Homelessness Act 2002 requires that local housing authorities conduct a review of homelessness in their areas and develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy. This report sets out briefly how this was conducted. The Homelessness Strategy is appended to the report for consideration.</p> <p>The report shows the increasing homelessness trend experienced in the borough and draws attention to some of the actions being taken to both prevent homelessness and extend and improve the range of temporary accommodation for those who become homeless.</p> <p>The Barking & Dagenham Partnership Housing Group, which has been consulted on the draft, will be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the action plan included in the strategy. The report also deals with the revenue resource implications of the strategy.</p> <p><u>Recommendation</u></p> <p>The Executive is asked to adopt the Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p><u>Reason</u></p> <p>There is a statutory requirement from the Homelessness Act 2002 for the Council to review homelessness and trends within the borough and produce a Homelessness Strategy by the end of July 2003.</p>		
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 set a requirement for local housing authorities to conduct a review of homelessness within their areas. This review must look at trends and consider differential impacts on specific groups within the community. Flowing from the review, a Homelessness Strategy is to be produced by the end of July 2003. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) gave practical guidelines on how these should be conducted and that the strategy must link with to Community Strategy, Housing Strategy and all relevant corporate programmes. The Executive agreed on 30th July 2002 to set up a group with these tasks.

2. Homelessness Strategy Working Group

- 2.1 The group has involved the bodies in APPENDIX A. A homelessness review was conducted which considered trends, the incidence of homelessness within specific groups in the community and mapping of homelessness service providers, gaps in services and any overlaps in provision.
- 2.2 A consultation event was held in January 2003 involving service providers and other stakeholders including the voluntary sector. Service users views have been assessed via surveys.
- 2.3 The draft Homelessness Strategy has been produced, APPENDIX B, in accordance with ODPM guidance and emerging best practice. Whilst it reflects national and regional demands and influences it is set in the borough context with clear relationships to other corporate strategies, in particular the Council's Housing Strategy and the Community Strategy.
- 2.4 The vision frames a value base for dealing with homelessness and gives an objective of homelessness being prevented wherever possible. The broad aims are to:
 - Prevent homelessness.
 - Alleviate homelessness and prevent social exclusion for those who experience it.
 - Eliminate bed & breakfast use for families with children by 2004.
 - Secure joint work and service delivery to provide user needs led services and support.
- 2.5 Implementation of the Strategy action plan will be monitored by the Barking & Dagenham Partnership Housing Group.
- 2.6 The past 4 years have seen substantial increases in homelessness with more than a 50% rise in the last year. Factors which have contributed to the rise in homelessness in Barking and Dagenham between 2000/01 and 2002/03 are:
 - An increase in the proportion of households living with friends or relatives, who were forced to leave (from 32.9% of cases in 2000/01 to 40.4 % of cases in 2001/02)
 - An increase in the proportion of households made homeless from privately rented or tied accommodation (from 14.1% of cases on 2000/01 to 25.1% of cases in 2001/02).

Table (i) provides information collected by the Housing Advice service, which shows the increase over this period.

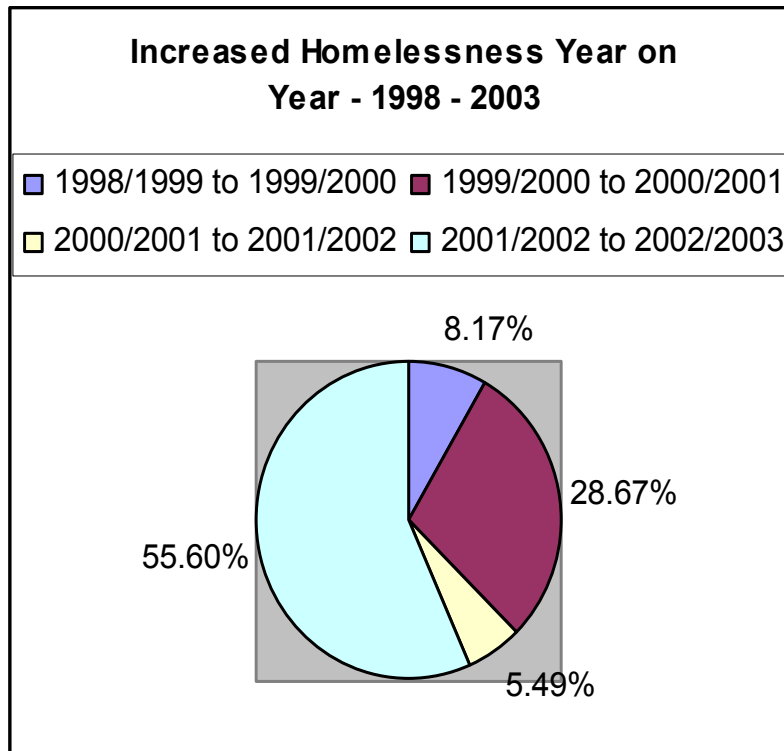


Table (i)

3. Resource implications

3.1 Actions are in place that will reduce the use of bed & breakfast. In particular:

- 2 new Registered Social Landlords (RSL) hostels with 71 units are due for completion in October 2004. ODPM have indicated that revenue support costs will be eligible for Supporting People Grant.
- There are 91 private sector properties in the borough leased for temporary accommodation, with plans to take this up to 200 to meet temporary housing needs.
- The Housing Strategy targets bringing back into use 10% of empty private homes a year.
- Foyer - for 116 young people - start on site is set for January 2004, dependent on a successful bid for Local Authority Social Housing Grant to meet capital costs and Supporting People Grant.
- Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSLS) - the Executive has previously been made aware of the upward trend in levels of homelessness applications and the need to procure alternative accommodation outside hostel, insecure tenancies and bed and breakfast. The Executive agreed to the implementation of the PSLS and it is expected that procurement of further private sector leased properties will be the short-term solution to meeting the target of no families with children in bed and breakfast. The PSLS programme is financially efficient because the scheme is at no cost to the Housing General Fund.

- LBBB/RSL Street Purchase - in contrast to PSLs, the option of purchasing freehold properties has become financially unattractive due to the impact that this would have on financial initiatives to support the Capital Programme. Furthermore, the Housing Corporation will no longer support RSL Street Purchase programmes.

3.2 Initiatives have been made and resourced to enhance homelessness prevention:

- The Accommodation Resettlement Unit has been established a major part of whose purpose is to prevent repeat homelessness.
- The partnership working with the Leaving Care Team has cut tenancy failure of young people leaving Council care.
- External mediation services are now used when homeless approaches are received from people who have been ejected by families.

3.3 Council spending on B&B:

- 2001/02 - £117,255
- 2002/03 - £664,076 (£428,012 net of Housing Benefit).

The initiatives in 3.1 will cut B&B use to meet the target of no family placements from April 2004. Proposals may be made later to strengthen the Housing Advice Service to raise homelessness prevention, but this should be capable of being financed from B&B spending savings.

Implementation of the strategy will have staff resource implications, which have not yet been fully assessed. The assessment has been complicated by the increasing number of homeless approaches, which require additional staffing within the Homeless Persons Unit. Assessments are being made on whether this can be met from within existing staff resources in the Landlord Services division or if a bid for additional funding will need to be made.

4. Consultation

4.1 All individuals and groups that have participated in the development of the strategy and homelessness review have been consulted on the draft. In addition to this the following actions to extend consultation have been taken:

- Draft strategy published on Council website
- ALG Homelessness and BME sub groups
- LSP Housing Group
- Homelessness Directorate ODPM
- Private sector landlord forum
- Shelter
- All Members of Council

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:
Report to the Executive 30/7/01

APPENDIX A

Organisations and Council Departments involved in the Homelessness Strategy Working Group:

- Dagenham Citizens Advice Bureau
- EMPA
- Probation Service
- East Street Youth Information
- Connexions
- Community Mental Health
- Supporting People
- Axe Street Drug Project
- Social Services Children's Services
- HACAS Chapman Hendy
- Housing & Health
- Corporate Policy & Performance

APPENDIX B

Homelessness Review 2003

APPENDIX C

Homelessness Strategy 2003