

**Braintree District Council  
Homelessness Review and Strategy  
2008 – 2013**

**Executive Summary**

**Version 1 for Consultation 7 April 08  
to 30 June 08**

## **Introduction**

### **1. The Strategic Housing Role of the Council**

In line with its strategic role, the Council is responsible for providing housing advice, homeless assessments, assessing housing need, managing the district housing register and developing new social housing.

The Council transferred its housing stock in November 2007 to a newly formed large scale voluntary transfer housing association, Greenfields Community Housing.

The Council works in partnership with a number of housing providers. Following the recent stock transfer, Greenfields continues to be the largest provider of social housing in the district, assisting the Council to offer accommodation to those in housing need.

At the time of carrying out this review and developing the future strategic priorities, the council is still at a relatively early stage post the housing transfer and is adjusting to new working arrangements.

#### **1.2 The Homelessness Strategy 2003-07**

The Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003. This strategy set out the Council's key priorities for preventing and tackling homelessness for a five-year period.

The Strategy has supported the development of services that help to prevent homelessness by ensuring that good advice, co-ordinated working and accessible, appropriate housing is available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There is still more work to do.

The existing strategy is due to expire this year. The Council has conducted a further review to identify any outstanding areas and set new strategic priorities for the next five-year period.

The review is intended to be used as a planning tool for the council in developing a new strategy for homelessness.

#### **1.3 The New Review and Strategy Documents**

The new review and strategy documents are written as one document. Section one relates to the review of homelessness and section two is the Homelessness Strategy outlining priorities for the next five years.

The strategy will take the form of an action plan, which will be reviewed on an annual basis. It is believed that this approach will ensure that our attention will be concentrated on providing deliverable and measurable targets. The action plan can be found in section 2 of this document.

At the time of publishing, this document is a draft for consultation purposes. Following the end of the 12-week consultation period, the document will be updated, as required.

## **1.4 Purpose of the New Review and Strategy**

### **1.4.1 The Review**

The review focuses on the following:

- An audit of existing service provision, which includes the homeless, advice, prevention, access to accommodation, use of temporary accommodation and provision of support
- Analysis of the current scale and nature of homelessness
- Assessment of likely future levels of homelessness
- Collating the views of service users and related organisations on the existing service provision
- Reviewing current resources and identifying potential gaps and overlaps in the current service provision
- Reviewing the achievements from the last strategy
- Linking related national and local strategies and policies

### **1.4.2 Producing the Review and Strategy**

#### **i) Statistics and Data**

The review uses all available statistics relating to homelessness and housing need. This information has been gathered from the following sources:

- Homelessness P1E reports (*statistical returns reporting on homelessness and housing activity*)
- HIP/HSSA returns
- Housing Advisory data
- Housing Register data
- Housing needs analysis/market information
- Demographic data
- Findings from internal review carried out in 2007 (prior to stock transfer)

The initial review and development of the strategic action plan has been developed by Officers.

#### **ii) Consultation**

A two-stage consultation process has been used as part of the development process:

- Stage one involved discussions with key stakeholders regarding the service. This information helped to produce the review document
- Stage two is an official 12-week consultation period, allowing all stakeholders, service users and public to comment on the review and strategy document

### **iii) Links to Existing Sub-Regional and Regional Activity**

In existence are a number of groups directly linked to sub-regional and regional activities, in particular the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme and Supporting People activities. The review and strategy have been developed alongside these activities.

### **iv) Homelessness Strategy Steering Group**

Following on from the review and development of the strategic action plan, a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) will be established. This group will be responsible for following through the strategic actions identified and monitoring outcomes and achievements.

It is intended that membership of the HSSG will include all relevant partners, as listed below:

- Social Services (Adult, Mental Health, Children and Families, Learning Disabilities, Physical Impairment Team)
- Mid Essex Primary Care Trust
- Connexions
- Youth Offending Team
- Probation Service
- Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership
- Essex County Council Supporting People
- Housing associations partners (including Greenfields)
- Voluntary Sector representative

It is hoped that multi agency ownership of the document will enhance existing partnership arrangements.

The HSSG will also be responsible for carrying out an annual review and update of the strategy. This will include identifying actions completed and any new areas of development.

## **2. Summary of Key Findings from the Review**

The review carried out in 2008 identified that the majority of the original priorities set in 2003 have been achieved. The key areas of achievement are:

- The Council continues not to use bed and breakfast accommodation as part of it's duty to provide interim accommodation to homeless people
- The overall use of temporary accommodation has reduced by 50% in the last five year period
- There has been a systematic increase in the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented
- The housing services have become more coordinated, therefore ensuring that any person with a housing need can be identified and assisted appropriately

## **2.1 The New Strategy**

The new strategy is intended to be a working document for the Council, providing direction on managing homelessness. The strategy is also intended to be a guide for a range of stakeholders (including district and parish councillors, external support agencies/organisations) working with local residents.

## **2.2 Summary of New Homelessness Strategic Priorities**

The strategy focuses on building on the success of the housing service in assisting those with a housing need. The key priorities are:

## **2.3 The New Strategic Aims for the Next Five Years**

### **Priority 1 Joint Working and Partnerships**

The Council has good links with all its key partners. Further work has been identified to build on these existing links and to facilitate better working practises. This work includes the development of service protocols and joint training.

### **Priority 2 Prevention of Homelessness**

In terms of homelessness, a renewed focus on developing further preventative measures is needed to assist any person who is at risk of becoming homeless.

As part of the development of the strategy, the Council intends to take account of good practise guidance and examples. Through the strategy, the Council aims to ensure that its prevention solutions provide effective and sound solutions, and the systems do not act as a mechanism for gate keeping resources.

### **Priority 3 Support for Vulnerable People**

The strategy aims to review and improve the support services for vulnerable people. This includes reviewing the existing floating support service and advice services.

From the review, it has been identified that there is a need to create more movement within supported housing schemes. It is proposed that the schemes will be given a set number of nominations each year specifically for residents who are ready to move into permanent accommodation.

#### **Priority 4 Provision of Accommodation**

A key council priority over the next four years is to develop more affordable housing in the district.

Another key area is to continue to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and maintain the Council's record for not using bed and breakfast accommodation.

The strategy includes further work with the private rented sector. The actions include working with private landlords and Colne Housing Society (Private Sector Leasing Scheme) to increase the access to private sector accommodation.

#### **Priority 5 Invest to Save**

This strategic aim focuses on making the best use of available financial and staff resources. This will include pooling existing budgets as one prevention fund, to allow greater flexibility when preventing homelessness.

#### **Priority 6 Administering Homelessness More Effectively**

The strategy aims to ensure that standards and performance are monitored and improved.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the Council intends to review the service, so as to identify any areas for improvement. This will include the introduction of quality assessments on casework, a formal audit of the service and examples of good working practices from Councils that are Homeless Regional Champions.

There is also a commitment to developing customer involvement to help shape the service.

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Homelessness Review  
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## **Section 1 Homelessness Review**

### **1. Homelessness in Context**

To put the issue of homelessness in perspective, this section focuses on the legal, national, regional and local context. This is also illustrated in appendix 1.

Each of these areas impact on the development and implementation of the service.

#### **1.1 The Legal Context**

The legislation relating to homelessness is contained in the Housing Act 1996 (Part 7), which was amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (HA 2002).

In addition, there are other key pieces of legislation directly linked to homelessness. Further details are listed below:

##### **1.1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002**

Building on the existing legal requirements in the 1996 Act, the HA 2002 introduced a number of new priority categories aimed to assist a greater number of people. In addition, the HA 2002 included a requirement for all Councils to adopt a strategic approach to managing and preventing homelessness.

#### **i) Strategic Approach**

The HA 2002 requires all Councils to undertake regular reviews of homelessness and develop strategies for tackling homelessness in all its forms. Particular emphasis has been placed on the prevention of homelessness.

The HA 2002 introduced a requirement for local authorities to formulate partnerships with external agencies, in particular, the requirement to refer families with dependent children who have been found to be ineligible or intentionally homeless to Social Services.

#### **ii) New Priority Need Categories**

The priority need categories were extended to include certain groups omitted from the 1996 legislation. The aim was to ensure that the greatest protection is given to the most vulnerable people.

The extension applies to the following groups:

- 16 and 17 year olds (except those regarded as relevant children, that is, those for whom Social Services have responsibility under the Children and Leaving Care Act, 2000)

- Care leavers between 18 to 21 years, who are former relevant children
- People who may be considered as vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence or threats of violence
- People who may be considered as vulnerable as a result of serving a prison sentence, care background or leaving the armed forces

### **1.1.3 Crime and Disorder Act 1999**

The act places a statutory duty on police forces and local authorities to work in partnership to develop and implement a strategy for dealing with local issues of crime and tackle anti social behaviour in local areas.

This requires these authorities to work in partnership with linked public, private, community, voluntary agencies and organisations.

### **1.1.4 Children Act 1989 and 2004**

The Acts give Social Services the responsibility to provide assistance in the form of accommodation to individuals in need. Often this can take the form of financial assistance to assist in accessing accommodation.

The Act also requires Social Services and Local Authorities to work in partnership to assist any child who is regarded as being in housing need.

## **1.2 The National Context**

The issue of homelessness is now a strategic priority for the Government. This focus has been prompted by a number of factors, not least as a result of the increasing demand for affordable housing, increased reliance on temporary accommodation and increases in the number of rough sleepers.

### **1.2.1 Links to Related National Policy Areas**

The commitment to address homelessness as part of wider policy agendas, is also found in the following policies:

#### **i) Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes: Changing Lives (2005)**

As part of its overall agenda to tackle social exclusion and create sustainable communities, the Government has developed its own five-year strategy to reduce homelessness and halve the use of temporary accommodation by 2010. The core principles of this strategy are as follows:

- Prevention of homelessness
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness
- Improving access to settled homes
- Sustaining reductions in rough sleeping
- Supporting vulnerable people

**ii) “More Than A Roof”:  
A Report into Tackling Homelessness (2002)**

A Government report into the causes and trends in homelessness, providing advice and suggestions.

**iii) “Every Child Matters; Change for Children” (2003)**

This policy places increased responsibility on all organisations (for example, Local Authorities, Police, hospitals, schools and voluntary groups) to effectively ensure the welfare of all children.

### **1.2.2 Government Guidance**

**i) Homelessness Code of Guidance (2006)**

This guidance document aims to assist Local Authorities in formulating their reviews and developing strategies. The document also provides extensive guidance on all aspects of homeless legislation.

**ii) Reducing Bed and Breakfast and Tackling Homelessness:  
What’s working: A Good Practice Handbook (2005)**

This guidance document provides suggestions on how to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and develop alternative options for temporary accommodation.

**iii) Choice Based Lettings Guidance  
(awaiting latest version to be published)**

## **1.3 Regional and Sub Regional Context**

The Greater Haven Gateway sub region is one of eight housing sub-regions in the East of England, and includes Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Tendring borough and district councils, working in partnership with housing associations.

Sub-regions have been established in response to the Government’s Sustainable Communities Plan 2003 to reflect the housing markets of the East of England.

Actions within the sub-regional strategy support homelessness prevention across the sub-region, especially those within the priority “Local Needs and Homelessness”.

Areas of Priority Identified are:

- Tackle Homelessness
- Improve access to affordable housing
- Maximise the delivery of new affordable housing

- Support people who are more vulnerable in our society
- Ensure housing in the sub region is high quality and sustainable
- Ensure equality for all in housing services

Local authorities within the sub-region have committed themselves to coordinate joint working and promote best practice on homelessness across the sub-region.

## 1.4 Local Context

The Council has a number of key strategic priorities, of which homelessness is one. Our challenge is to integrate all strategic priorities and initiatives seamlessly. This approach is reflected in the following local strategies and policies:

### 1.4.1 Local Strategies/Policies

- The **Essex Local Area Agreement** sets out the priorities for the local area as agreed by central government and the local area. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) manages these agreements.

LSPs consist of statutory, non-statutory and multi-agency partnerships, which match the local authority boundaries. The aim is to bring together all local sectors (public, private, community and voluntary) and develop local strategies, initiatives and services. This approach aims to coordinate services effectively.

- The **Community Plan** for the district is a long term plan developed by the Local Strategic Partnership (a partnership of local agencies including the Council who prepare and implement a community strategy) to improve quality of life for people in the district.
- The **Corporate Strategy** is set by councillors and describes the priorities they want to see carried out on behalf of the people they represent. It covers a four-year period and is reviewed every year, setting further key objectives. There is a new Corporate Strategy for the period 2008 – 2012 and Corporate Action Plan for 2008/2009.
- The **Housing Strategy** is designed to meet the Corporate Strategy's priorities relating to housing. It also supports other corporate aims affecting housing provision.
- The **Local Plan/Local Development Framework (LDF)**, which describes the nature of overall development for a ten-year period.
- The **Community Safety Strategy** contributes to complement and reinforce the actions proposed in the Homelessness Strategy.

The action taken by the Council to meet the aims of these strategies is explained in part in the strategies themselves. It will also appear in the **Service Plans** of the various Council departments.

### 1.4.2 Performance Targets

At a national and local level, there are a number of targets set to monitor if strategic aims are being achieved.

At a national level, the Government now sets National Indicators and these are often linked to the strategic aims of the Local Area Agreement. There are two specific indicators that are directly related to housing: -

NI 156 The number of households living in temporary accommodation

NI 155 The number of new homes delivered (gross)

The Government also sets local targets for all local authorities, known as "Best Value Performance Indicators" (BVPIs). These are statutory indicators that not only measure performance but also aim to enforce strategic objectives, measure actual service outcomes, measure service delivery and ensure that services are accessible to the public.

The BVPIs are reported on an annual basis, and supplement the information provided in the Homelessness **P1E**, (*statistical returns reporting on homelessness and housing activity*), which the Council submits to the government on a quarterly and annual basis.

Several new BVPIs were introduced in 2005/06, including:

**BVPI 213** – the number of households for whom casework prevented homelessness.

**BVPI 225** – expanded from a previous BVPI that measures the number of domestic violence refuge spaces. The indicator has 11 points relating to the provision of services for victims of domestic violence.

The Homelessness Strategy is therefore intended to:

- reflect the primary goals of the Corporate Strategy and
- use the experience of planning and review to set policies, priorities and plans that will deliver the housing improvements demanded by local people and their elected representatives.

For homelessness, there are seven BVPI's, which measure the following:

- Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation
- Length of stay in hostel accommodation
- Number of rough sleepers
- Percentage of homeless families in temporary accommodation
- Prevention of homelessness
- Level of repeat homelessness
- Provision of services to victims of Domestic Violence

## 2. Partnership Arrangements

The Council has a proven track record of working in partnership, and currently participates in the following seven Partnership/Groups: -

- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership
- Transport Partnership Board
- Economic Development Partnership Board
- Health, Housing and Well-Being Partnership
- Cultural Partnership Board (inc. Leisure & Sport)
- Braintree District Local Compact Steering Group

The key agencies and bodies involved include

- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ▪ Essex County Council       | ▪ Environment Agency          |
| ▪ Essex Police Authority     | ▪ Registered social landlords |
| ▪ Strategic Health Authority | ▪ Braintree Business Council  |
| ▪ Parish and town councils   | ▪ Voluntary sector agencies   |
| ▪ Public transport operators | ▪ Tenants representatives     |

Braintree Council is determined that local people get the services they want and need. One of the major innovations has been to introduce Local Committees, based on the areas surrounding the three main towns of Braintree, Witham and Halstead. These committees help enable ongoing dialogue with local partners, stakeholders and residents on the major issues facing the communities.

PACT (Partners and Communities Together) is the local strategic partnership that brings together the main public, private, voluntary and community organisations working in the district.

### 3. Audit of Existing Service Provision

#### 3.1 The Structure of the Housing Service

Following the stock transfer, the housing service consists of the following teams, and is illustrated below in Figure 1.

- Housing Advisory/Welfare Rights
- Homelessness
- Housing Assessment
- Housing Research and Development

**Figure 1**     *Structure of the Housing Service*

<b>Housing Advisory &amp; Welfare Rights</b>	<p><b>Advice, information and direct assistance and casework to help with the process of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preventing homelessness</li> <li>▪ Maximising income/minimising debt</li> <li>▪ Securing suitable housing and/or support services</li> </ul>
<b>Homelessness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deciding the nature of the Council's duty to people who are homeless.</li> <li>▪ Securing temporary accommodation for those to whom a relevant duty exists</li> </ul>
<b>Housing Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operating the Housing Register for the District</li> <li>▪ Ensuring that applicants' needs are adequately reflected by the priority banding given to their application.</li> </ul>
<b>Housing Research &amp; Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitoring levels of housing need</li> <li>▪ Developing strategies to meet identified need</li> <li>▪ Enabling the development of new affordable housing</li> </ul>

The housing service operates by providing areas of specialism. Each area is equipped to provide the relevant information, advice and assistance to anyone with a housing need.

The Council operates a coordinated service through an effective system of referral. This referral process works between the Council departments, housing teams, housing providers, external organisations and support agencies. This approach has been successful in ensuring that people receive the help and support they need.

The work carried out by these teams is fundamental in the prevention of homelessness. As the first point of contact, these teams will quickly carry out the necessary assessments of any person with a housing need. Once the assessment has been completed, the Officers will establish appropriate solutions and work with the person.

These teams are not intended to act as gatekeepers, but to proactively work with the person to prevent homelessness where possible.

### **3.1.2 Standards and Philosophy**

The Council aims to provide excellent service to anyone who requires assistance or advice. A summary of the standards and our philosophy is listed below:

- Treat customers with professionalism and respect
- Offer high quality advice and assistance
- Promptly answer all enquiries
- Process Homeless applications within 33 days- in majority of cases
- Provide a 24 hour emergency service
- Where possible, provide next day appointments
- Provide home visits where a person is unable to access the office
- To welcome friends/relatives/professionals to support at any interview
- Provide private interview facilities and same sex interviewer
- Provide translation services (as appropriate)
- Referrals to appropriate Council departments, housing teams, housing providers, external organisations and support agencies
- Continuously monitor and review the service, to ensure high quality and efficient performance

### **3.1.3 Profile of Services Available in the Braintree District**

These statutory and voluntary services may have links with people who are at risk of homeless or are homeless: -

**Children and Family Service, Essex Social Services** – The Children and Family services works with partner agencies to prevent homelessness for families with dependent children.

**Probation Services Essex** – The Probation Service works with offenders who have been in prison for a minimum of 1 year to reduce reoffending and to change clients' offending patterns by assisting them to change their behaviour.

**Leaving and After Care, Essex Social Services** - The Leaving and After Care team work with young people in Chelmsford, Braintree and Maldon, offering a range of support services, including outreach, floating support, a drop-in centre, and supported accommodation.

**Community Mental Health Team** – There are four teams operating in the district that serve people with severe and enduring mental health problems, between the ages of 16 to 70.

**Essex, Southend and Thurrock Connexions** - Connexions provides information, advice and support to all young people in Essex and the unitary areas between the ages of 13 and 19.

**Changes Drug and Alcohol Team** - Changes is a statutory service funded by Social Services that works with chronic drug users and alcohol users.

**Mid Essex Primary Care Trust** - Provide care such as doctors, dentists, opticians, pharmacists and health visitors.

**Linden Centre** – The centre is part of the part of Broomfield Hospital and provides inpatient care for people from Chelmsford, Braintree and Maldon with an enduring and severe mental health issue. The Centre also provides some treatment for clients with substance abuse issues

**Braintree Women's Aid** - BWA manages a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence, with 12 units of accommodation.

**Braintree, Halstead & Witham Citizens Advice Bureau** - Provides advice on a range of issues including benefits, housing, employment, money and family law.

**First Stop** - First Stop provides a drop-in service to people living in the Braintree area. They provide confidential help and advice for people over 16. Services include advice, information, support, needle exchange, advocacy, canteen and safe C/O address.

## **3.2 The Homelessness Service**

### **Legal Duties of the Council**

The Council works within a statutory framework that sets out its duties towards homeless people within the district. The various Housing Acts have placed a duty on housing authorities to secure accommodation and/or offer appropriate housing advice to anyone who is homeless and approaches the Council for assistance in their area. This legislation gave a duty to local housing authorities to secure accommodation for such households determined to be in priority need.

A person is considered homeless if they have no accommodation anywhere in the world, which they can occupy.

In order to qualify for assistance under homeless provisions, a person must meet the following criteria, (as defined by the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 and Homelessness Act 2002):

- Eligibility
- Homeless
- Vulnerable
- Unintentionally homeless
- Have a local connection to the district

Below is a summary of the categories of need assisted by the homeless service.

#### **3.2.1 Families**

The HA 2002 states that families or people with young children or who are pregnant who are eligible, homeless, are vulnerable. They are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

Families become homeless for a number of reasons. Often they have multiple problems or misfortunes that culminate in the loss of their accommodation.

#### **3.2.2 Single People**

The HA 2002 states that some young people who are eligible and homeless are vulnerable and are, therefore, entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

The current and former legislation means that many single homeless people are not considered to be vulnerable and therefore do not qualify for priority assistance under homeless provisions. In these circumstances, the Council will ensure that the Housing Advisory and Welfare Rights teams provide the person with the necessary advice and assistance to help them secure alternative accommodation.

The Council has established a multi-agency monitoring group to continuously monitor and identify the needs of single people in the

district. This group meets on a quarterly basis and ensures that the needs of single people are featured in all new strategies and programmes for development (both housing and related areas).

### **3.2.3 Rough Sleepers**

Nationally there is a renewed focus on assisting those individuals who are classed as rough sleepers. In this district, we do not have many service users who are classified as rough sleepers in the truest sense of the meaning, which is sleeping in doorways, bus parks or railway stations. We do, however accept that we have a proportion of service users who do not have secure accommodation and are sleeping with friends and/or relatives on an ad-hoc basis.

As outlined in 3.1, the Housing Advisory and Welfare Right team will work with those who do not qualify for priority assistance.

### **3.2.4 Young People**

The HA 2002 states that some people who are 16/17 years old are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

The Council views all 16/17 year olds as vulnerable as a matter of best practice. It is felt that this group can often have limited ability to obtain and retain accommodation due to housing benefit restrictions and the reluctance of landlords to grant tenancies to under 18's.

These young people often have special needs in terms of support. Specialist projects in the district form a vital lifeline to young people, focusing on developing a range of practical skills needed for independent living and sustaining accommodation.

It is often difficult for the Council to secure emergency housing for this group.

### **3.2.5 Care Leavers (18 to 21 years)**

The HA 2002 states that some people who are care leavers are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

Through research and statistical evidence it is recognised that young people leaving care are at a high risk of becoming homeless. The Council works closely with the Leaving and After Care Team at Social Services to plan ahead for future housing needs of all care leavers living in the district.

### **3.2.6 Older People**

The HA 2002 states that some older people who are eligible are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

Records indicate that the number of presentations from older people is low. Through Social Services support, it is now possible for older people to receive appropriate levels of support, to enable them to remain in their own homes for longer.

A Hospital Discharge Policy will be developed between the Council, NHS and Social Services that will ensure that where there is a potential homelessness issue identified with a patient, a prompt assessment of their housing requirements is made.

### **3.2.7 People with Disabilities**

The HA 2002 states that some people with disabilities who are eligible are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

In order to assist this group, the Council works closely with all its housing partners, to ensure that people are able to access the appropriate accommodation.

In addition, the Council works in partnership with Social Services Occupational Therapists to identify housing requirements and access any available grants to assist with adaptations. This arrangement works on a system of referral between both parties.

### **3.2.8 People with Mental Health Problems**

The HA 2002 states that some people who have Mental Health problems and are eligible are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

The number of people who have a need for housing in this category has increased in recent years. It is widely acknowledged that, in addition to accommodation, many people may also require additional support. This requirement for support can be as a result of associated problems, in particular substance misuse.

In order to meet the needs of those with mental health problems, the Council actively works in partnership with the Community Mental Health Team and related support agencies, to ensure that appropriate provision can be achieved.

The Council fundamentally believes that partnership working is the only proactive method of resolving some of the problems facing customers with mental health problems. Essex County Council's Supporting People strategy has also identified closer co-operation between providers as a strategic issue.

### **3.2.9 People with HIV/AIDS**

The HA 2002 states that some people who have HIV/AIDS who are eligible are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district. Records indicate that only a small number of service users who have HIV/AIDS presented for this service. However, this does not mean that this group should be ignored or discounted. In our experience, there are strong links between health and housing problems and it has to be acknowledged that service for this group of customers must be highly confidential and responsive to the service user's needs.

Particular issues concerning this group are to have well-maintained homes, with effective heating systems if they are not to succumb to associated health problems. Many HIV/AIDS sufferers are too unwell to undertake removals, home decorating and maintenance therefore financial and practical assistance are necessary to meet their needs.

As with other groups, the Council works with partner organisations and agencies to ensure that appropriate support services are available to support and sustain accommodation.

### **3.2.10 People with a Substance Abuse Issues**

The HA 2002 states that some people who abuse drugs or alcohol who are eligible are vulnerable and are therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

Like other vulnerable groups, those who abuse alcohol or drugs can often have difficulty in obtaining and sustaining accommodation. Currently, there are no specialist housing providers operating in the district. As a result, the Council works with partner organisations and agencies to ensure that appropriate services and support networks are available to help the person to sustain accommodation.

### **3.2.11 Ex-Offenders**

The HA 2002 states some ex-offenders should now be considered as vulnerable and therefore entitled to accommodation if they are eligible and not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with the district.

Recent research has indicated a strong link between homelessness and repeat offending.

The National Probation Service has an agreed information sharing protocol with Health, Housing and the Police. Regular multi-agency meetings (MAPP) are held to discuss particular cases of current customers who are classified as dangerous offenders or Schedule 1 Offenders.

These MAPP meetings help to identify the needs of the ex-offender and ensure that a full risk assessment is carried out prior to any offer of accommodation. This approach ensures that the needs of the individual

are met, whilst ensuring appropriate measures are in place to secure public safety.

Whilst it is extremely difficult for this group to access accommodation, the Council works closely with the Probation service to find and help ex-offenders keep accommodation.

The placing of dangerous ex-offenders and Schedule 1 Offenders has caused tremendous problems for Local Authorities and RSL's in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

### **3.2.12 Teenage Parents**

The HA 2002 states Teenage Parents should be considered as priority need and therefore entitled to accommodation if they are eligible and not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with district.

Government guidance recommends that, where possible, this group should be offered supported accommodation. The aim is to provide the necessary skills and support to ensure that people can sustain their accommodation.

In order to fulfil this obligation the Council places people into supported Mother and Baby projects. At the time of writing this review, the Council still owns and manages its own project. The project is due to transfer to a specialist housing provider (Family Mosaic Housing Association).

The project provides 13 units of self contained accommodation with communal facilities for vulnerable (teenage), pregnant women or couples with a child.

The accommodation is not for exclusive use by this group – persons over the age of 18 may also be accommodated in this type of accommodation. The accommodation also provides life–skills training, parenting courses, antenatal classes, further and adult education and debt counselling. This is an integral part of the accommodation, in order to help customers develop the skills needed to break cycles of homelessness and tackle any peripheral problems. Resettlement support is also given and helps achieve a smooth transition once permanent accommodation has been found.

### **3.2.13 Minority Ethnic Groups**

In cases where there are issues relating to language, the Council ensures that a translation service is available. In addition, Council produced documentation and information can be offered in a variety of formats and languages.

Racial harassment is included as a priority in the homeless legislation. The Council has specific policies to manage instances of racial harassment. The policy ensures that, where appropriate, the Council will involve the Police and relevant support agencies.

### **3.2.14 Ex- Service Personnel**

The HA 2002 states that a person who is vulnerable as a result of leaving the armed forces may be considered as priority need and therefore entitled to accommodation if they are not intentionally homeless and have a local connection with district.

The rules associated to local connection state that a person can be considered to have a connection if they live or work in the district, have immediate relatives in the district, require support or provide support. A local connection can be established once a person has lived or worked in the district for at least six months.

At present people who reside in military accommodation/bases do not automatically establish a local connection after six months of residency or work. The Government is currently reviewing this situation.

There are no major military accommodation/bases in the district. Our records show that we have only received a small number of requests for assistance from this group.

### **3.2.15 Domestic Violence**

The Strategic Plan for inter-agency action on domestic violence in Essex has identified the following definition of domestic violence:

*Domestic violence is essentially a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by a person, usually a man, over another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship. It can be manifested in a number of ways, including, but not restricted to, physical, emotional and financial abuse, and the imposition of social isolation and is most commonly a combination of them all.*

The HA 2002 reinforces previous legislation that if a person is in fear of violence or abuse it would not be reasonable for them to continue to occupy the home.

The Council believes that everyone should be given good quality information to facilitate choice, thus enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their future.

Domestic Violence is defined as physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse actual or threatened from an 'associate person'. This includes partners, ex-partners and family members. More often than not, domestic violence is usually perpetrated against women. It should be mentioned that men also experience domestic violence and are entitled to the same level of support and assistance.

The Council offers same-sex advisers. For women experiencing domestic violence, accommodation can be offered in Women's Refuges. This accommodation is considered to be the most appropriate type of assistance available, however is subject to availability. In some cases women prefer to stay with relatives or friends and this should not preclude them from receiving an offer of permanent accommodation.

Those affected by domestic violence are often very frightened and confused. Offering private interviews at the Refuge can alleviate this situation. Those affected often find it very distressing to discuss their situation. We acknowledge everything should be done to put them at their ease. As mentioned, our emphasis is to empower by offering real choices in a way that is not patronising or over-persuasive – hence staff training is vital.

With the support of the Council, Braintree Women's Aid (BWA) opened a Refuge in 1998 and has helped approx. 600 women and children escape domestic abuse. The Refuge has expanded its services to include outreach work to victims of abuse who do not necessarily want or need secure accommodation.

Until recently, BWA ran a drop-in centre but, due to its location, this was closed. BWA is actively looking to resurrect the service, but needs to source a more suitable location.

Due to the limited refuge spaces in the south of England and the Council has, on many occasions, had to secure places in the north of England in order to assist women and children with a place of safety.

Following from the last strategy, the Council has introduced a Sanctuary Scheme that aims to adapt properties, making them secure and safe for those who wish to remain in their property.

The scheme is limited by budget and is subject to a full risk assessment in partnership with the local Police and if appropriate, the housing provider. The full risk assessment is conducted in partnership with the Police to assess if it is appropriate for the individual to remain in the property. Other considerations included are the level of adaptations required and whether it is financially viable.

### **3.2.16 Multiple Needs**

It is widely recognised that a number of people have more than one issue affecting their housing and personal circumstances. These problems can manifest themselves in a variety of ways.

As part of our coordinated approach, the Council ensures that anyone presenting with a number of issues is referred to the appropriate agencies or organisations.

### **3.3 The Housing Needs Register**

#### **3.3.1 Background Information**

Following the housing stock transfer, the Council has retained responsibility for managing the Housing Needs Register for the district.

The Housing Assessment Team is responsible for assessing and registering all applications to the district's Housing Needs Register (HNR). This includes applications from applicants who already live in Greenfields accommodation and wish to transfer to another property.

#### **3.3.2 Current Process for Allocating to Social Housing Vacancies in the District**

The Council has nomination rights with its partner housing associations for available properties and uses the HNR to select the appropriate applicants for these vacancies.

Greenfields has established a Lettings Team for its own vacancies and uses the HNR to select the appropriate applicants for all vacancies (this includes transfers for existing Greenfields tenants).

At present, there is a district allocation policy that covers the majority of lettings of social rented housing in the district.

All homeless people are registered on the HNR and are awarded the appropriate level of priority in line with the district allocation policy. People for whom the Council has a duty under homeless legislation to house, will usually be offered accommodation by one of the housing associations operating in the district, unless they accept an assured short hold tenancy from a private sector landlord.

In order to fully discharge its duty, the Council must ensure that the person is offered a secure tenancy (or assured short hold tenancy in the private sector) and that the accommodation is reasonable and suitable for their requirements.

The new sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme will enable homeless people to have more choice in where they live when moving to a permanent home. The new Choice Based Lettings scheme is expected to operate from November 2008.

#### **3.3.3 The Housing Research and Development Team**

This team is responsible for the development and monitoring of the key housing strategies. It is also responsible for measuring housing need in the district and sub-region. A major area of work for this team is the development of new affordable housing schemes in partnership with housing associations and providers.

Although not directly involved in dealing with homeless people, this team is fundamental in ensuring that levels of housing need are identified and ensuring that any future developments of new affordable housing reflect the local housing need.

## **4. Audit of Current Provision**

### **4.1 Permanent Accommodation**

It is widely accepted that supply of low cost social housing continues to be a major issue, as it is unable to meet the overall demand. Development of social housing continues to be a high priority of the Government, however does not provide a quick solution to the increasing levels of demand.

Following the stock transfer, Greenfields continues to be the main provider of permanent social housing in the district.

On average, there are approximately 535 permanent vacancies each year from housing associations operating in the district. These are a mixture of property types and sizes. This figure is an average for the last five financial years. It does include two years of reasonable vacancies, plus two years of above average vacancies as a result of sizeable new developments in 2005/06 and 2006/07. It is anticipated that future vacancy levels may be less, as there are less sizeable new developments planned at present. However the council has identified the need for more affordable housing as a corporate objective in the Corporate Strategy 2008 -2012 and will be addressing this issue.

As a result of insufficient/decreasing levels of available accommodation, the Council is committed to providing effective solutions to help meet the overall demand for accommodation. These solutions have focused on accessing and securing accommodation in the private sector. Initiatives include rent bond schemes, loans, and greater links with private leasing schemes (through Colne Housing Association).

### **4.2 Temporary/Supported Housing Accommodation**

The provision of temporary accommodation is used to assist some people whilst permanent accommodation is sourced usually via a housing association.

Temporary accommodation can also be offered to people who have nowhere to live, as part of the Council's legal obligations, during investigation periods.

The Council has arrangements with Greenfields to access 35 designated temporary general needs properties. This arrangement operates successfully and helps the Council to continue not to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation. In line with Government recommendation to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, the Council has managed to reduce its usage by nearly 50%.

Virtually all the remaining temporary accommodation in the district is supported housing.

Figure 2 below is a summary of temporary accommodation and supported housing in the district, used by the Council. This summary is broken into household type and includes supported housing units

**i) Temporary/Supported Housing Accommodation in the District**

<b>Scheme Location</b>	<b>Housing Provider</b>	<b>Type of Accommodation</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>	<b>Tenancy Types</b>	<b>Access</b>
Braintree	BDC	Emergency general needs accommodation	4	Licence	Referral via BDC
Various	Greenfields	Single person and family general needs accommodation	35	Licence	Referral via BDC
Braintree	BDC/ Family Mosaic HA	Single person and family general needs supported hostel	14	Licence	Referral via BDC
Braintree	BDC/ Family Mosaic HA	Young vulnerable parents unit	13	Licence	Referral via BDC
Braintree	Salvation Army HA	Single person supported hostel	14	Licence	Direct access
Braintree	St Matthews	Single person supported hostel	8	Licence	Referral
Halstead and Braintree	NACRO	Single person supported hostel (Mental Health)	16	AST	Referral
	Braintree Women's Aid	Single female/female and children accommodation (Domestic violence)	13	Licence	Referral
Witham	Family Mosaic HA	Single young person supported hostel (ages 16-25)	9 self contained units  16 move on units	AST  AST	Referral
Witham	Sanctuary HA	Supported accommodation	19	AST	Referral
Braintree	Family Mosaic HA	Single young person supported hostel (ages 16-25)	10 self contained units	AST	Referral
Braintree House	Family Mosaic HA	Single young person supported hostel (ages 16-25)	6 self contained units	Licence	Referral
Braintree Foyer	Salvation Army HA	Single person supported young people's hostel (ages 16 -25)	32 cluster units	Licence	Referral
Witham	Family Mosaic HA	Single young person (Care Leavers)	6 units	Licence	Referral via Essex CC

**Figure 3 Summary of temporary accommodation and supported housing in the district**

## **4.3 New Supported Housing Schemes developed since 2003**

### **4.3.1 Scheme for Care Leavers in Witham**

A new scheme has been developed and accommodates eight young people.

In addition to the scheme, there are 'move on' arrangements agreed. The Council and Social Services have jointly funded this arrangement. It ensures that those people who are ready to move from supported schemes are able to access permanent general needs accommodation.

The Foyer and the other specialist projects also work in partnership with the Council to provide accommodation and options for care leavers in the district.

### **4.3.2 Extra Care Sheltered Housing Braintree**

The first extra care sheltered housing scheme in the Braintree district opened in Braintree in January 2007. The scheme is owned and managed by the Braintree and Bocking Abbeyfields Society. It provides more support than a traditional sheltered housing scheme.

## **4.4 Floating Support**

Floating support is a service offered to people in their own homes. It provides a flexible service, visiting the tenant regularly to assist them with life skills, contact, finance, activities and social/emotional support.

In this district, the service is operated and managed by Swan Housing. The Council often makes direct referrals, however other organisations and individuals can also approach directly. The need for this is often identified from a number of sources, including internal departments and external organisations.

## **4.5 Rent Bond Scheme and Rent Deposit Scheme**

As part of its prevention work, the Council operates a rent bond scheme and a rent deposit scheme.

### **4.5.1 Bond Scheme**

The rent bond scheme operates by offering a private landlord a formal agreement to pay an agreed figure should any damage occur to a property. This scheme was introduced some years ago and in recent years has become less popular, as Landlords prefer advanced payments before a tenancy commences.

#### **4.5.2 Deposit Scheme**

The rent deposit scheme operates by providing private landlords with an upfront payment covering the damage deposit and first month rent. This scheme has been extremely successful in assisting a number of people into private rented accommodation. The scheme is budget limited and it is only possible to assist approximately 25 households each year.

### **5. Analysis of Housing Need/Market Information**

#### **5.1 Background**

Each year, the Council undertakes an assessment of housing need in the district.

The assessment is based on statistics and information collated from the previous financial year. The information centres on the following areas:

- Records of social housing provision in the district
- Information from the housing needs register
- Records from new build schemes with RSLs *and*
- Records of investment in existing private stock
- Available information on the local housing market

Overall the district has been growing very quickly. Between 1981 and 2005, the population in the Braintree District grew from 112,600 to 137,800. If a significant, prolonged downturn in the market occurs, it would be expected that the Council could experience increased homeless presentations as the population is larger.

Our Strategic Housing Market Assessment completed in 2008, indicates a net need for new affordable housing (i.e. after allowing for expected re-lets) of 607 new homes, of which around 80% should be social rented housing. This represents more homes than we expect in the entire market. As discussed above, our completion of 300 affordable homes in the last two years represents the best such period for well over 10 years and is above expected future completions.

We expect around 7% of social rented housing stock to become vacant each year. As numbers increase through new-build, we can expect a small increase in lettings per year. Overall records show that Right-to-Buy sales have decreased. Sales were exceeding the rate of new build but that is no longer the case.

#### **5.2 Household Figures**

In the Braintree District there were 54,332 households in 2001 (Census) of which, 16.5% rented from the Council and 2.6% rented from Housing Associations.

Projected figures estimated an increase of households to 60,208 of which 15.9% rented accommodation from housing associations, which includes Greenfields. (Source Council Tax Records: 31/03/07)). It is estimated that there will be a 10.8% increase in households in the next 6 years.

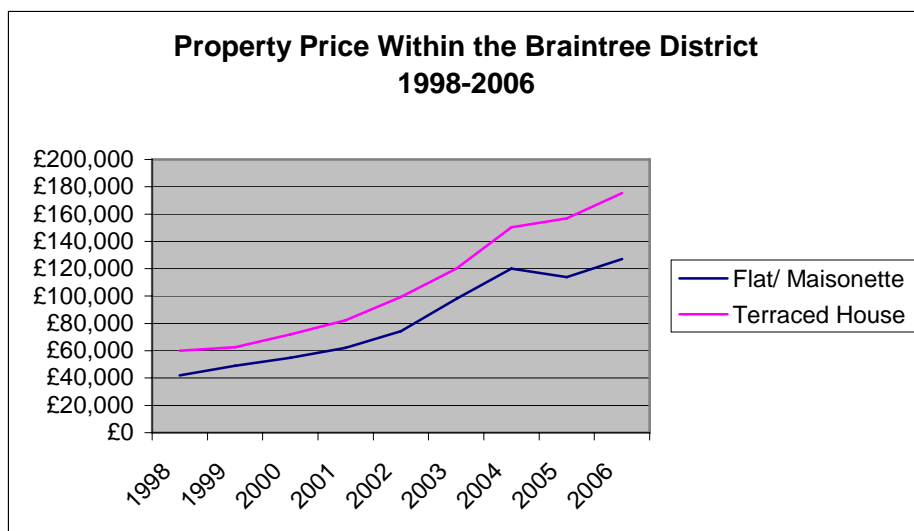
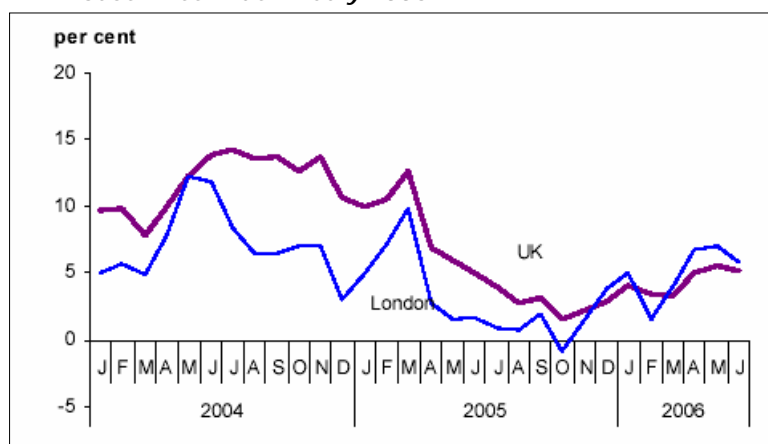
### 5.2.1. House Prices, Income and Employment

Like most areas, the Braintree district has experienced rapid growth in house prices in the last few years. The average price of a flat/maisonette in the eastern region has doubled in the last four years whilst annual local pay rises have not increased at an equivalent rate.

Halifax Index recorded UK house price inflation for the year ending 31st March 2006 at 11.1% and by the Land Registry at 9.3%. House prices in the South East Region show a decrease of 0.3% during the first quarter of 2007.

**Source: BDC Housing Needs Survey Update 2006/07**

**Figure 3: UK annual house price inflation (all dwellings).**  
**Source: ODPM House Price Index – July 2006**



**Figure 4x. Property price increases Source: Housing Research and Development**

In 2006/07, an estimated 41.4% of Braintree's resident population earned below its district average of £26,119.60 per annum (Gross). This is an indication of the fact that there are a number of households that have insufficient income by which to access the housing market, being unable to secure a loan/mortgage.

<b>Annual Income (2007)</b>	<b>%</b>
Below £10,000	16.3
£10,000 - £20,000	25.1
£20,000 - £30,000	18.1
£30,000 - £40,000	7.8
£40,000 - £50,000	10.5
£50,000 - £60,000	7.5
Above £60,000	14.7
	<b>100.0</b>

*Figure 5. Incomes of existing households Countywide (Essex) 2002 & 2004. Source: Braintree SHMA 2007*

An income of around £31,000 is needed to buy a 1 bedroom flat in Halstead and £36,000 in Braintree. A one bedroom flat requires an income of £35,000 in Witham. On average the incomes needed to access flat properties have increased on average by 20% over the last year. Source: BDC Housing Needs Survey Update 2004

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2007 shows an average income for Braintree (full time workers) of £26,119 (£27,383 for men and £22,833 for women).

	<b>Braintree (£)</b>	<b>Eastern (£)</b>	<b>GB (£)</b>
<b>Gross weekly pay</b>			
Full-time workers	452.9	470.0	449.6
Male full-time workers	515.1	520.5	490.5
Female full-time workers	391.2	392.7	387.6
<b>Hourly pay</b>			
Full-time workers	11.41	11.69	11.26
Male full-time workers	12.54	12.54	11.91
Female full-time workers	9.79	10.38	10.28

*Figure 6. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2006) Source: Nomis: National Statistics*

	<b>Braintree (employee jobs)</b>	<b>Braintree (%)</b>	<b>Eastern (%)</b>	<b>GB (%)</b>
Total employee jobs	49,100	-	-	-
Full-time	32,600	66.4	66.3	67.9
Part-time	16,500	33.6	33.7	32.1
Manufacturing	8,300	17.0	11.5	11.1
Construction	3,300	6.8	5.2	4.6
Services	36,700	74.7	81.6	82.9
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	12,100	24.6	25.2	24.1
Transport & communications	2,500	5.0	6.6	6.0
Finance, IT, other business activities	7,300	14.8	20.1	20.7
Public admin, education & health	12,500	25.4	24.8	26.9
Other services	2,400	4.8	4.9	5.2
Tourism-related	3,200	6.5	7.3	8.1

*Figure 7. Employee jobs: percentages are based on total employee jobs.*

*Source: Nimos: National Statistics annual business inquiry employee analysis (2005)*

### **5.2.2 Private Rented Sector**

Rental charges can be prohibitive for those on low incomes in the Braintree district and the requirement by most landlords that a month's rent and a deposit (often equal to one month's rent) is paid at the commencement of a tenancy adds to the lack of affordability. In addition, if renting privately, people are unlikely to be able to afford to save for a deposit and fees to purchase a property.

### **5.2.3 Right to Buy**

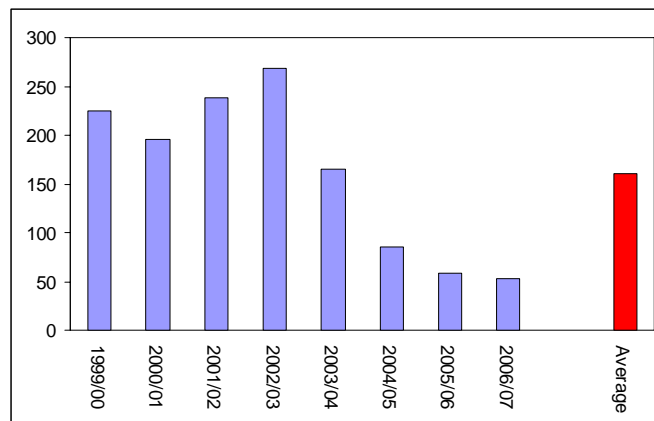
At the point of stock transfer, there were 8,156 Council properties. This figure decreases year by year mainly due to Right to Buy sales, whilst there is an increase of properties owned by Housing Associations. Since 2000, 1289 local authority properties have been purchased under Right to Buy and there has been an increase of 710 in Housing Association stock for the same period.

The figures show that there has been a decrease in the number of properties sold over the last five years. This may be due to increases in property value. It is estimated that sales under right to buy will continue, however due to the unsettled financial climate it is not possible to provide realistic predictions at this time.

Figure 8 below provides the data and a graph to illustrate the number of properties sold under right to buy from 1999/00 – 2007/07. This illustrates the trends in sales. Interestingly, it appears that sales have slightly decreased in the last three financial years. Right to buy sales continue to be below the national average.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1999/2000	225
2000/01	196
2001/02	238
2002/03	269
2003/04	165
2004/05	85
2005/06	58
2006/07	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>1289</b>

*Figure 8 - BDC Right to buy sales 1999 - 2007*



## 5.2.4 The Housing Needs Register

### i) Numbers Registered

As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 there were 2361 applicants registered as requiring social rented accommodation and 817 applicants who are already social housing tenants requiring a transfer to alternative social rented accommodation.

### ii) Priority Banding

As previously mentioned, the system for assessing housing need was amended to a priority banding system in August 2007. Figure 9 below, provides a breakdown of the number of applicants registered in each priority band (as at 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008).

Priority Band	Total number of applicants
A	3
B	246
C	308
D	2,648

*Figure 9 HNR – breakdown of applicants in each band (as at 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008)*

The highest numbers of applicants are registered in Band D, which is applied to those applicants with little or no housing requirements. At the time of writing this, there were three applicants in Band A, the highest priority category for those requiring immediate assistance.

It should be noted, that the numbers registered on the HNR and in each priority band is subject to daily change following the selection of candidates for vacancies and daily additions to the register.

### iii) Priority Banding – Common Reasons

Analysis of the most common reasons for priority reasons in each band is listed below.

#### **Band A**

- Urgent medical or welfare need

#### **Band B**

- Homeless households that the Council must house under the homeless legislation
- High medical or welfare awards
- Under occupation of a social rented property
- Overcrowding in social rented property

### **Band C**

- Overcrowding in private sector accommodation
- Sharing facilities
- Homeless households that the Council has no duty to house under the homeless legislation
- Medium medical or welfare need

### **Band D**

- No housing need

#### **iv) Level of New Lets from the Housing Needs Register**

The total number of lets as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 was 768. Of these, 78.6% went to new let applicants and 21.4% to applicants requiring a transfer to alternative social rented accommodation.

At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007, the total new lets to Housing Associations (other than Greenfields) were 144 due to households taking up BDC nominations for RSL housing.

Figure 10 below illustrates the number of new lets and transfers between 2000 -2007.

#### **Housing Movements: New Lets and Transfers 2002 – 2007**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number on HNR (as at 31/3/07)</b>	<b>Number of first time lets from HNR (as at 31/3/07)</b>	<b>Number of transfer lets from HNR (as at 31/3/07)</b>	<b>% of number of movements from the HNR</b>
2002/03	2464	488	189	28.5%
2003/04	2382	473	209	28.7%
2004/05	2587	440	169	23.5%
2005/06	2563	671	152	26.2%
2006/07	2361	604	164	32.5%

**Figure 10 – Housing Movements: new lets and transfers 2002-2007:  
Source: BDC Computer statistics**

## 5.3 Homelessness

### 5.3.1 Records and Monitoring

The Council is obliged to keep accurate records relating to all presentations and acceptances of those presenting as homeless.

The information collated is supplied to central Government on a quarterly and annual basis in the form of statistical returns (known as P1E and HIP returns). In order to accurately record the information required, the Council uses a specialist computer programme, which is tailored to information requested on the statistical returns.

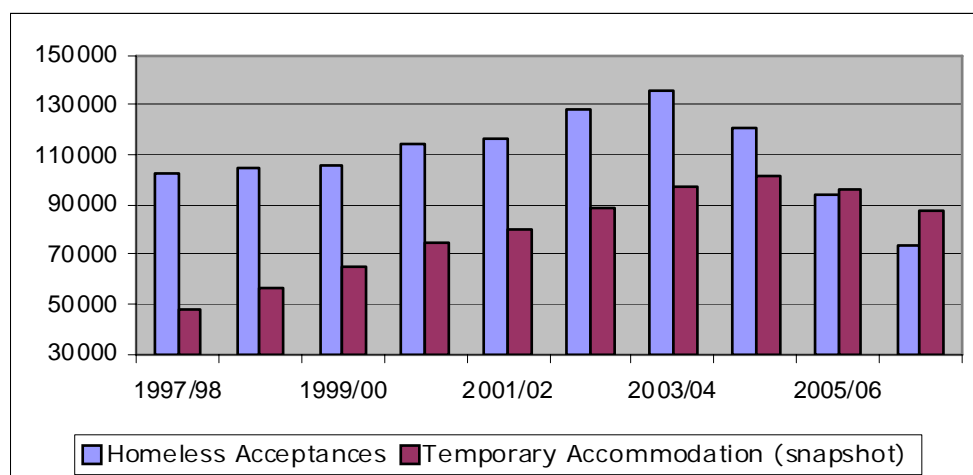
The information collated provides a breakdown of various elements directly related to homeless presentation.

The purpose of gathering this detailed level of information is to assist both the Council and central Government in identifying key trends and where possible, developing possible strategies to prevent or alleviate homelessness.

### 5.3.2 National and Local Trends

The overall trend nationally since 2003/04 has been a fall in the number of households accepted as homeless. The number of households in temporary accommodation has also fallen but the trend started a year later:

#### National Homelessness Trends



*Figure 11. Source: CLG*

The trend locally follows a similar pattern to the national one although the number of acceptances is still higher locally than our use of temporary accommodation:

## Braintree District Homelessness Trends

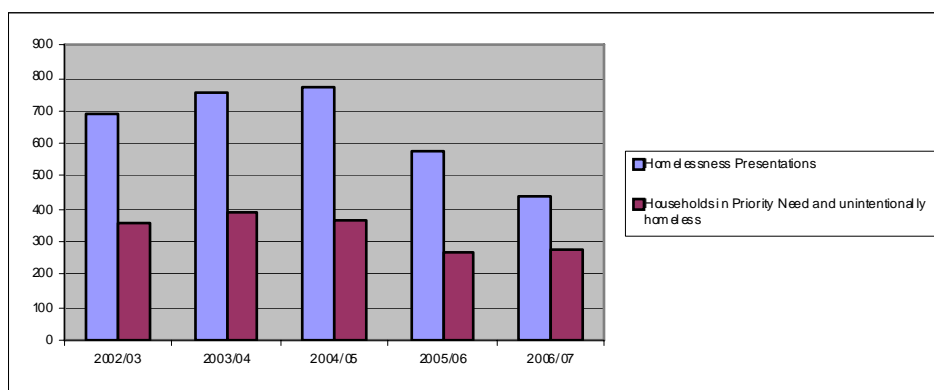


Figure 12. Source: BDC submissions to CLG (P1e)

The fall in the number of people presenting as homeless is influenced by a number of factors. These include:

- Increased Council activity aimed at preventing homelessness;
- Increased supply of affordable housing – Braintree has provided over 300 new affordable homes in the last 2 years; *and*
- Relatively low interest rates and a thriving housing market.

There are likely to be pressures in the future but their impact is uncertain. These include:

- A slow-down in the market, with generally higher interest rates;
- Rising repossessions – we may see an increase in presentations from home-owners but also potentially from tenants of buy-to-let landlords experiencing financial problems; *and*
- A possible slow-down in affordable housing supply mirroring the overall slow-down in house building.

### 5.3.3 Presentations and Decisions

Figures 13 – 15 below, provide data and graphs to illustrate the number of homeless presentations and decisions for the last four financial years.

#### i) Total Number of Homeless Presentations/Decisions

	2003 - 2004	2004 -2005	2005 -2006	2006 –2007
April – June	191	203	161	122
July – Sept	177	231	146	127
Oct –Dec	212	159	139	91
Jan – March	177	176	129	101
<b>Total</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>441</b>

Figure 13: Actual figures for the total number of presentations/decisions: Source: BDC P1E returns

## ii) Breakdown of Decision Outcomes

Decision outcomes	2003 - 2004	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006	2006-2007
Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need	390	363	269	274
Eligible, homeless, priority need but intentionally homeless	39	42	58	51
Eligible, homeless but not in priority Need	224	237	128	62
Eligible but not homeless	87	119	117	50
Ineligible households	17	8	3	4
<b>Total decisions</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>441</b>

Figure 14: Breakdown of decision outcomes: Source BDC P1E returns

## iii) Total Number of Acceptances as Eligible, Homeless and in Priority Need

	2003 - 2004	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006	2006 - 2007
April - June	110	95	83	72
July - Sept	83	101	63	77
Oct -Dec	104	72	53	60
Jan - March	93	95	70	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>274</b>

Figure 15: Actual figures for total number of acceptances: Source: BDC P1E returns

This information illustrates that the number of homeless presentations and acceptances has steadily decreased over the last two financial years.

The decline in applications and acceptances is attributed to the increased focus on prevention work. Through the increased emphasis on prevention work, it is hoped that the number of homeless applications and acceptances will continue to decrease.

The Council is mindful that recent changes in the housing market and increased levels of repossessions (particularly within the "sub prime" market and buy to let market) could increase the number of homeless presentations in the future. At present, it is not possible to predict the impact of these problems, but the Council is committed to its prevention agenda and will continue to work proactively with any person at risk of homelessness as a result of repossession of a property.

### 5.3.4 Categories of Priority Need

The Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 outline the legal categories of priority need.

Figure 16 illustrates the number of accepted homeless applicants with individual categories of priority need for the last five financial years.

#### Breakdown of Homeless Applicants by Priority Need Category

Priority Need Category	2003 – 2004	2004 – 2005	2005 – 2006	2006 – 2007
<b>Households with dependent children</b>	156	161	130	150
<i>1 child</i>	89	86	67	65
<i>2 children</i>	47	52	37	55
<i>3 children</i>	20	23	26	30
<b>Households where a member is pregnant/ no other dependent children</b>	71	49	43	45
<b>Households where a member is vulnerable due to:</b>				
<b>Old age</b>	44	16	9	4
<b>Physical disability</b>	22	26	21	19
<b>Mental illness/disability</b>	32	38	19	13
<b>Vulnerable young person</b>	14	15	5	10
<b>Domestic violence</b>	43	41	23	17
<b>Violence (other)</b>	3	8	5	8
<b>Care Leaver</b>	1	1	5	5
<b>Other</b>	0	4	7	3
<b>Homeless as a result of an emergency (eg. flood, fire)</b>	4	4	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>274</b>

*Figure 16: Breakdown of homeless applicants by priority need category: Source: BDC P1E*

The records indicate that the main category of priority need is households with dependent children or where a member of the household is pregnant with no other dependent children.

There has been an increase in the number of applicants eligible for assistance as a result of having dependent children. The breakdown of the households with dependent children for 2006/07.

### Breakdown of Homeless Applicants with Dependent Children

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Couple with dependant children	N/a	N/a	53	82
<u>Lone parent household with dependant children:</u>				
•Male	N/a	N/a	12	12
•Female	N/a	N/a	107	112
<u>One person household:</u>				
•Male	N/a	N/a	40	36
•Female	N/a	N/a	51	21
All other household groups	N/a	N/a	6	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	N/a	N/a	<b>269</b>	<b>274</b>

*Figure 17: Breakdown of homeless applicants with dependant children: Source: BDC P1E return*

Many households present with multiple issues, for example, a single person with children who is the victim of domestic violence. In this instance the main reason for being found in priority need will be recorded as "domestic violence" and therefore the fact that they also have children is not represented.

### 5.3.5 Reasons for Loss of Accommodation

Figure 18 below, provides a breakdown of all reasons for loss of accommodation over the last four financial years.

#### Reasons for Loss of Accommodation 2003/04 – 2006/07

	2003 - 2004	2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2006- 2007
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	101	81	59	61
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	30	26	16	21
Non violent breakdown of relationship with partner	19	42	34	21
<u>Violence:</u>				
• Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	47	37	26	17
• Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	6	10	7	6
• Racially motivated violence	1	0	0	0
• Other forms of violence	0	1	0	0
<u>Harassment, threats or intimidation:</u>				
• Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0
• Other forms of harassment	1	1	1	0
Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	13	12	23	32
<u>Rent arrears on:</u>				
• Local authority or other public sector dwellings	1	3	0	2
• Registered social landlord or other housing association dwellings	0	1	1	1
• Private sector dwellings	4	3	4	3
<u>Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to:</u>				
• Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	98	94	60	75
• Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	45	33	23	22
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	0	0	0	0
<u>Left an institution or LA care:</u>				
• Left prison/n remand			4	0
• Left hospital			0	5
• Left other institution or LA care			7	4
• Total	11	7		
<u>Other reason for loss of last settled home:</u>				
• Left HM Forces	0	-	0	0
• Other reasons (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	13	12	4	3

**Figure 18: Main reasons for loss of accommodation: Source PIE returns/HIP returns**

Historically the two main reasons for homelessness in the district are parents unwilling to accommodate and loss of rented or tied accommodation, mainly as a result of the termination of assured short hold tenancies. Below figure 19 illustrates that these are the primary reasons for homelessness and account for almost half of all presentations.

## Main Reasons for Loss of Last Settled Accommodation

	2003-2004	2004 -2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Parental evictions	101	81	59	61
Loss of rented or tied accommodation	143	127	83	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Total households accepted</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>274</b>

*Figure 19: Most common reasons for loss of accommodation: Source: BDC P1E*

### 5.3.6 Lets to Homeless Households

Lets to homeless households (including those accepted under homeless legislation and those found as non priority or intentionally homeless) are made via the HNR.

Partnership arrangements with housing associations, via nomination arrangements enable the Council to discharge any legal duties and assist homeless households.

The figures for the number of lets to priority need households 2006/07 represented 29% of all BDC lets. The highest number of lets was of two bedroom properties, 180 of which were let to priority need households.

### 5.3.7 Prevention of Homelessness

In the last two financial years, the Government has requested that all Local Authorities provide figures for the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented. These figures are reported as a best value performance indicator (BVPI).

The Council has achieved a good rate of success in preventing homelessness. Figure 20 provides the actual number of cases where homelessness has been prevented in the last two financial years.

#### **Number of Cases where Homelessness has been prevented (2005/06 – 2006/07)**

<b>Financial year</b>	<b>Number of cases</b>
2005/06	294
2006/07	299

**Figure 20: Number of cases where homelessness has been prevented:**  
Source: BVPI records

The Council has achieved a top quartile status for the number of cases prevented, (per 1000 homeless cases).

At present the Council keeps a database to record all cases where homelessness has been prevented. The information collated includes details of why the applicant was at risk of losing their accommodation, any referrals to appropriate organisations/departments and where alternative accommodation has been found.

The Council hopes that by collating extensive information on all applicants assisted under prevention work, it will help to identify key trends, repeat presentations and enhance the service.

We anticipate a specialist IT programme will be purchased in the future, designed to record all housing advice/homelessness/prevention and housing needs assessment. This specialist IT programme will be directly linked to the new Choice Based Lettings scheme.

### 5.3.8 Rent Deposit and Rent Bond Scheme

As mentioned previously, the Rent Deposit and Rent Bond Scheme are used as tools to assist in preventing homelessness.

Both schemes have achieved good success. Due to budget limits, the schemes can only assist a small proportion of all households presenting as homeless. Despite this, the schemes remain effective and the Council is committed to continuing with the schemes.

Figure 21 below, provides information relating to the number of households assisted under each scheme and the total expenditure for each financial year.

### i) Rent Bond Scheme

Financial year	Number of cases
2004-2005	6
2005-2006	14
2006-2007	22
2007-2008	1

### ii) Rent Deposit Scheme

Financial year	Number of cases	Total expenditure
2006-2007	21	£20,523.38
2007-2008	25	£25,648.88

Figure 21: Number of cases assisted by Rent Bond and Rent Deposit Scheme:  
Source: BDC prevention records

### 5.3.9 BVPI results 2006/07

As mentioned above, the Council has achieved top quartile performance status in five out of the seven homeless BVPIs. Figure 22 below, provides further details.

BVPI Description	%	Quartile position
183a Length of stay in B&B	0	Top
203 (% change in the number of families in Temporary Accommodation)	- 39.9%	Top
213 (prevention of homeless per 1000 household)	5%	Top
225 (provision of help to victims of Domestic Violence)	91%	Top
202 (number of rough sleepers)	0	n/a
214 (repeat homelessness)	0.72%	Second
183b (length of stay for families in hostel accommodation)	15.5 weeks	Third

Figure 22 above, illustrates that the Council is achieving and performing well in most of the BVPIs. Further improvement is needed in meeting the target for length of stay for families in hostel accommodation. This is an ongoing action and will continue to be addressed as part of the new strategy.

## **6. Internal Review of the Service 2007**

In preparation for the stock transfer, an external consultant carried out an internal review. The aim of this review was to help the strategic housing service prepare for the future following the housing stock transfer.

The review focused on the whole housing service to be retained by the Council following the stock transfer. This included an assessment of the homeless service and suggestions for future development.

The themes from this review have been fundamental in developing the new five year strategic action plan. These include the following:

- Development of protocols with key organisations and partners
- Review existing procedures
- Identify innovative methods of using existing resources (both staff and financial), this includes pooling existing budgets into one homelessness prevention fund, to facilitate proactive methods for preventing homelessness.
- Developing alternative housing options
- New focus for the service

## 7. Update of Achievements from Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2003-07

Proposed Actions	Achievements
<p><b>Publicity</b></p> <p>Target publicity of services</p>	<p><b>1. Publicity Leaflet</b> Publicity leaflet printed and available at all Council Offices and partner organisations.</p> <p><b>2. Website</b> Council website developed and continuously updated to reflect accurate information and advice.</p>
<p><b>Development of the Housing Advisory Service</b></p>	<p><b>1. Housing Advisory Services</b></p> <p>Housing Advisory Service has been established and operational. The service focuses on prevention of homelessness and works in partnership with key agencies, organisations and private landlords. Figures show that the service has been widely used (number of people seen by the Housing Advisory Service are; 2004/5 - 1264 people, 2005/6 - 1582 people, 2006/7 1398 people).</p> <p>The Council continuously reviews the service to ensure that it meets its objectives, and intends to carry out an external audit of the service to identify any gaps and possible improvement to existing systems and practices.</p>
<p><b>Private Sector</b></p> <p>Seek to work in partnership with the private sector to improve provision of private rented accommodation</p>	<p><b>1. Links with Private Landlords</b></p> <p>The Housing Advisory Service has been proactively working with a number of private landlords in the district to secure access to private rented accommodation.</p>

	<p><b>2. Development of a Rent Deposit and Rent Bond Scheme</b></p> <p>A Rent Deposit Scheme and Rent Bond Scheme has been established to help applicants with deposit payments.</p> <p><b>3. Development of a Private Landlord Forum</b></p> <p>A Private Landlord Forum has been established to foster good relationships with local landlords. This forum also provides local landlords with the opportunity to receive advice and information relating to tenancies, regulations and changes in legislation.</p> <p>The actions listed above have resulted in much better relations with local landlords and greater access to accommodation in the district.</p> <p>The Council continually reviews the services linked to the private sector to ensure the above continue to meet the strategic objectives.</p>
<p><b>Develop a Floating Support Scheme</b> (linked to Essex County Council Supporting People Strategy Action Plan)</p>	<p>Floating Support Scheme now provided in the Braintree District by Swan Housing Association</p>
<p><b>Domestic Violence</b></p> <p>a) Working with the 'domestic violence panel' and other agencies to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the problem.</p> <p>b) Introduce domestic violence cards (Strategic Plan for inter-agency action on domestic violence in Essex objective A).</p>	<p>a) Literature published and domestic violence awareness open days held.</p> <p>b) Domestic violence cards introduced.</p>

<p>c) Participate in the Domestic Violence Panel and the Community Safety Strategy.</p> <p>d) Train staff to ensure sensitive and responsive service to the customer. Front line staff to attend inter-agency training (Strategic plan for inter-agency action on domestic violence in Essex objective C/D).</p> <p>e) Develop a standardised system to promote better recording by agencies and to assist in identifying incidents by location (Housing Strategy priority 4.3) (Strategic plan for inter-agency action on domestic violence in Essex objective G/J).</p>	<p>c) Active participation in the Domestic Violence Panel.</p> <p>d) Staff attended training courses every year. BWA has been running training sessions year on year.</p> <p>e) We have not been able to standardise a system for recording domestic violence as a multi agency group but each agency is more aware of and regularly producing these statistics.</p>
<p><b>Monitoring</b></p> <p>a) Ensure accurate monitoring of homeless households and those threatened with homelessness</p> <p>b) Monitoring of tenants at risk from eviction and repossession and target housing advice and welfare rights advice to these groups</p> <p>c) Regular compilation and monitoring of statistics on the causes of evictions.</p>	<p>a) P1Es are submitted every quarter to the government department and are publicly available.</p> <p>b) The council completed procedure on rent arrears completed. Eviction letters reviewed.</p> <p>c) Completed</p>
<p><b>Housing Benefit</b></p> <p>a) Feed concerns over Standard Rent Allowances through the Essex Housing Officers Group (EHOG)</p>	<p>a) Concerns raised at EHOG</p>

<p>b) Investigate possibility Housing Benefit (for RSL schemes) all ending on the same day. This would help the support provider can ensure the Housing Benefit form is completed. Also investigate possibility of RSLs verifying Housing Benefit forms</p>	<p>b) Investigated and found not to be possible under Housing Benefit rules. All Housing Advisory, Housing Assessment Team and Homeless staff trained to verify housing benefit applications.</p>
<p><b>Representation at Court</b></p> <p>Investigate possibility of Housing Advisory Service representing private tenants at eviction hearings</p>	<p>This has been accomplished.</p>
<p><b>Water Meters</b></p> <p>Investigate the installation of water meters – in order to prevent homelessness</p>	<p>Not implemented</p>
<p><b>Centralised Service (Homelessness)</b></p> <p>Investigate the possibility of centralising the homeless service in order to ensure cover and comparative caseloads</p>	<p>Completed Homelessness was centralised for efficiency in 2004</p>
<p><b>Bed and Breakfast</b></p> <p>Avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation (Housing Strategy priority 3.14)</p>	<p>Achieved, the Council continues not to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation.</p>

<p><b>Temporary Accommodation</b></p> <p>a) Develop the roles of the House Manager at Craig and College House and a designated Housing Advisory Officer to cover support to all customers in temporary accommodation.</p> <p>b) Develop partnership working with other agencies to provide holistic support to customers in temporary accommodation.</p>	<p>House Manager and a designated Housing Advisory Officer work closely to support residents with their tenancies and avoid repeat homelessness. (Craig and College House due transfer to Family Mosaic in 2008/09).</p> <p>Work with floating support services established to provide residents with general support whilst in temporary accommodation and as part of resettlement into permanent accommodation.</p>
<p><b>Develop a Rent Deposit and Rent Bond Scheme</b></p>	<p>Completed Both schemes developed and well established with good success.</p>
<p><b>Flats Over Shops</b></p> <p>Review the use of flats over shops</p>	<p>An area for further development with Housing Association Partners and linked to the new Empty Homes Strategy. See new Strategy Action Plan.</p>
<p><b>Credit Union</b></p> <p>Investigate the feasibility of working more pro-actively with a credit union</p>	<p>Links with Credit Union established. Credit Union actively working in temporary/supported schemes to promote savings and money management.</p>
<p><b>Hostel/Temporary Accommodation</b></p> <p>a) Identify need for further hostel provision within BDC housing stock.</p> <p>b) Identify need for "emergency" accommodation.</p>	<p>a) We need a limited expansion of hostel accommodation. New Directions in Braintree is unable to meet the demand for places in the scheme. Also need to review how hostel accommodation is accessed in the district.</p> <p>b) Assessment carried out and 4 units of accommodation designated as "emergency". This continues following the stock transfer.</p>

<p><b>Mediation Service</b></p> <p>Investigate the need for a mediation service for young people at risk of homelessness</p>	<p>Investigation completed and found that mediation is expensive. Concern that the service would not be cost effective or effective. Decision taken not to develop a mediation service. To be reviewed in the new Strategy Action Plan.</p>
<p><b>Right to Buy</b></p> <p>Investigate changes to resale options on RTB properties in rural areas</p>	<p>Completed. Not applicable to the Braintree District.</p>
<p><b>Referral Mechanisms for Young Single Homeless Applicants</b></p> <p>Develop a single referral form for all supported housing projects for young people</p>	<p>Completed. Referral form developed and operational. Monitoring of the mechanism has found it is successful and has assisted applicants by only having to complete one form for all supported housing projects.</p>
<p><b>Lettings Policy</b></p> <p>Develop a new lettings policy for the district</p>	<p>Completed. New district Allocations Policy completed. This included development of a new priority banding system, which has been successfully operating since August 2007.</p>
<p><b>Review of Homelessness and Allocation Service Structure</b></p>	<p>Completed. A full review of the existing structure has taken place. This review was linked to the stock transfer. Teams are now established and where appropriate, job descriptions have been amended to reflect the service following stock transfer. To develop a comprehensive preventative service, the Council has integrated the Welfare Rights Team into the Homeless and Housing Advice Service. This takes effect from April 2008.</p>
<p><b>Review of Interview Facilities at Causeway House Braintree</b></p>	<p>Review completed and identified the need for two purpose build interview rooms. The rooms have now been built.</p>

<p><b>Training of Staff</b></p> <p>Staff to receive training on key issues (including mental health, HIV/AIDs/Substance Misuse/Disability/Domestic Violence) and customer service.</p>	<p>Training programmes established and regular training sessions held.</p>
<p><b>Development with Braintree Women's Aid</b></p> <p>Assist BWA in determining the lack of refuge spaces in the district. If necessary, assist BWA in finding alternative property and location.</p> <p>Work with BWA to investigate the possibility of providing disabled facilities.</p>	<p>Discussions held, new lease agreement with the council that includes a clause for the council to consider a reduction of the lease rental payments for agreed improvements to the building.</p>
<p><b>Empty Homes Strategy</b> Develop an Empty Homes Strategy</p>	<p>Need for a new strategy identified in new Strategy Action Plan</p>
<p><b>Partnership Development</b></p> <p>a) Raise the possibility of an Essex wide user group forum at EHO</p> <p>b) Investigate the possibility of working with the Care Trust and health visitors to identify families at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>c) Establish multi agency working with Social Services</p> <p>d) Develop links with the Connexions service for 13-19 year olds (Essex County Council Supporting People Strategy action plan).</p>	<p>This issue has been raised and is being addressed at a sub-regional basis.</p> <p>This issue has been raised and is being addressed at a sub-regional level.</p> <p>Further work required.</p> <p>Regular contact with staff at Connexions. The Housing Advisory Young Person Officer is the main contact at BDC.</p>

<p><b>Tenancy Agreements</b></p> <p>Investigate changing tenancy agreements to make provision for evicting convicted perpetrators of domestic violence, if it is felt that such a course will increase the protection of victims (Strategic plan for inter-agency action on domestic violence in Essex objective B).</p>	<p>As part of the housing stock transfer, Greenfields have incorporated this action point into their new tenancy agreements.</p>
<p><b>Establish Links with Schools</b></p> <p>Undertake sessions on homelessness and housing in schools.</p>	<p>Over 1300 children have been seen by the Housing Advisory Young Person's officer in seven local schools. All schools were approached; however some did not wish to participate.</p>
<p><b>Young People in Temporary Accommodation</b></p> <p>Provide support for young people becoming tenants for the first time including provision of part furnished accommodation with floating support (Housing Strategy priority 4.2)</p>	<p>Family Mosaic HA developed specialist accommodation. Agreements set with floating support services and operating successfully.</p>
<p><b>Life Skills</b></p> <p>Investigate the provision and possible extension of life skills courses</p>	<p>Life skills course established and run on a regular basis at the Mother and Baby Housing Scheme.</p>
<p><b>Specialist Officer for Young People</b></p> <p>Investigate the possibility of having one Housing Advisory Officer specifically for Young People.</p>	<p>Housing Advisory Young Person's officer appointed and is actively working with young people and relevant organisations.</p>

<p><b>Care Leavers</b></p> <p>a) Develop a pro active and planned approach for care leavers.</p> <p>b) Educational package designed for care leavers</p>	<p>a) An agreement now in place to provide planned move-on accommodation in the social sector for those young people leaving the 8-bed scheme in Witham.</p> <p>b) Completed.</p>
<p><b>Accommodation for Older People</b></p> <p>a) Provide/facilitate an extra care sheltered housing scheme for the elderly</p> <p>b) Review current Council owned sheltered accommodation</p>	<p>An Extra Care Sheltered Housing Scheme opened in Braintree in January 07 – Owned and managed by the Braintree and Bocking Abbeyfield Society.</p> <p>The council’s sheltered housing transferred to Greenfields Community Housing. As part of the housing transfer funding is available to improve accommodation. Prior to the housing transfer two difficult to let sheltered housing schemes were decommissioned. Subject to funding, a new extra care sheltered scheme will be developed on one of the sites.</p>
<p><b>Temporary Accommodation</b></p> <p>a) Ensure suitable temporary accommodation is always available.</p> <p>b) Undertake and monitor customer satisfaction surveys for Craig House and College House. To include monitoring of statutory agencies satisfaction survey.</p>	<p>Review undertaken and completed.</p> <p>Monitoring completed.</p>

<p><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>a) The provision of suitable accommodation for people with mental health problems.</p> <p>b) Agree protocol for discharge from hospitals</p>	<p>a) Specialist housing provision available in the district with NACRO Housing Association at a supported housing scheme in Halstead and Braintree.</p> <p>b) Not completed. Carried forward to new strategy.</p>
<p><b>Ethnic Minorities</b></p> <p>a) Homeless services for ethnic minority groups. Ensure that people from minority groups are given equal access to all services and their needs are taken into account in all aspects of service delivery (Housing Strategy priority 5.110)</p> <p>b) Ensure that data on the number of people from different backgrounds is collected consistently and monitored regularly (Housing Strategy priority 1.5)</p>	<p>Translation service established through Language Line.</p> <p>Partnership work through the Economic Migrant Project (Uttlesford, East Herts and Braintree District Councils) has secured a post for a Migrant Community Development Officer. The Officer holds drop in sessions to discuss problems and assist with enquiries</p> <p>Proposal of a Multi-Lingual website by BDC's Equity and Access Focus Group for all Housing related pages.</p> <p>The new Housing Allocations Policy was developed in accordance with the principles of equality. The principle of equal opportunity is to ensure the provision of opportunities for all individuals regardless of gender, race, disability and age, with regard to good practice and the regulations of the Commission for Racial Equality's Rented Housing Code of Practice.</p> <p>A new Greater Haven Gateway sub group for Equality and Diversity, established and chaired by Colchester BC.</p> <p>Participation of a Regional BME Monitoring Data Pilot, initiated by EERA.</p>

<p><b>Racial/Homophobic Incidents</b></p> <p>Develop clear procedures for multi-agency action in cases of racial and homophobic incidents (Housing Strategy priority 5.4)</p>	<p>Introduction of a Racial and Homophobic Incidents Panel, by BDC, with the following involved agencies: Victim Support Essex, BDC, Greenfields, Essex Approach to Equality and Diversity, Action for Men, and Al-Falah Braintree Islamic Centre. -Publication of a guide to Support Services within the District for victims of Hate Crime.</p>
<p><b>Links with the Probation Service</b></p> <p>a) Strengthen working relationships between the Council and the Probation Service</p> <p>b) Develop a staff exchange scheme</p> <p>c) Develop an agreed formula on vulnerability between the Council's Housing service and the Probation Service.</p>	<p>This work is ongoing. We have organised some exchange visits. Further work is required.</p>

## **8. Evaluation**

### **8.1 Achievements**

Following an extensive review of the service it is evident that the Council continues to successfully manage homelessness and housing need.

#### **8.1.1 Prevention Work**

The statistics show that the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented has increased. As part of the review process, it is noted that the uncertain financial climate may alter this trend.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict the full impact of the current financial climate; however the new strategy will continue to focus on prevention work and actively working to develop alternative accommodation options in the private sector. It is hoped that this approach (amongst other strategic actions), will help to manage any increases in the number of homeless presentations.

#### **8.1.2 Performance**

##### **a) Outcomes from Strategic Action Plan 2002-07**

Assessment of the outcomes from the last strategy has found that the Council has been successful in achieving the majority of strategic actions set in 2003. Any outstanding actions will be carried forward into the new strategic action plan.

##### **b) BVPI Performance**

The latest BVPI figures show that the Council is achieving top quartile status in five out of the seven Homelessness BVPIs. As part of the continuous review of the service and performance, the new strategy will ensure that further work is undertaken to improve on the two lower quartile areas (repeat homelessness and length of stay for families in hostel accommodation).

##### **c) Use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation**

The Council has maintained its corporate objective not to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

##### **d) Reduction of the Use of Temporary Accommodation**

In line with Government recommendation, the Council has reduced its use of temporary accommodation by 50% in the last five-year period.

### **8.1.3 Continuous Improvement**

Since the last strategy, the Council has centralised its service in order to provide a more efficient and cost effective service. This work is to continue as part of the new strategic aims, to ensure that the Council maintains a high quality service.

## **8.2 Obstacles**

Like many other Local Authority areas, the main obstacle is the availability of low cost social housing verses overall demand.

## **8.3 The New Strategic Aims for the Next Five Years**

### **Priority 1 Joint Working and Partnerships**

The Council has good links with all its key partners. Further work has been identified to build on these existing links and to facilitate better working practices. This work includes the development of service protocols and joint training.

Ensuring good working and partnerships arrangements continue to develop is key in homelessness prevention and providing people with the right support if they become homeless.

### **Priority 2 Prevention of Homelessness**

In terms of homelessness, a renewed focus on developing further preventative measures is needed to assist any person who is at risk of becoming homeless.

As part of the development of the strategy, the Council intends to take account of good practice guidance and examples. Through the strategy, the Council aims to ensure that its prevention solutions provide effective and sound solutions, and the systems do not act as a mechanism for gate keeping resources.

There are number of supported housing schemes operating in the district. These schemes provide vital accommodation and support for young people and those with multiple requirements.

It has been identified that access arrangements to these schemes requires further attention, since a number operate on a referral basis and require assessment through an allocation panel. The result is that it is often difficult to access available vacancies in emergencies. One of the areas for future development will be to negotiate access arrangements to these schemes.

### **Priority 3 Support for Vulnerable People**

The strategy aims to review and improve the support services for vulnerable people. This includes reviewing the existing floating support service and advice services.

From the review, it has been identified that there is a need to create more movement within supported housing schemes. It is proposed that the schemes will be given a set number of nominations each year specifically for residents who are ready to move into permanent accommodation.

Through this system of nominations, it is believed that the Council will ensure that existing schemes do not become blocked and will ensure that residents are able to move into suitable accommodation once their support needs have been met. Furthermore, the Council will be able to nominate homeless people to any of the vacancies that arise through these nomination arrangements.

The strategy identifies that work with each supported housing scheme needs to commence. Once in place, the nomination arrangements will be monitored to ensure that the system is providing effective results.

### **Priority 4 Provision of Accommodation**

A key council priority over the next four years is to develop more affordable housing in the district. Consultation with residents has indicated this is a major concern.

Another key area is to continue to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and maintain the Council's record for not using bed and breakfast accommodation.

The strategy includes further work with the private rented sector. The actions include working with private landlords and Colne Housing (Private Sector Leasing Scheme) to increase the access to private sector accommodation. At present the Council has excellent links with a number of private landlords in the district. This work will also link with a new Empty Homes Strategy.

### **Priority 5 Invest to Save**

This strategic aim focuses on making the best use of available financial and staff resources. This will include pooling existing budgets as one prevention fund, to allow greater flexibility when preventing homelessness.

## **Priority 6 Administering Homelessness More Effectively**

The strategy aims to ensure that standards and performance are monitored and improved.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the Council intends to review the service, so as to identify any areas for improvement. This will include the introduction of quality assessments on casework, a formal audit of the service and examples of good working practices from Councils that are Homeless Regional Champions.

There is also a commitment to developing customer involvement to help shape the service.



**Braintree District Council  
Homelessness Strategy Action Plan  
2008**

**Version 1 for Consultation 7 April 08  
to 30 June 08**

**Version 1 Issued 7 April 08**  
**Consultation Period 7 April 08 to the 30 June 08**  
**Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2008-2013**

**About this Action Plan**

In July 2008 Braintree District Council will publish a new Homelessness Review and Strategy 2008 – 2013.

The Homelessness Strategy sets out how the Council will address homelessness in the District. This strategy is based on the Homelessness Review which is a piece of research that identifies the levels of homelessness in district and which groups of people are most affected.

The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan will be monitored at meetings of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and updated annually, including new targets as identified by the Group.

This is a first draft Action Plan that we are publishing for comment. We would expect some changes to be made and intend to publish a second draft of the plan mid June 2008, which will have considered the comments received to date.

The Homelessness Review and Strategy will be considered by Braintree Districts Council's Cabinet on the 7 July 08.

Key Contacts for discussing the Homelessness Review or Strategy Action Plan are:-

Joanne Albini – ext 2118 or email [joanne.albini@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:joanne.albini@braintree.gov.uk)

Daryl Brotchie – ext 2737 or email [daryl.brotchie@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:daryl.brotchie@braintree.gov.uk)

Tim Lucas - ext 2124 or email [tim.lucas@braintree.gov.uk](mailto:tim.lucas@braintree.gov.uk)



3. Working with the Greater Haven Gateway Sub-Regional Housing Partners.	Explore opportunities to work together on issues where we could achieve more together and maximise resources for example: - commission research, joint training, advice line working with Regional Homelessness Champions.	Sept 08 *	From existing officer time at present
4. Improve local knowledge of relevant organisations working in the district.	BDC to offer training on homelessness prevention, options, how homelessness applications are administered and assessed by the Council.  Continue to learn from other relevant organisations about their services.	April 09 onwards	From existing-officer time at present
5. Seek regular feedback from statutory and voluntary agencies	To help improve our understanding of the needs of other organisation and their services users.	April 09 onwards	From existing officer time at present

\* Meeting of the Sub Regional Homelessness Sub Group September 08

<b>Priority 2 Prevention of Homelessness</b>			
<b>Priorities</b>	<b>What Do We Want to Achieve</b>	<b>Provisional Timescale</b>	<b>BDC Resources</b>
<p>1. Introduce a Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings by November 2008</p> <p><b><i>BDC Corporate Action Plan 2008/09</i></b></p>	<p>A Sub Regional Allocations Policy</p> <p>A Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme Choice that provides an opportunity to develop a more effective and transparent allocations system.</p> <p>A scheme that gives people more choice where they live</p>	Nov 08	Resources have been identified for the new scheme
<p>2. Work with registered Social Landlords to formalise how homelessness prevention will be incorporated into their procedures for dealing with rent arrears and anti-social behaviour</p>	<p>Develop a protocol with key housing associations to ensure the appropriate advice, support and information is provided at key stages to prevent eviction.</p>	April 09	From existing officer time at present
<p>3. Explore establishing a Supported Housing Allocation Panel for accommodation where stays are time limited.</p>	<p>To explore the options to establish a coordinated single panel approach to selecting residents for the most appropriate vacancies in supported housing schemes (this does not include permanent housing where tenants receive support e.g. sheltered housing).</p>	March 09	From existing officer time at present

<p>4. Reduce the number of young people evicted from the family home.</p>	<p>Develop education packages to be delivered in schools and colleges to make young people aware of the realities of living independently and the implications of homelessness.</p> <p>Review availability of mediation services for families at risk of break down.</p> <p>Explore options for providing supported lodging accommodation for young homeless people.</p> <p>Explore option for providing emergency accommodation for young homeless people.</p>	<p>April 10</p>	<p>From existing officer time at present</p>
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<b>Priority 3 Support for Vulnerable People</b>			
<b>Priorities</b>	<b>What Do We Want to Achieve</b>	<b>Provisional Timescale</b>	<b>BDC Resources</b>
<p>1. Floating Support Scheme: -</p> <p>Ensure floating support is responsive to individual needs</p>	<p>Agree protocols that will enable a simple referral process and prompt assessment so that people can receive support as soon as they need it - This can be essential if immediate action needs to be taken to prevent imminent homelessness.</p> <p>Ensure appropriate information is provided to BDC on a regular basis thus permitting monitoring for the purpose of improvement of the service to avoid homelessness.</p> <p>Review if there are gaps in the service – for example people with complex needs.</p>	April 09	From existing officer time at present
<p>2. Advice Services: -</p> <p>Scope availability of housing and debt advice to prevent households from becoming homeless</p>	<p>Review existing provision of advice and debt services, review how they are promoted in the district and who/how these services are provided.</p> <p>Check to ensure services are available throughout the district to meet the needs of people in town and rural areas.</p> <p>Encourage households to seek advice at the earliest stage rather than waiting until homelessness is inevitable.</p> <p>Consider publicity campaigns to make people aware of benefits and the need to pay their rent regularly.</p>	<p>July 09</p> <p>April 09</p>	<p>From existing officer time at present.</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>TBC</p>

<p>3. Develop a protocol for move-on with all providers of supported housing, Including consideration of all options across all tenures.</p> <p>Has links to National Indicator 141</p> <p>And LAA 2 target</p>	<p>To work with supported accommodation providers to help people move in a planned way from supported housing to other accommodation.</p> <p>Target to be developed</p> <p><u>About Indicator NI141</u>  This indicator measures the number of service users who in a planned way move from supported accommodation. This indicator is important because living independently can have a huge influence on a person's quality of life.</p>	<p>April 09</p>	<p>From existing officer time at present</p>
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Priority 4 Provision of Accommodation			
Priorities	What Do We Want to Achieve	Provisional Timescale	BDC Resources
<p>1. To reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010 from 31/12/04</p> <p><b>National Indicator 156</b></p> <p><b>LAA 2 Target</b></p>	<p>To reduce the use of temporary accommodation in the Braintree District to 57 households or less by 2010.</p> <p>Continue to avoid use of bed and breakfast accommodation.</p>	March 2010	Existing resources at present – but will need to review.
<p>2. Ensure temporary/interim accommodation is of a suitable size, quality standard and location</p>	<p>Whenever possible try to ensure temporary/interim accommodation is of a suitable size, quality standard and location.</p> <p>In the case of emergency homelessness the accommodation may not meeting these standards but we want to work to providing suitable size accommodation within 6 weeks.</p>	March 2010	Existing resources at present - but will need to review.
<p>3. Develop more affordable housing in the district.</p> <p><b>LAA 2 Target</b></p> <p><b>National Indicator 155</b></p> <p><b>Links with BDC Corporate Strategy Objective</b></p>	<p>More affordable homes in the district:</p> <p>Current target an average of 100 affordable homes per year (gross)</p> <p>Continue to negotiate for the maximum quota of affordable homes on all larger private housing developments.</p> <p>To develop an Affordable Housing Strategy for the Braintree District.</p>	<p>April 08 onwards</p> <p>April 09</p>	To be fully identified will include: - land, S106 planning gain, Housing Corporation Grant funding, funding via BDC, funding via RSL's

<p>4. Increase access to the private sector accommodation.</p> <p>a) Leasing Scheme</p> <p>b) Rent Bond/Deposit Scheme</p> <p>c) Empty Homes Strategy</p>	<p>a) Continue and expand work with the Private Sector Leasing Scheme with Colne Housing Society.</p> <p>b) Review effectiveness of the Rent Bond/Deposit Scheme</p> <p>c) Develop a new effective Empty Homes Strategy targeted at landlords who are able to provide good quality, affordable private sector properties</p>	<p>July 07</p> <p>March 09</p> <p>July 09</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>From existing officer time at present</p> <p>From existing officer time at present</p>
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Priority 6 Administering Homelessness More Effectively			
Priorities	What Do We Want to Achieve	Provisional Timescale	BDC Resources
1. Good Homelessness Administration  Ensure rigorous consistent standards are met and maintained	<p><b><u>a) Performance</u></b></p> <p><b>BVPI 183 (a) length of stay in bed and breakfast</b></p> <p>Out turn            2006/07 – 0 - top quartile            Out turn            2007/08 - 0            Target                2008/09 – 0</p> <p><b>BVPI 183 (b) length of stay in hostels</b></p> <p>2006/07 – 15.5 weeks - 3rd quartile            Projected out turn 2007/08 – 13 weeks            Target                2008/09</p> <p><b>BVPI Number of rough sleepers</b></p> <p>Out turn                2006/07 – 0            Projected Out turn 2007/08 - 0            Target                 2008/09 -</p> <p><b>BVPI 213 Number of households where homelessness has been prevented for more than 6mths as a result of active prevention casework per 1000 households</b></p> <p>Out turn                2006/07 – 5% - top quartile            Out turn                2007/08 - TBC            Target                 2008/09 – TBC</p>	Ongoing	

	<p><b>BVPI 214 Repeat Homelessness based on number of acceptances</b></p> <p>Out turn 2006/07 - 0.72% (2 cases) 2<sup>nd</sup> Quartile  Out turn 2007/08 – TBC  Target 2008/09 – TBC</p> <p><b>BVPI 225 Provision to help victims of Domestic Violence</b></p> <p>Out turn 2006/07 - 91% - top quartile  Outturn 2007/08 – 91%  Target 2008/09 – 91%</p> <p><b><u>b) Casework Management</u></b></p> <p>Introduce new homelessness application assessment procedure, setting standards for the level of evidence required before accepting any interim or full Duty.</p> <p>Pilot increasing the number of home visits on parent/relative/friend exclusions to establish effectiveness in reducing homelessness presentations.  Links also with the need for an improved IT system to help manage the service more effectively.</p>	<p>April 09</p> <p>July 09</p>	<p>From existing-officer time at present</p> <p>From existing-officer time at present</p>
<p>2. Review IT used to manage the service</p>	<p>Implement a new IT system to help provide information to monitor our performance and enhance case work management - will help with freeing up of officer time to spend more time on homelessness prevention work and researching good practice etc.</p>	<p>April 09</p>	<p>Funding provisionally identified full business case to be made to progress with purchase and to maintain new system.</p>

3. Develop customer involvement to help shape the services.	To develop ways of measuring customer satisfaction with the services provided.	July 09	From Existing-Officer Time at present
4. Equality and diversity - Provide an accessible advice service for the residents of the district.	Improve monitoring and analysis of demand for services from the community and monitor outcomes to ensure quality and accessibility.	July 09	From Existing-Officer Time at present and improved IT system
5. Arrange for an external evaluation of the service.	(i) To review the council's strategy for tackling homelessness (ii) To evaluate the effectiveness of the council's efforts to prevent homelessness. (iii) To identify the main risks and opportunities for improvement. (iv) To make clear recommendations for improvement	April 10	Internal BDC funding Bid September 09

# Appendix 1

## Linking the homeless strategy to national, regional and local policies

