Foreword
By Councillor Lady Patricia Newton
Cabinet Member for Planning and Property

Having an adequate supply of good quality affordable housing that meets people’s needs remains a key priority for the Braintree District.

We are now over 5 years on from the stock transfer to Greenfields Community Housing and as well as meeting all the housing transfer promises to tenants and leaseholders, they are now developing much needed new homes.

Despite the economic downturn, we have continued to work hard to ensure that new affordable homes have been developed across the district. Since 2008 over 560 additional affordable homes have been provided.

I am pleased to be able to say that during the four years following the publication of the last Homelessness Strategy in July 2008, significant progress was made in reducing homelessness and improving homelessness prevention services in the Braintree District. However, we know that significant challenges lay ahead.

Some of our key successes during those 4 years include:

- Continuing to avoid the use of B&B for homeless households, other than in a few isolated cases and then for no more than a few days
- Significant reduction in the number of homelessness presentations and acceptances
- Significant reduction in the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation

The economic downturn experienced over the last few years is, however, now impacting on these successes and a general upward trend in applications is emerging and also the numbers of households in temporary accommodation.

In the words of the former Housing Minister, Grant Shapps MP, in the publication ‘Making Every Contact Count - a joint approach to preventing homelessness’:

‘There is no place for homelessness in the 21st Century. The key to delivering that vision is prevention - agencies working together to support those at risk of homelessness’.

With the additional pressures which some households are likely to experience as further welfare reforms are introduced, and as public services seek to make efficiency savings, it is even more important for agencies to work together to prevent homelessness.

The new Homelessness Strategy puts partnership at its very core - placing a real focus on working with other agencies to build on existing opportunities to prevent homelessness wherever possible, to develop new approaches and, when homelessness cannot be prevented, to support the household into alternative accommodation.

If you wish to comment or to be included in our list of consultees for the future please contact:

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Part 1

Executive Summary

This is the third Homelessness Strategy for the Braintree District and it reviews the current situation in the district, looks back at the achievements since the last strategy and sets out the work we will carry out with other organisations to reduce and prevent homelessness.

1.1 Braintree District Council’s Strategic Housing Responsibilities
There are approximately 62,000 properties in the district of which over 10,500 are affordable homes (source: TSA, 2011). Over 8,000 properties of the district’s affordable housing stock belong to Greenfields Community Housing following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of the Council’s housing stock in November 2007.

As a result of this transfer the council is no longer a housing landlord. The Council continues to provide the following strategic housing functions:

- Statutory homelessness duties;
- Providing housing advice and working to prevent homelessness;
- Managing the housing register;
- Enabling the development of new affordable homes across the district;
- Returning empty properties back into use; and
- Researching local housing needs

The Council works with a number of housing providers and other organisations to meet the housing needs of local people. Whilst there are over 30 registered providers with affordable housing stock in the district, Greenfields remains the largest provider since the 2007 stock transfer.

1.2 Review of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2013
The Council produced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 which was updated in 2008 with a strategy for the following 5 years. The Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 identified five priorities around:-

- Joint working and partnership working
- Prevention of homelessness
- Supporting for vulnerable people
- Provision of accommodation
- Administering homelessness more effectively

The Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013 provided guidance for embedding protocols for use of emergency overnight accommodation, moving young people on from supported temporary housing units and making better use of the private rented sector for meeting housing needs.

The existing Homelessness Strategy is due to expire in 2013 and therefore an assessment of the current situation has been necessary to inform the strategic direction of the homelessness function for the next five years, 2013 - 2018.
1.3 Summary of Achievements from the 2008 to 2013 Homelessness Strategy

Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013: Achievements

The table below provides the main achievements accomplished as part of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013: Achievements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the Gateway to Homechoice sub-regional choice based lettings scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Government target for the Council to halve the number of households resident in temporary accommodation by December 2010 was achieved, with 31 households in temporary against a target of 57 or under. However, there were 64 households in temporary accommodation at the end of July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established a Joint Referral Panel (JRP) to consider referrals to supported accommodation units. Considerable reduction in duplication of work achieved and simpler process for applicants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move-on quota from supported accommodation into general needs established via the Joint Referral Panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- eviction Panel established at the supported housing schemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Options Officer with specialism in Mortgage Rescue Scheme established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme of quarterly Housing Breakfast Briefings established, aimed at key stakeholder groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Weather Emergency Protocol established to help rough sleepers in very cold weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure of the Council’s Housing Advice and Homelessness teams to a single Housing Options Team. This provides greater continuity of service to the client.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The restructure also enabled a post in the team to be redesignated as an Accommodation Officer to work with private landlords and increase opportunities for using this sector to meet housing needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reprovision of a NACRO supported housing scheme to a new build scheme in July 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ‘Enhanced Housing and Work Advice’ online tool developed to help support people in identifying their housing, employment and training opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College House, a supported housing scheme for young parents transferred to Family Mosaic Housing Association, who have invested in and improved the accommodation. Also two additional units of temporary accommodation secured via Family Mosaic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
565 units of new affordable housing have been completed across the district between 2008/09 and 2012/13. This is an average of 113 new homes a year.

'Housing StatNav' is a partnership project between Greenfields Community Housing and Braintree District Council. It is an innovative online tool providing housing needs information for all towns and parishes across the Braintree District.

The Housing Service achieved the Customer Service Excellence Standard in December 2012. The following five instances of best practice were identified by the assessment:

1) Our work to reach hard to reach groups
2) Our corporate commitment to customer focused culture
3) Observation and feedback of staff professionalism and understanding of customer needs.
4) The degree to which we check customers have received and understood the information we provide them.
5) The range and effectiveness of our partnerships that benefit customers.

1.4 The New Review and Strategy Documents
The Homelessness Review and Strategy 2013 - 2018 is contained within one document and provides an assessment of the current situation regarding homelessness, both nationally and locally, and a five year action plan for meeting the strategic objectives identified as part of the review.

The main objectives/priorities of the Homelessness Strategy will feed into the district Housing Strategy. The Housing Strategy overarches the Affordable Housing Strategy, the Empty Homes Strategy and the Homelessness Strategy.

Section 153 of the Localism Act 2011 came into force by commencement order on 7th June 2012 and prescribes the relationship between schemes and strategies that local authorities must have regard to in developing or modifying their local preventing homelessness strategies:

In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, a local housing authority in England shall have regard to—
(a) its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996,
(b) its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011

The Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan and monitoring will be facilitated by the Council’s online performance management system, Covalent. We expect the Homelessness Strategy 2013 - 2018 to be identified as a “Key Service project” and therefore quarterly project update reports will be required for consideration by the Council’s Joint Executive Team (JET).

1.5 Methodology of the New Review and Strategy
The Homelessness Review 2013 - 2018
The review focuses on the following:
- An audit of existing service provision e.g. housing options advice, access to accommodation, use of temporary accommodation and provision of housing-related support.
- Analysis of homelessness trends and indicators of service user demands.
- Using analysis and research to provide projections for how we anticipate homelessness is likely to manifest locally over the next 5 years.
- Seeking customer insight from service users and other stakeholder groups eg. organisations we work with, members and local agencies.
- Reviewing current resources and identifying potential gaps and overlaps in the current service provision.
- Linking related national and local strategies and policies, including changes introduced through the revised Allocations Policy 2012 and the Policy for discharging statutory homeless duties.

**Producing the Review and Strategy**

**i) Statistics and Data**

Data has been gathered from a number of sources as part of the review and used to inform the strategic direction of the service for the next 5 years. The table below shows what information we have gathered and respective data sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local housing needs</strong></td>
<td>» Abritas IT system – housing register information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Housing StatNav</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Strategic Housing Market Assessment and subsequent annual updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homelessness Trends</strong></td>
<td>» P1E quarterly homelessness data returns to government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Abritas IT system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Monthly performance monitoring indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Potential impacts of Welfare Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Mortgage/landlord repossession statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wider local demographic data</strong></td>
<td>» Nomis: local benefit claimant levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Annual Survey of Hours and Earning (ASHE): Local earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Office of National Statistics: population estimates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ii) Links to Existing Sub-Regional and Regional Activity**

The council participates in a number of sub regional and regional relationships that will have an impact on our homelessness services locally. These relationships are set out in the review.

**1.6 Consultation**

General Consultation
Partner/stakeholder workshops took place during summer 2012. These were well attended and identified a number of common themes. The two most important areas identified in all workshops as giving significant concern were a) the ease of access to credit and the amount of debt many households are carrying and b) the possible impacts of Welfare Reform.

Workshops were split into a series of groups: although there are inter-relationships between all the agencies represented, a small group approach enabled us to focus on specific issues and for more effective dialogue to take place.

Consultation groups were as follows: Supported Accommodation Providers, Benefit & Advice Agencies, Housing Associations, Agencies working with young people and Support Agencies.

A short telephone survey of single young service-users was undertaken in early 2013 to try to identify any particular concerns/issues from this group. The response rate was, unfortunately, disappointing and results consequently unreliable.

**The Braintree District Homelessness Strategy Steering Group**

As part of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013, a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) was established. One of the core functions of the group has been to lead on the implementation of the strategic aims identified within the strategy and to monitor the outcomes and achievements.

The HSSG comprises of representation from the following, although not all agencies attend all meetings.

- Social Services (Adult, Mental Health, Children and Families, Learning Disabilities, Physical Impairment Team)
- Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens’ Advice Bureaux
- Mid Essex Primary Care Trust (PCT)
- Youth Offending Team
- Probation Service
- Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership
- Essex County Council Supporting People
- Housing association partners (including Greenfields)
- Voluntary Sector representative
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
1.7 The New Homelessness Strategy 2013 to 2018

The strategy is being developed against a background of economic challenges which are having, and are expected to continue to have, an impact on the number of households experiencing housing difficulties. This strategy will set out the challenges which the Council is likely to face and how it intends to address them.

Three key priorities have been identified through the review process.

Summary of New Homelessness Strategic Priorities in context

The Government undertook a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in 2009 and identified a range of actions which it would implement to address the impact of the global recession.

Welfare Reform plays a central role in the Government’s actions and the changes and some of the actual/possible impacts are considered in the review.

Issues highlighted by the Homelessness Review and Consultation Process

Whilst significant achievements have been made to prevent homelessness, including the decrease in the number of homeless applicants/acceptances and successful homelessness prevention work, this is now changing. A key priority therefore remains prevention of homelessness, although this is even more challenging in the current economic climate. Prevention of homelessness requires committed partnership working and a shared understanding of the social impacts of homelessness, together with direct and indirect costs.

The work of statutory and voluntary partnerships is now more developed and this must continue if we are to manage the current challenges which are:

- The gradual increase in homeless applications which has been seen locally in the past year, and also seen in national trends.

- The 2011 Census shows that 13% of households in the district now live in privately rented accommodation. In 2001 this figure was 5.7%. We need to be able to work effectively with private landlords and have services that can support both landlords and their tenants when issues arise. The loss of private rented accommodation is responsible for the main increase in households that have been accepted as homeless in 2012/13.

- It is becoming more difficult and challenging to prevent homelessness.

- The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has increased from 38 at the end of March 2012 to 61 at the end of March 2013; this pressure is expected to continue as the movement into permanent housing has become slower.

- Unemployment in the district since the last review has increased from 1,221 in 2007 to 2,535 in 2012.

- The demand for social and affordable rented family sized and single person accommodation remains high.
The development of affordable housing remains challenging with fewer new homes being provided through S.106 housing developments than previously.

The welfare reforms will affect many residents in the district, their household budgets and housing options. We do not really know how residents will respond to the new welfare reforms at the current time. However, we expect the number of social housing tenants wanting to downsize to increase and there will be an increased demand for two and one bedroomed homes. Most accepted homeless applicants need two bedroomed homes and therefore the length of stay of homeless applicants in temporary accommodation is expected to increase. An impact will therefore be a need for more temporary housing.

Whilst rough sleeping remains low in the district, there are increased instances of rough sleeping.

The Government is setting local housing authorities some ‘gold standard’ challenges for homelessness services to meet and is encouraging peer reviews. It is understood that future homelessness funding will be determined at least in part by Councils’ progress towards achieving the ‘gold standard’ and some focus must therefore be applied to these issues.

The New Strategic Priorities Identified for the Next Five Years

We have identified three key priorities. In the last Homelessness Strategy, we also had a priority around working in partnership. Partnership working is now well developed and is key to many of the actions contained in the Strategy Delivery Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 1: Prevention of Homelessness and Sustaining Tenancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Council’s Housing Service now works with many partners to try to prevent homelessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work with supported housing providers in the district has improved considerably during the period of the last strategy with establishment of the Joint Referral Panel. This enables single housing applicants in need of accommodation and support to be referred to the most appropriate housing scheme, and to have the support and obtain the skills to sustain a tenancy in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to sustain tenancies is part of the work of social landlords and can be enhanced in the social sector and private sector by the floating support service now provided in the district by One Support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our actions in this new strategy continue our work with partners and include working with our sub regional council partners to help support some of the most vulnerable single people sleeping rough, who do not engage easily with mainstream services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Priority 2: Provision of Accommodation

The actions for this priority cover a range of different types of accommodation. They include the provision of affordable housing, temporary accommodation for homeless households, supported housing schemes and actions to encourage and support private landlords.

The Council aims to support the provision of a 100 new affordable homes a year, (averaged over a four year period), by working with housing associations. The Council supports the provision of this with its own grant funding and the jointly managed Community Housing Investment Partnership, the ‘CHIP’ Fund with Greenfields Community Housing. This fund resulted from the housing stock transfer of Braintree District Council’s homes to Greenfields Community Housing in 2007, and part of the capital receipt was used to create this jointly managed fund of over £10 million.

There are a number of supported housing schemes in the district providing short term accommodation with support. The cost of the housing related support is funded via a government grant through Essex County Council. Examples of these include the Council’s scheme for homeless households, schemes for single people such as the Braintree Foyer and New Direction.

The Council must also ensure it can meet its statutory homeless responsibilities which include the provision of temporary accommodation for some homeless households.

The priorities in this strategy in 2013 include transferring the Council’s supported scheme for homeless households to Family Mosaic Housing Association (who will invest and modernise the scheme) and to complete the relocation of a scheme for people recovering from mental health issues to a new build property.

Consideration will also need to be given to the future of the district’s Women’s Refuge accommodation, which is ageing.

The private rented sector has grown in recent years and we need to work with private landlords, encouraging them to work with the Council to find suitable tenants.

Priority 3: Managing the Impacts of Welfare Reform and the Localism Act

Whilst there have already been some changes to housing benefits in 2012, the most significant changes of the welfare reforms commence this year. They include:

- The introduction of a local council tax support scheme
- The new under-occupancy rules for working age tenants in social housing receiving housing benefit
- The ‘Household Benefit Cap’ limiting the amount of total benefit a household may receive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The start of Universal Credit (including housing benefit paid direct to tenants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The phased introduction of Personal Independence Payments to replace Disability Living Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reform of the national Social Fund Scheme with the Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants abolished and funding transferred to local authorities to set up local schemes. In Essex, the fund has been provided to Essex County Council which has set up the 'Essential Living Fund' from April 2013.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is difficult to gauge the full impact of the changes on residents in the district or the impact on services, although we have prepared our services where we can.

The District’s Housing Allocation Policy was reviewed in 2012 and brought the size of accommodation a household could be allocated in line with the new housing benefit changes.

Additional two bedroomed properties have been acquired by Greenfields as we expect a higher demand for two bedroomed homes from social housing tenants down-sizing and to help ease the pressure on homeless applicants as it is the size of property most needed by this group too.

The housing related risks include longer stays in temporary accommodation for homeless households as the demand for smaller properties increases and increased risk of homelessness for some larger families who exceed the ‘Household Benefit Cap’ and are unable to secure employment.

In 2013/14 the Council will need to monitor the changes closely and be able to respond to ensure it continues to meet its statutory duties.

The issue of concern about debt was raised throughout the consultation.

We have increased funding to the Braintree, Halstead and Witham Citizens’ Advice Bureaux for 2 years; our actions also include further discussion with Holdfast (the local credit union) and exploring jointly with Greenfields the possibility of a furniture recycling project which, as well enabling good quality items to be re-used, may also include some training opportunities.

**Monitoring**

The Delivery Plan includes key actions by the Council and partner agencies throughout the life of the strategy. The Delivery Plan will be monitored and updated quarterly, including any adjustments to target, consideration of new targets and actions as identified by the Braintree District Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.

Whilst it is intended that the strategy is in place for five years, an annual review will take place. We do recognise that many actions in the Delivery Plan are focused on the next two to three years and this reflects the current uncertainties regarding the economic situation and welfare reforms.

We will commit to a formal review and new Homelessness Strategy in 2018.
Part 2

2.0 The Review

2.1 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.

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) and again by the Localism Act 2011.

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

The Housing Act 1996
This Act remains the major piece of legislation informing local authorities’ response to homelessness. Subsequent legislation and regulations have expanded the priority need categories, and placed a requirement on Councils to adopt a strategic approach to managing and preventing homelessness.

In 2012, amendments were made by the Localism Act 2011, one of the most significant of which is giving Councils the power to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector without the need for the applicant’s consent. Braintree Council, together with its sub-regional partners, agreed to adopt this power and a joint policy framework around which to make decisions.

The Localism Act also gave local authorities the power to make changes to their allocations policies, for example allowing them to restrict access to their housing register to households meeting specified local connection criteria. The Greater Haven Gateway partners took a decision to retain open access to the housing register: consequently there is no conflict with the local connection criteria under s199 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) which has had to be addressed within the policy to discharge the homelessness duty.

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 to tackle anti social behaviour in local areas.

This requires these authorities to work in partnership with linked public, private, community, voluntary agencies and organisations.
Children Act 1989 and 2004
The Acts ascribe duties to Social Services in respect of households which include dependent children. This includes a responsibility to provide assistance to households who are deemed not to be owed the full homelessness duty. Such assistance 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. Protocols have been developed between the Essex Housing Authorities and Essex County Council in respect of homeless 16-17 year olds and Intentionally Homeless families. The former is currently being reviewed by ECC.

The Social Care Homelessness Response Team, with a specific remit to deal with 16-17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, has resulted in some good working relationships developing with the Housing Options team and positive outcomes being achieved for young people. It is to be hoped that this relationship can be rolled out to other teams within Children’s Services, particularly in light of the office base which we now share.

2.2 The National Context
Braintree’s experience since the last review of homelessness mirrors the national trends. A range of actions, including improved prevention activity, resulted in a sustained reduction in homeless applications over a number of years. The economic difficulties which the country has experienced since the late 2000s have, however, seen this trend plateau in 2010/11 and take an upward turn in 2011/12 and again in 2012/13.

(Source: www.gov.uk)

Ministry of Justice figures provide evidence of trends in possession action being taken by mortgage providers and landlords.
Annual mortgage orders peaked in 2008 across England and Wales at 111,763. This reduced by approximately 50% to 55,218 mortgage orders being made in 2011.

The trends observed in landlord orders over the previous years are slightly different. Annual landlord orders were at their highest in 2003 at 117,581. By 2011 this had reduced to 97,815 representing a decrease of 17% however we anticipate this could increase over the forthcoming months as a result of changes in benefit payments and increased competition for private rented sector properties.

Loss of privately rented accommodation is, at the time of writing, responsible for the biggest increase in those presenting as homeless in the district, with the landlord’s intention to sell their property frequently cited as the reason for notice having been issued.

Reasons for an increasing number of homeless applications are complex. In addition to the more obvious impacts of the recession (job loss, income reduction etc) which can have a direct effect on a household’s ability to retain its accommodation, other less obvious impacts have a cumulative effect which is potentially of much greater concern.

Links to Related National Policy Areas
The commitment to address homelessness as part of a wider policy agenda is also found in the following national strategies and policy documents:

Laying the foundations: a Housing Strategy for England
The strategy published in 2011 identified addressing homelessness as a key priority for the government to tackle, with greater focus on prevention as well as targeting action for dealing with rough sleeping.

The strategy introduces the Ministerial Working Group comprising of representatives from across eight government departments working together to prevent homelessness and crisis. The group published “Making every contact count”, a joint approach to preventing homelessness, in August 2012. The document provides detailed guidance for how councils should work collaboratively with other local authority services to prevent homelessness through early intervention and avoid households reaching crisis point.

Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness (August 2012), The Ministerial Working Group
The aim of the report by the Ministerial Working Group is to make sure that every contact local agencies have with vulnerable people and families has value. It brings together five government commitments to:

1) Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence
2) Improve health
3) Reduce involvement in crime
4) Improve skills, employment and financial advice
5) Pioneer social funding for homelessness
The report poses the following ten local challenges to the sector. The following table shows the current position of the council in relation to each challenge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making Every Contact Count: Local Challenges</th>
<th>Current BDC Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.</td>
<td>Implementation of the district’s Homelessness Strategy is identified as a Key Service project and reported quarterly to Joint Executive Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.</td>
<td>Enhanced Housing Options toolkit provided through Gateway to Homechoice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer a Housing Options prevention service including written advice to all clients.</td>
<td>In development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative.</td>
<td>We have an established Severe Weather Emergency Protocol. We are working jointly with sub-regional partners to develop projects to respond to rough sleepers with complex needs and to provide support for single people seeking accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.</td>
<td>Move-on arrangements from supported schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups including advice and support to both clients and landlords.</td>
<td>Implementation of the Accommodation Officer post. Development of the Landlord Select scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.</td>
<td>In place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs.</td>
<td>In place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.</td>
<td>Rarely and only in an emergency have we placed young people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.</td>
<td>In line with our existing policy,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the above the report also identifies that LAs should assist with the delivery of targets around ‘Troubled Families’ (the ‘Family Solutions’ team in Essex). The Council has
a procedure in place for referring potentially suitable families to the Family Solutions Team for support.

**Evidence Review Cost of Homelessness 2012, Department for Communities and Local Government ((DCLG)**

The paper aims to present evidence currently available to provide an indication of the cost of homelessness. Whilst the cost of meeting needs of homeless households is subject to significant variation, a study undertaken by the New Economics Foundation “Work it out: Barriers to Employment for Homeless People” in 2008, indicated a figure of £26,000 per homeless case (based on those aged either under 27 or between 40 and 55 and considered to be work ready).

More recently Shelter and Acclaim consultancy undertook a benchmarking study to identify the unit cost of preventing and accepting homelessness cases.

The study, Value for Money in Housing Options and Homelessness Services, identified the following headline figures regarding the cost effectiveness of preventing homelessness.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevention unit cost</td>
<td>£826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance unit cost</td>
<td>£2,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential saving for preventing a case of homelessness over acceptance</td>
<td>£1,286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Value for Money in Housing Options and Homelessness Services, Shelter and Acclaim Consultancy)

### 2.3 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 borough and district councils, working in partnership with housing associations.

The Greater Haven Gateway Housing Strategy was updated in 2010 and published in 2011. The strategy details strategic objectives agreed by participating local authorities around:

- Enabling development of new affordable homes
- Improving the quality of existing affordable housing
- Improving housing options for customers
- Improve existing partnership working

The full Greater Haven Gateway Strategy is available on the Councils website and is linked below:


Local authorities within the sub-region have committed themselves to coordinate joint working and promote best practice on homelessness across the sub-region.
Tenancy Strategy
The Localism Act requires local authorities to have a Tenancy Strategy for their area which registered providers should have regard to when developing their housing policies relating to:

- Types of tenancies they grant
- Circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of particular type
- Where they grant tenancies for a certain term, the lengths of the terms
- Circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy on the coming to an end of an existing tenancy.

The Council worked with sub-regional partners to develop a sub-regional Tenancy Strategy to which all councils and registered providers across the Greater Haven Gateway (GHG) should have regard. The following link is to the Councils Tenancy Strategy available on the Councils website:

Braintree District Council Tenancy Strategy - Downloads - Braintree District Council

2.4 Local Context

Braintree District Council’s Corporate Strategy 2012 to 2016
In 2012 the Council published its Corporate Strategy up to 2016 and identified the corporate priorities:

1) **Place**: a better place
2) **People**: people feel good
3) **Prosperity**: building a prosperous district
4) **Performance**: an organisation that delivers value
5) **Partnership**: to deliver the corporate priorities through working in partnership with organisations across sectors.

Actions to support the prosperity of the district are related to housing and homelessness. The Corporate Strategy details that as a council we intend to boost training and employment opportunities and enable housing growth, specifically affordable housing.

**3.4.1 Braintree District Council’s Housing Strategy 2009 to 2014**
The Housing Strategy for the Braintree District was developed in 2009 and set out the Councils intentions for meeting local housing need to 2014 under the following nine strategic aims.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Aims</th>
<th>Relationship to homelessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Increase the supply of affordable housing</td>
<td>Increased capacity to house homeless households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Improve choice and mobility</td>
<td>Increased mobility supports churn within existing affordable housing and improved capacity to house households more quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Prevent and reduce the use of temporary</td>
<td>Reduce the stress of homelessness experienced by households, provide more stable solutions to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
accommodation

4) Improve condition of housing especially for vulnerable people
Improves opportunities for tenancy sustainment and saves cost of repeated moves. Improvements to standards of insulation will also provide financial benefits.

5) Address the health, wellbeing and support needs of vulnerable people
Improved opportunities for gaining employment, sustaining tenancies and improving educational outcomes for children.

6) Improve physical and social environment of our neighbourhoods
Reduce the risk of homelessness as a result of anti-social behaviour.

7) Make sure that housing investment supports local economic wellbeing
Supports the provision of training and employment opportunities in the district and financial stability for local households.

8) Improve use of existing housing
Empty homes returned to use help meet local housing needs. Ensure existing affordable housing stock is being used most effectively to meet the needs of residents and encourage movement within the sector.

9) Plan for future, clarifying location and type of housing needed
Enables movement and churn within the social sector supporting our capacity to meet housing needs more quickly.

The Housing Strategy is the overarching strategy to the Affordable Housing Strategy, Empty Homes Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.

**Local Plan/Local Development Framework (LDF)**
The Local Plan/Local Development Framework (LDF) is a suite of documents that provide detailed guidance on development across the district. The existing LDF is due to be reviewed in 2014.

**Performance Targets**
We regularly monitor a range of performance indicators across various homelessness and related procedures to provide insight into how we are performing, the effectiveness of our service delivery and whether there are any potential opportunities to improve our services for customers.

The following table summarises the performance indicators we monitor, frequency of monitoring, reporting responsibilities, performance during 2011/12 and targets that were set for 2012/13.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicator</th>
<th>Frequency of monitoring</th>
<th>Reported</th>
<th>Performance met 2011/12</th>
<th>Target 2012/13</th>
<th>Outturn 12/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BV 183a Length of stay in Bed&amp;Breakfast</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Internally</td>
<td>0 weeks</td>
<td>0 weeks</td>
<td>*see note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV 203 % change in the number of families in Temporary Accommodation</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Internally</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5 cases per thousand households</td>
<td>4 cases per thousand households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV 225 provision of help to victims of Domestic Abuse</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Internally</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV 202 number of rough sleepers</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Internally and externally</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV 183b length of stay for families in hostel accommodation</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Internally and externally</td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
<td>9 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI 156 Number of households in TA at end of month</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Internally and externally</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI 155 Number of affordable homes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Internally and externally</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Use of Bed and Breakfast – The outturn figure is correct and reports an end of month figure. However, a small number of households were accommodated for a very short time in B&B. In 12/13, 5 households were accommodated in B&B for one night each as part of the Council’s statutory duties. In addition in the severe cold weather, 2 households were accommodated for 1 night and 3 nights respectively.
Scope of the Homelessness Strategy
Considering the national and local context around policy, strategy and service performance, the Homelessness Strategy intends to:

- Improve performance across the service with the aim of preventing homelessness where possible and in instances where homeless can’t be prevented, to find secure and sustainable housing solutions as quickly as possible.
- Identify further opportunities to improve partnership working to prevent homelessness.
- Detail actions to be taken to meet the housing and homelessness needs identified locally.
- Identify examples of innovative working and best practice and, where possible, introduce these locally.
- Support the delivery of the corporate priorities.
2.5 Partnership Arrangements
The Council has a proven track record of working in partnership, and currently participates in the following:

- 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
- Joint Referral Panel (JRP)
- Homelessness Strategy Steering Group
- Private Sector Leasing Scheme, Colne Housing Society
- Greater Haven Gateway sub region (GHG) (Gateway to Homechoice, Enhanced Housing Options online tool kit, Tenancy Strategy)
- Community Housing Investment Partnership (CHIP) - Greenfields
- Private Landlords Accreditation
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

The key agencies and bodies involved include:

- Essex County Council
- Essex Police Authority
- Strategic Health Authority
- Parish and town councils
- Public transport operators
- Environment Agency
- Housing associations
- Braintree Business Council
- Voluntary sector agencies
- Tenant representatives

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.
2.6 Audit of Existing Service Provision

The Structure of the Housing Service
Following a review in 2011, the housing service consists of the following teams, and is illustrated below.

- Housing Options
- Housing Needs Assessment
- Housing Research and Development

| Housing Options | • Providing advice and assistance to households experiencing housing difficulties  
• Providing a range of options to prevent homelessness  
• Deciding the extent of the Council’s duty to homeless households.  
• Securing temporary accommodation for those towards whom a relevant duty exists |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Housing Needs Assessment | • Operating the Housing Needs Register for the District  
• Ensuring that applicants’ priority banding correctly reflects their housing needs. |
| Housing Research & Development | • Monitoring levels of housing need  
• Developing strategies to meet identified need  
• Enabling the development of new affordable housing |

The three teams within the Housing Service operate by providing areas of specialization.

The Housing Options team is equipped to provide the relevant information, advice and assistance to anyone experiencing housing difficulties and to offer advice and information to others active in the sector, e.g. private rented sector landlords. At the first point of contact the Housing Options officer will carry out an initial assessment of the household’s needs and determine the appropriate action to be taken within the available timescale. Following the re-structure of the team in 2011, the same officer will now work with a household to try to prevent the loss of their accommodation or to arrange a planned move and, if necessary, proceed to carrying out the necessary enquiries to establish the extent of the Council’s duties under homelessness provisions. This has benefits for both customer and officer, with less duplication being a key shared benefit.

The Housing Assessment team manages the Housing Register for the district and is responsible for verifying applications and assessing housing need. The team are able to identify potential risk factors for loss of accommodation in housing applications and refer households to their colleagues in the Housing Options team in such circumstances.
Working alongside these two teams is the Research and Development team which is responsible for monitoring levels of housing need and responding, through the Council’s enabling role, in the development of new affordable housing and in formulating other strategies.

The Council operates a coordinated service through an effective system of referral. This referral process works not only between housing teams but between council departments, housing providers, external organisations and support agencies. This approach has been successful in ensuring that people receive the help and support they need.

**Housing Service Standards**
The Council aims to provide excellent service to anyone who requires assistance or advice. A summary of the standards is set out below:

- Treat customers with professionalism and respect
- Offer high quality advice and assistance
- Respond promptly to all enquiries
- Process Homeless applications within 33 working days- in majority of cases
- Provide a 24 hour emergency service
- Where possible, provide appointments within 5 working days
- Provide home visits where a person is unable to access the office
- To welcome friends/relatives/professionals to provide 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

**Profile of Services Available in the Braintree District**
These statutory and voluntary services may have links with people who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless:-

**Essex Social Care** – The work of ECC Children and Family services in liaising with partner agencies to help sustain the tenancies of families with dependent children will become increasingly important as welfare reforms come into effect.

**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. Housing can be a key factor in successfully reducing re-offending.

**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.
In-patient care for people with enduring and severe mental health issue is provided either via the NHS at the Linden Centre, Broomfield Hospital or The Lakes, Colchester Hospital.

**Open Road** – Services include Personalised Assessments, Advice and Information, as well as one to one recovery working, Counselling and other outreach services such as Family Support. Working in partnership with ‘Changes NHS Foundation Trust’ who provide a range of specialist medical interventions for substance misuse issues.

**Mid Essex Primary Care Trust** - Provide details of health providers such as doctors, dentists, opticians, pharmacists and health visitors. This will be replaced by a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) from 1st April 2013.

**Safer Places, Braintree** – Safer Places manages a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence, with 12 units of accommodation.

**Braintree, Halstead & Witham Citizens’ Advice Bureaux** - Provide 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.

### 2.7 The Council’s Housing Options Service

Officers in the Housing Options Team will work with households to try to prevent them from becoming homeless, either by providing assistance to keep them in their existing home or by helping them secure alternative accommodation before their current home is lost.

**Preventing homelessness**

Officers have worked with households to achieve a wide range of sometimes very creative solutions to respond to threatened homelessness. Negotiation with family, friends and landlords often proves successful, if not in securing the existing accommodation long-term, then in buying enough additional time for an alternative housing solution to be found.

The provision of financial/benefit advice can be successful in helping a household to retain existing accommodation: for example a successful application for housing benefit may be submitted or a proposal put forward to the landlord/mortgage company (or Court) to address arrears of rent or mortgage payments.

Single young people who are asked to leave the parental home are usually referred to a supported housing project via the Joint Referral Panel, with officers negotiating for them to remain with family or friends until a place has been secured. The projects provide not just accommodation but help young people to develop the necessary skills to move on to independent living as well as helping them into further education, training or employment.

A significant number of households each year are provided with assistance which enables them to access accommodation in the private rented sector. A willingness to consider alternative accommodation within this sector at the Options stage often enables a household to exercise more choice about where they live and the type of property they occupy.
Helping People Access Accommodation in the Private Rented Sector

As part of its prevention work, BDC operates a rent in advance scheme and a deposit bond scheme.

Rent in Advance Scheme

Landlords will require 4-6 weeks’ rent in advance when letting anything from a room in a shared house to a self-contained property. BDC has a limited budget to assist with both Rent in Advance loans and to underwrite Deposit Bonds and options for securing funds for rent in advance will always be explored in full. Households with employment may be able to save for rent in advance, or may be able to borrow from family/obtain an advance from their employer. Households not in employment would previously been able to apply to borrow money for rent in advance via a crisis loan from the DWP – although there were limits on the number and value of such loans. From April 2013, funds have been transferred from DWP to ECC, which is now responsible for implementing a local scheme – the current provision does not include money for rent in advance.

The Deposit Bond Scheme

The Deposit Bond Scheme operates by providing private landlords with a paper bond which gives an undertaking to meet the cost of any damage and/or arrears of rent (usually limited to the equivalent of 4-6 weeks’ rent) at the end of the initial term of the tenancy. This scheme is attractive to landlords who are thereby able to avoid the administration involved in placing the deposit in one of the Government’s approved compulsory deposit protection schemes. The Council cannot, however, underwrite an ever expanding number of tenancies and participants are, therefore, required to save during the term of the tenancy so that they are able to take over the deposit. This has caused some difficulties with landlords who, despite having signed agreements which limit the duration of the Bond, have expected to be able to make a claim after (sometimes considerably after) expiry. This is an area of work which we are planning to develop, becoming more pro-active in engaging with landlords and tenants during the course of the tenancy - intervening sooner if any problems begin to appear with the aim of sustaining the tenancy and reducing claims. This will only be possible with an Accommodation Officer dedicated to managing the Council’s relationship with the PRS: the post is currently also responsible for management functions in respect of the Council’s retained temporary accommodation.

Due to budgetary constraints, both the above are usually limited to households towards whom the Council would have a homelessness duty and will be dependent upon the Council being satisfied that the household will be able to re-pay any loan and/or save to take over any deposit bond.
Homelessness

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 in their area who is homeless and approaches the Council for assistance. The Act places a duty on local housing authorities to secure accommodation for households which are determined to meet all the criteria set out in the legislation.

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

- Eligible
- Homeless
- In Priority Need
- Not homeless intentionally
- Have a local connection to the district

Families with dependent children are the single largest group who fall within the ‘Priority Need’ criterion – see appendix 2 for full details.

In the event that a solution cannot be found before the existing home is lost then, if the household is within a priority need group, accommodation will be provided within the Council’s temporary stock while investigations are carried out and a decision reached. If the Council determines that it owes what is known as the ‘full’ duty (i.e. to secure accommodation, not just to provide advice and assistance) temporary accommodation will continue to be provided until such time as the Council discharges the duty. Duty is most commonly discharged when a household accepts an offer of accommodation made through the Housing Register but will also cease in a number of other circumstances, including if a suitable offer is refused - in either the social rented sector or private rented sector.

Households accepted under homelessness provisions receive a priority banding but are subject to certain restrictions: they are limited to bidding in Braintree District on Gateway to Homechoice, the Council has the ability to place bids on the household’s behalf and to change any bids they have placed themselves and the priority banding is lost if a suitable offer (in either the social rented sector or private rented sector) is refused.

Households who are deemed not to be owed the full homelessness duty will still be offered advice and assistance from the Council, but this will not generally include the provision of accommodation (there is a short-term duty only to provide temporary accommodation to a priority need household deemed to have become homeless intentionally).
2.8 The Housing Needs Register

Background Information
Following the housing stock transfer and the introduction of Choice Based Lettings (CBL), the Council 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 existing tenants of Greenfields Community Housing and other housing associations with stock in the district who wish to transfer to another property.

The sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Gateway to Homechoice
The Council, together with its sub-regional partners, adopted a joint Allocations Policy in 2009 and this is now the route for accessing social housing.

Anyone approaching the Council for Housing Advice is offered the option of registering on Gateway to Homechoice (G2H) but officers are realistic about the potential for this to offer a solution, particularly where timescales are limited.

Applicants who join the HNR are assessed in accordance with the Allocations Policy and given the banding appropriate to their circumstances. Vacancies are advertised on a weekly basis and applicants are able to ‘bid’ for up to 2 vacancies each cycle. Applicants are able to bid across the sub-region (with some exceptions) and are able to see which of the vacancies they are eligible for will offer them the best chance of a successful bid.

Households to which the Council accepts the full homelessness duty receive ‘reasonable preference’ under the Allocations Policy but are restricted to bidding for a home within the District which has accepted the homelessness duty.

Some significant changes have been made to legislation in 2011 which have resulted in policy changes in 2012. A new Allocations Policy took effect on 1st November 2012: amongst other changes this reduces the amount of time available to accepted homeless households to exercise choice. This has become necessary to ensure that Councils are able to keep occupancy of temporary accommodation to a minimum – some households have declined to place bids for suitable homes in an effort to secure their preferred area and/or property type and stayed longer in temporary accommodation as a result. This has clear cost implications for Councils.

In addition, Councils were given the power, from 9th November 2012, to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector. Previously, an offer in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) could only be used to discharge the homelessness duty if the applicant consented. From 9th November this consent is no longer required. Councils must, however, ensure that accommodation in the PRS is suitable for the household’s needs – full details are available in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012.

The Council, together with its sub-regional partners, has developed a policy for discharging the homelessness duty into the PRS and this can be found as an appendix to the Council’s Allocations Policy. The extent to which the Council discharges duty into the PRS will depend largely upon how effective it is in developing its strategy to engage with landlords.
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 through commissioning Strategic Housing Market Assessments and monitoring local indicators. 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.

2.9 Audit of Current Housing Provision

Secure Accommodation
It is widely accepted that demand for low cost social housing continues to exceed supply. Development of affordable housing continues to be a high priority of the Government and the Council, however it does not provide a quick solution to the increasing levels of demand.

Significant changes to affordable housing have been introduced which affect tenure and/or rent. Housing associations are now able to offer Fixed Term Tenancies and charge Affordable Rents – the two can operate independently of each other, or together.

Fixed Term tenancies can be offered by housing associations and councils who choose to use them. Existing tenants’ security is unaffected but new tenancies will be reviewed at the end of the fixed term period. As part of the review providers will take into account:

- Size of accommodation in relation to the size and composition of household
- Financial means of the tenants
- Whether tenants have been good tenants

Affordable Rent was introduced in 2011 and worked up alongside the Localism Act 2011. Under the Affordable Rent framework, rents for affordable homes can be set at up to 80% of market rent which for Braintree represents an increase of between £10 and £60 per week compared with social rent.

Only registered providers who have agreement from the Homes and Communities Agency can charge affordable rents on new properties. Higher rents can also be charged on re-lets provided extra resources are used to support new development.

Following the housing stock transfer, Greenfields continues to be the main provider of affordable housing in the district and has recently embarked on a development programme which has seen it offer support to MOAT (the zone agent for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme) as a syndicated provider as well as spot-purchasing homes on the open market.

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 lower, as there are fewer sizeable new developments planned at present. Howev
however the Council has identified the need for more affordable housing as a corporate
 objective in the Corporate Strategy 2012-2016 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 deposit bond schemes, loans, and
greater links with the Private Sector Leasing Schemes (provided by Colne Housing
Society).

Temporary/Supported Housing Accommodation
Temporary accommodation is used to assist priority need households whilst a more
permanent solution to their housing difficulties is sourced - until now, most commonly via a
housing association.

Temporary accommodation can also be offered to households who have nowhere to live
and are believed to meet the priority need criterion, while the Council completes its
enquiries into their homeless application and reaches a decision as to what, if any, duty is
owed.

As part of the stock transfer agreement Greenfields will provide the Council with up to 35
properties for use as temporary accommodation. The number of properties the Council
used under this agreement reached a low of 16 in 2010. At the time of writing this has
increased to 32 units. This arrangement helps the Council to secure temporary housing
and avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, but there are some costs to the
authority. In addition, every time the Council requests an additional unit of accommodation
this is one fewer property available to be advertised through Gateway to Homechoice.

The Council has also retained two schemes of flats for use as temporary accommodation.
One, a former sheltered housing scheme, is expected to transfer to Family Mosaic
Housing Association in 2013. This scheme currently provides the Council with 14 units of
accommodation: 11 bedsits with shared bathrooms and 3 self-contained 1 bedroom flats.
Support is provided by Family Mosaic staff via contract with ECC Supporting People. The
other scheme provides 4 units: 2 self-contained bedsits and 2 self-contained 1 bedroom
flats, the ground floor one of which has some flexibility for a small family with mobility
problems as it provides a shower unit rather than a bath.

In 2012 Family Mosaic housing association also provided the Council with two additional
self-contained bedsits which are used as temporary accommodation, with supported
provided via their staff in the hostel.

The Council can also refer households to supported housing schemes as their temporary
accommodation and this works to good effect with Family Mosaic’s scheme in Manor
Street which can provide a suitable stepping stone between homeless hostel and settled
accommodation.

Virtually all the remaining short-term accommodation in the district is supported housing
which is accessed via the Joint Referral Panel (JRP). The Panel meets fortnightly and
consists of representatives from the various projects who consider the referrals and agree
which project, if any, should offer an interview. The JRP has been operational since 2008
and offers a more time efficient route into supported accommodation (for both the projects
and prospective residents) than the previous arrangement whereby referrals were made to each individual project.

The table below is a summary of temporary accommodation and supported housing in the district, used by the Council. This summary is broken down into household type and includes supported housing unit numbers.
## Temporary/Supported Housing Accommodation in the District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme Location</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Type of Accommodation</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Tenancy Types</th>
<th>Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>BDC</td>
<td>Emergency general needs accommodation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral via BDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Greenfields</td>
<td>Single person and family general needs accommodation</td>
<td>Up to 35</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral via BDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>BDC/ Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Single person and family general needs supported hostel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Excluded Licence &amp; Licence</td>
<td>Referral via BDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Single person supported bedsits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral via BDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Young vulnerable parents scheme</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral via BDC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These schemes are referred into by BDC as part of the Council’s statutory homelessness duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme Location</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Type of Accommodation</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Tenancy Types</th>
<th>Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>Salvation Army HA</td>
<td>Single person supported hostel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Direct access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>St Matthews</td>
<td>Single person supported hostel</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halstead and Braintree</td>
<td>NACRO</td>
<td>Single person supported hostel (Mental Health)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Licence/AST</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safer Places from May 2012 (formerly Braintree Women’s Aid)</td>
<td>Single female/female and children accommodation (Domestic Abuse)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witham</td>
<td>Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Single young person supported hostel (ages 16-25)</td>
<td>9 self contained units</td>
<td>AST</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witham</td>
<td>Sanctuary HA</td>
<td>Supported accommodation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>AST</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Single young person supported hostel (ages 16-25)</td>
<td>10 self contained units</td>
<td>AST</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braintree Foyer</td>
<td>Salvation Army HA</td>
<td>Single person supported young people’s hostel (ages 16 -25)</td>
<td>34 cluster units</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witham</td>
<td>Family Mosaic HA</td>
<td>Single young person (Care Leavers)</td>
<td>8 units</td>
<td>Licence</td>
<td>Referral via Essex CC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These schemes are more general schemes where people may or may not be owed a homelessness duty by the Council.
Changes to Supported Housing Schemes since 2008

Helen Court Extra Care Scheme, Witham
This scheme provides 55 units of extra care accommodation for people over the age of 55 and was a joint venture with Maldon District Council and Hanover Housing. The scheme opened in summer 2010 and was shortlisted for the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Design Award the same year.

Greenfields have also carried out major refurbishments of two of their sheltered housing schemes with more now planned.

The Women’s Refuge
Safer Places now manage the refuge. Safer Places is an independent domestic abuse charity dedicated to supporting adults and children affected by domestic abuse.

Replacement for Trinity House, Halstead
A supported housing scheme for people with mental health problems which had been running in Halstead for a number of years has just been replaced by a new-build development. The new development provides residents who were sharing bathroom facilities with modern self-contained dwellings. The new building is owned and managed by Colne Housing Society, with NACRO continuing to provide the support to residents. Tenants moved into the new scheme in July 2013.

BENS – Braintree Emergency Night Shelter
BENS is a new local charity, which now provides a small scheme of four rooms for single people, along with a coffee shop below the accommodation open to the public. Along with the Salvation Army and Salvation Army Housing Association, BENS have been key in helping provide shelter to rough sleepers as part of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol. This project unlike others mentioned here does not receive Supporting People grant funding.

Trafalgar House, Braintree
A small six unit scheme for single people is no longer ‘supported accommodation’ as a result of funding reductions.

Floating Support
Floating support is a free service offered to people in their own homes and to individuals who need support to help them access and manage accommodation. It provides a flexible service, visiting the tenant/individual regularly to assist them with life skills, contact, finance, activities and social/emotional support. Referrals can be made by agencies, or an individual can self refer.

Provision of the service in this district transferred from Swan Housing to One Support in 2012. The Council makes direct referrals, most often either to ensure a household receives support when moving into a new home or to help resolve difficulties with budgeting, applying for benefits, managing a home etc, thus helping to sustain tenancies and thereby contributing to the prevention agenda.
2.10 Housing Need and the Local Housing Market

The Housing Register

i) Numbers of applicants on the register
At the end of March 2012 there were 3,082 applicants registered as requiring affordable accommodation. This had reduced by 175 applications to 2,907 by March 2013. Despite the slight differences in the total number of housing register applications, the proportion of those considered to be in “reasonable preference” bands (A to C) remain constant at 38%.

ii) Priority Banding
The housing needs of each applicant to the register are assessed and banded in accordance with how urgent their need to move is. Band A is awarded to applicants whose housing needs are urgent and Band E is the lowest level band awarded to applicants who are considered to be adequately housed.

High priority bands A and B are also given to applicants under-occupying affordable homes and who are looking to downsize as this helps improve the availability of much needed larger accommodation for families in housing need.

The table below summarises the distribution of applicants across the priority bands and provides comparison between March 2012 and March 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Band and outline level of need</th>
<th>March 2012</th>
<th>March 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of applicants on register as at March 2012</td>
<td>% of applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band A</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of which downsizing from 3 and 4 bed properties</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band B</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of which downsizing from 2 bed properties</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band C</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band D</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band E</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,082</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Abritas)

The highest numbers of applicants are registered in Band E, which is applied to those applicants with little or no housing requirements.

As shown in the table above, many of the applicants in Band A are looking to downsize from family size accommodation. As mentioned previously these applicants will have been awarded a high priority band to help them move quickly and release much needed family size accommodation.

Applicants in Band A that are not registered to downsize are assessed as having urgent housing needs.
The Allocations Policy was reviewed during 2012 and some significant changes were made to how housing needs are assessed in response to legislative changes within the Localism Act 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

The table shows an increase in the number of households registered for a transfer to smaller accommodation by the end of March 2013. As some of the key welfare reforms start to take effect from April 2013, it is anticipated that the number of households registering for a transfer to a smaller home will continue to rise.

By their very nature, these households require small family properties which are also considerably in demand by accepted homeless households. The impact of this is already being felt by households towards whom the Council has accepted the homelessness duty: households are waiting longer to be housed as they face increasing competition from down-sizing households in a similar or higher priority band than they. This in turn has an impact on the supply of temporary accommodation as households are in occupation for longer and vacancies are not, therefore, being released for newly homeless households, resulting in the need for additional temporary units. This carries both an increased cost to the Council and, if the new temporary unit is a property which would otherwise have been advertised through Gateway to Homechoice, reduces the number of properties available through the bidding process.

Further information about how housing needs are assessed is available in Appendix 4.

**iii) New Lettings from the Housing Needs Register**

There were 582 lettings to households on Braintree’s housing register between April 2011 and March 2012. Of these, 86% were to properties in the Braintree District and 14% to properties elsewhere in the sub region.

During April 2012 and March 2013, 603 households from the Council’s housing register were housed. 92% of lettings made were to properties in the Braintree District and 8% were to properties in other areas within the Greater Haven Gateway. Further information about annual lettings and movements is available in Appendix 4.

The table below shows the proportion of lettings made to homeless households, households transferring from one affordable property to another and households moving into an affordable home for the first time, also known as “Direct Applicants”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Homeless applicants</th>
<th>Transfer applicants</th>
<th>Direct applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2009/10</strong></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2010/11</strong></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2011/12</strong></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012/13</strong></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Abritas)

**The Housing Market**

In 2007 the Council established a Housing Market Partnership with Colchester and Chelmsford councils and commissioned the first Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the District, findings of which were published in 2008.
Since publication of the SHMA in 2008, the Housing Market Partnership expanded to include Maldon District Council and began to undertake annual updates to the data around local housing markets, earnings, populations and affordability.

Since the mid 1990s there has been significant residential development across the Braintree District to which population growth has positively correlated. Despite the rate of new development in recent years, the SHMA identified a net annual need for almost 700 affordable homes across the district, of which 70% was for social rent and the remaining 30% for intermediate tenure i.e. rent set at a midpoint between social rent and private rent.

From our monitoring since the implementation of the Gateway to Homechoice lettings scheme, we estimate that approximately 6% of affordable housing stock becomes available for letting each year. Development of new affordable homes significantly increases the number of affordable homes available each year and helps to meet the housing needs of the households on the housing register.

Affordability of housing is an issue in the district. To purchase an “entry level” 2 bed property i.e. property within the lower quartile of values for its size in the district, a household requires an income of over £30,000 and a deposit of over £23,000.

The average private rent for a 2 bed property in the district is over £600 per calendar month, although there are distinct differences in rent levels across the district with higher rents generally seen in the south-west of the district compared with areas in the north east of the district.

Further information about house prices, rent levels, low incomes and affordability is available in Appendix 5.

2.11 Homelessness

Records and Monitoring
The Council is required to maintain accurate records relating to all homelessness presentations and acceptances and provide statistics to central Government through the P1E statistical return.

The Abritas computer system facilitates our gathering and monitoring of local information relating to homelessness. We can analyse the data to identify trends and develop strategies to help alleviate homelessness.

National and local trends

National trend
The graph below shows the national trend regarding the number of homeless acceptances and the number of households in temporary accommodation. Following a decrease in both the number of homeless acceptances and number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) from 2008/09 to 2009/10, increases in both areas have been observed during 2010/11 to 2012/13.
Local homelessness trends

The following graph provides the same analysis as above, the number of households accepted as homeless and the number of households in temporary accommodation, at a local level.

As the graph above shows, there is some similarity between trends seen locally with those at national level however the number of households in TA is proportionally much lower locally compared with national figures.

The table and graph below show the number of homeless presentations and acceptances between 2009/10 and 2012/13 across the Braintree District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless presentsions</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless acceptances</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Abritas)
Our monitoring identifies that since 2009/10 the number of households presenting as homeless to the Council increased. The number of presentations for 2010/11 and 2011/12 are very similar, but a notable increase was recorded in 2012/13.

The number of households accepted as homeless, as expected, positively correlates with the increase in number of households presenting as homeless.

These increases are likely to be for reasons including:
- Recalculation of the local housing allowance from being set at 50\textsuperscript{th} percentile of local rents reduced to 30\textsuperscript{th} percentile. This has reduced the number of properties available for rent by LHA claimants and increased competition amongst those seeking private rent accommodation.
- Difficulties in obtaining mortgages has resulted in more people turning to the PRS and also staying in the PRS longer, reducing opportunities for other households to enter this sector.
- Increased unemployment.
- Decrease in employment opportunities.

The table below summarises the decisions made on presentations between 2009/10 and 2012/13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision outcome</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible, homeless, priority need but intentionally homeless</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible but not homeless</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible, homeless but not in priority need</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible households</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BDC P1E returns)
Reasons for homelessness
Identifying the reasons why a household became homeless helps inform our service planning and delivery. The table and graph below summarise the reasons why households accepted as homeless lost their accommodation between 2009/10 and 2012/13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for loss of accommodation</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>Accumulative total 09/10 to 12/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents no longer willing to accommodate</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non violent breakdown of relationship with partner</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment, threats of intimidation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage arrears (repossession or loss of home)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent arrears</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private housing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of rented or tied accommodation</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office asylum support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left an institution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (incl left HM forces)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BDC P1E returns)
As shown by the table and graph above, the top three most frequent reasons for loss of accommodation are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 3 reasons for loss of accommodation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BDC P1E return)

**Priority Need Category**

The Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 outline the legal categories of priority need. The table below summarises the priority need categories of accepted homeless cases from 2009/10 to 2012/13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority need category</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless as a result of an emergency (e.g. floor/fire)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with dependent children:</td>
<td>(66)</td>
<td>(67)</td>
<td>(86)</td>
<td>(117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 child</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households where a member is pregnant/ no dependant children</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicants aged (16 or 17 yrs)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant formerly in care (18 to 20 yrs)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness/disability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drug/alcohol/asylum seeker/other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care leaver (having been in care)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Having served in HM forces | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
Having been in custody/ remand | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0
Domestic violence | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1
Violence (other) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0
Total | 103 | 104 | 137 | 164
(Source: BDC P1E return)

As shown in the table and graph above the main category of priority need is households with dependant children and those households where a member is pregnant. This is followed by households with a physical disability and/or mental illness/disability.

A breakdown of households with dependent children is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of Homeless Applicants with Dependent Children</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple with dependent children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent household with dependant children:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One person household:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other household groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Source: BDC P1E return)

Many households present with multiple issues, for example, a single person with children who is the victim of domestic violence.
Prevention of Homelessness
The table below provides details around the number of households whose homelessness was prevented by the council undertaking effective casework to enable households to remain living at their existing home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Support</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediate using external/internal trained family mediation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial payments from homeless prevention funds</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt Advice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving Housing Benefit problems</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis intervention - providing emergency support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that someone can remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing other assistance that will enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage arrears intervention or mortgage rescue</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cases able to remain living at home</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of homeless presentations made</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table above shows, provision of debt advice, resolving problems with housing benefit, providing legal advocacy and other assistance were the main methods used to help households threatened with homeless to remain living at home.

Total Number of Cases where Homelessness has been prevented/relieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Number of homelessness cases being prevented/relieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: BVPI 213 records)

Homelessness can also be prevented or relieved by helping households to access alternative accommodation, commonly in the private rented sector or in supported housing schemes.
As shown by the table and graph above, the number of homeless cases being prevented each year increased consistently between 2005/06 and 2008/09. Since 2008/09 figures have fluctuated and by the end of 2012/13 were at the lowest since 2005/06.

Homelessness prevention data is extracted from the Abritas database. Current configuration of the system limits the extent of the reporting on cases where advice and/or assistance has been provided so that it is not possible to obtain some information which could be useful in identifying key trends, repeat presentations, geographic hotspots etc with which to inform development of the service. Two other Local Authorities within the sub-region have contracted to the Advice & Prevention module during 2012 and it is anticipated that this wider use will enable more system development work to be undertaken.

Rent in Advance and Deposit Bond Schemes
As mentioned previously, the Rent in Advance and Deposit Bond Scheme are used as essential tools to assist in preventing homelessness. Following a change to legislation in November 2012, councils now have the power to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector without needing the consent of the applicant. Although the supply of suitable and affordable private rented homes will largely dictate the extent to which BDC is able to discharge duty into this sector, it is likely to place additional demands upon the budget.

The following tables provide information relating to the number of households assisted under each scheme and the total expenditure for each financial year.

Deposit Bond Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Total expenditure</th>
<th>Average expenditure per case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>£0</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>£34,267</td>
<td>£857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>£38,563</td>
<td>£1015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>£44,887.84</td>
<td>£935.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>£17,458</td>
<td>£747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>£18,143.50</td>
<td>£672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rent in Advance Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Total expenditure</th>
<th>Average expenditure per case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>£30,512.00</td>
<td>£1,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>£48,436.73</td>
<td>£988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>£13,686.13</td>
<td>£805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>£27,886.93</td>
<td>£775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>£14,959</td>
<td>£863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>£16,318.50</td>
<td>£777</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

2.12 New Affordable Housing in the Braintree District

The Council’s target is to enable an average (over 4 years) of 100 new affordable homes a year and works with housing association to achieve this.

Affordable housing completions over the last 5 years are as follows:

- **2008/09**: 125
- **2009/10**: 171
- **2010/11**: 131
- **2011/12**: 67
- **2012/13**: 71
- **Total**: 565

Average over 5 years: **113**

The Council’ Annual Plan Target for 2013/14 is 58.

We now expect to exceed this target, provided the current proposed programme stays on target. The 58 homes are on sites around the district including schemes in Braintree, Witham and Sible Hedingham as well as some properties purchased on the open-market by Greenfields.

We are expecting starts on a number of significant-sized schemes in this coming year.

These include:
- Riverside, Braintree (55 affordable homes)
- Premdor, Sible Hedingham (58)
- South Street Garage site, Braintree (24)
- Constance Close, Witham (28)
- Hatfield Road estate, Witham (15)

We expect most of these properties will be completed for next year’s programme 2014/15.

Resources

The Council has constantly invested resources into new affordable homes. It has consistently allocated £500,000 to provide new affordable homes and this year has added an additional £750,000 from New Homes Bonus. In addition, the CHIP Fund is being used
to support Greenfields to purchase homes on the open market and develop sites owned by the Council and Greenfields.

The Council has also transferred (or is in the process of transferring) several sites to housing associations to provide new homes. Recent transfers include:

- Riverside, Braintree,
- The Senior Citizens Centre, Halstead,
- Land at 19-21 Bocking End, Braintree
- Hanover Square, Feering

The main public funding for new affordable housing is administered and allocated by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The funding is not made on a geographic basis but to overall programmes of development agreed with housing associations. The HCA has funded (or co-funded) around half of all affordable housing completions this year.

2.13 Performance Monitoring

The Council monitors performance of various functions across the Housing Options service and the delivery of homelessness services. Overall performance of the Council Housing Options service is good when compared to other local authorities, although further improvement is needed to reduce the length of time households, especially families, stay in temporary accommodation.

Further detail about the Council’s performance in delivery of homelessness services is available in Appendix 5.

2.14 Review of the Housing Service 2011

An external consultant carried out a review of the Housing Advisory and Homelessness service in early 2011. The purpose of the review was to help to identify any efficiency savings which could be made and to recommend changes to service delivery which would result in improvements to customer service.

The major change to result from the review was the re-organisation of the former Housing Advice and Homeless Team in July 2011 to become a generic Housing Options Team. There is no longer a transfer of a household from an Advisory Officer to a Homelessness Officer if prevention of homelessness is not possible. The Housing Options officer will carry out prevention work and then continue with an assessment under homelessness legislation if this becomes necessary.

The review also identified the need for an officer dedicated to managing the temporary accommodation supply and to develop relationships with the private rented sector to sustain and improve opportunities to prevent homelessness. The Accommodation Officer has been in post since October 2011 and it is anticipated the transfer of BDC’s hostel to Family Mosaic in 2013 will enable the officer to concentrate more on the private rented sector.
2.15 Welfare Reform

The welfare reforms are expected to present challenges. The table below summarises the changes arising from Welfare Reform, the implementation date and outline of the impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare Reform</th>
<th>Implementation date</th>
<th>Actual/possible impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Housing Allowance (LHA) restricted to 4 bedroom rate</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Larger households unable to afford properties with more than 4 bedrooms, leading to overcrowding in smaller properties. Landlords reluctant to accept large families into 4 bedroom properties due to concerns about wear &amp; tear. Few 4 bedroom properties in the social rented sector to absorb additional demand. Large households remaining longer in temporary accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHA reduced from 50th to 30th percentile</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Fewer properties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) affordable to households dependent on housing benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR extended to single people under the age of 35</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
<td>Increased demand for room rents. Difficulties ‘moving-on’ from Supported Housing projects, resulting in waiting lists and delays for other single people in need of accommodation with support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Benefit Caps: total maximum benefit</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>Excess to be taken from HB payments (prior to UC) – more households falling into rent arrears. Potential for increased levels of homelessness, particularly amongst larger households.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the time of writing, revised to Summer 2013.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHA linked to CPI (instead of RPI)</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>Reduction in the annual up-rating of LHA – fewer PRS properties available to households dependent on HB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-rating of LHA limited to 1%</td>
<td>April 2014</td>
<td>Further restrictions may lead to a continuing reduction in the number of PRS properties affordable to households on low incomes/in receipt of benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB for working age social rented sector tenants restricted in line with bedroom eligibility under LHA</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>Increase in social rented sector rent arrears. Increased demand for transfers to smaller properties. Potentially more competition for homeless households in need of small family homes, leading to longer stays in temporary accommodation and the need for additional units to be sourced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax Benefit replaced by Council Tax Support scheme</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>All working age households will have to make a contribution towards their council tax: anticipated to be approx. £20pm in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The areas arising from Welfare Reform that are likely to affect homelessness are highlighted and summarised below.

**Key issues affecting homelessness**

- Under-occupation in social housing
- Council tax
- Household Benefit Cap (HBC)

**Under-occupation in the Social Rented Sector**

**Key notes:**
- In excess of 500 households are expected to be affected by the reduction in housing benefit of working age tenants deemed to be under-occupying their homes.
  - Households under-occupying by 1 bedroom will have a 14% reduction in Housing Benefit equating to approximately £14.
  - Households under-occupying by 2 bedrooms will have a 25% reduction in Housing Benefit equating to approximately £25.
- Research by the DWP suggests 25% of affected households will be looking to downsize, 30% would seek employment or further opportunities for work, 10-15% would offer a spare room to a lodger or family member and 35% would fall into arrears.

**Council Tax Scheme**

**Key notes:**
- People of working age will be required to pay a minimum of £20 per month

**Household Benefit Cap (HBC) (expected to be implemented Jul – Sept 2013)**

**Key notes:**
- HBC will mean the maximum amount a household with children can receive in benefits will be £500 per week.
- Approximately 100 households living in social and private rented accommodation across the district will be affected. Reductions will range from £1 or £2 per week to amounts of over £100 per week
- Larger families with four or more dependent children will be hit hardest by the reductions.

The following diagram aims to summarise the cause and effect of the most significant issues arising from welfare reform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Expected Outcomes</th>
<th>Mitigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced housing benefit</td>
<td>More households looking to move to smaller accommodation</td>
<td>More applications on the housing register</td>
<td>Promotion of mutual exchange to encourage movement in the social sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Tax scheme (contribution required to council tax)</td>
<td>Less income reducing households’ capacity to make rent payments</td>
<td>Greater competition for smaller properties, especially 2 bed properties</td>
<td>Monitor lettings made and use bidding restrictions as necessary and where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in number of households approaching BDC as homeless</td>
<td></td>
<td>Review of existing policies to encourage movement and make better use of existing social housing stock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>◼ Discretionary Housing Payments are available but resources are limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>