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REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING ADVICE REVIEW
(2008 to 2009)

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Introduction

Since the development of our first Homelessness Strategy in 2003, there have been big changes in the way that housing and homelessness advice is delivered in Redditch. The Council has seen significant reductions in the number of statutory homelessness acceptances and cases of repeat homelessness and the number of successful homelessness preventions has increased.

The Council and our partner agencies have worked hard to come up with innovative solutions for preventing homelessness and supporting people in homeless situations. Relationships with voluntary and statutory partners have strengthened and a number of joint protocols to support vulnerable people in housing need have been developed. What has been most encouraging from this review is that consultation with customers and other stakeholders shows that they also recognise the improvements made in the delivery of Homelessness and Housing Advice Services since 2003.

Officers from Redditch Borough Council were involved in the development of a Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy 'Working Together to Change Lives' which was the culmination of many years of partnership working between the district housing authorities and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners. It highlights the shared priorities for Worcestershire and ensures arrangements are in place to allow partners to pool resources and work together to deliver better value for money across the county.

In January 2009, the Council agreed that a review of local homelessness and housing advice services should be undertaken and a Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy should be developed in partnership with all key stakeholders to ensure that the Council remains focused upon the needs and priorities of local people.

Setting the Scene Nationally

The Government's overall aim is to ensure that more households are adequately housed, in permanent accommodation, with access to quality services and that, where possible, households should be offered more options to prevent homelessness.

The five year strategy to reduce homelessness, 'Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes: Changing Lives' outlined the need for a joined-up, co-ordinated approach to tackling homelessness which addresses the wider causes and symptoms, and looks beyond the provision of housing to the wider range of services and support which may be required for individuals to sustain settled accommodation. Clearly outlined in the document is the importance of preventative measures in order to reduce homelessness and the need to increase the amount of affordable housing and provide more settled homes. The Supporting People "Guide to accommodation and support options for homeless households" which was published in 2003 also called for improvements to services supporting homeless individuals within temporary accommodation and floating support services.

Greater emphasis was put on reducing the number of homeless households being accommodated in temporary accommodation and the Government set a challenging target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. Local Authorities were also targeted to reduce the length of time households with dependent children, pregnant households and 16-17 year olds spend in unsuitable Bed and Breakfast accommodation and this has been widely achieved. Nationally much progress has also been made towards reducing the numbers of rough sleepers and households presenting themselves as homeless.

The Government's target that all Local Authorities should introduce Choice Based Lettings by 2010 has also significantly changed the way in which social housing is allocated around the country. A wide range of innovative systems have been introduced which has led to much debate regarding best practice. The lessons learned to date were recently summarised in 'Allocation of Accommodation: Choice Based Lettings – Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities' which was published in August 2008.

In December 2007, the Local Government Association (LGA) and Housing Corporation signed a joint protocol which calls for Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to work together more closely and in a more coordinated way. Local Authorities are charged with supporting Registered Social Landlords with planning applications for affordable housing. There is a requirement for joint prioritisation of funding, cooperation regarding the prevention of homelessness, promotion of Choice Based Lettings and the alignment of the provision of supported housing based on need.

The Cave Review published in 2007 called for more uniformed assessment and regulation of Social Housing providers and put emphasis on ensuring good quality housing, empowering and protecting tenants, expanding the availability and choice of housing provider.

In 2008, the Government announced the launch of a £200m mortgage rescue scheme was aimed at helping up to 6,000 of the most vulnerable households facing

repossession. Local Authorities, Citizen Advice Bureaus and partner Registered Social Landlords have all played key roles in the administration of the scheme.

The delivery of housing advice and homeless services takes place within a much broader context of the modernisation agenda and efficiency savings as outlined by the Gershon Review 2004/05. Local Authorities are being asked to work smarter and deliver better services giving greater value for money. The Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” published in 2006 outlined the vision that Local Authorities should have greater influence over planning and delivering the services for Local People. The Green Paper ‘Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable’ published in July 2007 pulls all this together calling for every person to have a decent home at a price they can afford, in a place where they want to live and work and acknowledging that that Local Authority must play a strategic role and lead the way in addressing the housing needs of all local residents across all tenures.

Setting the Scene at a Local Level

Redditch Borough Council published its first local Homelessness Strategy in 2003 which outlined their vision to 2009. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the homelessness Act 2002) required the local authority to undertake a Homelessness Review followed by the production of a Homelessness Strategy by July 2003. The Council has delivered all the key objectives outlined within that document and the findings from this review will be used to develop a new Homelessness and Housing Advice Strategy which will set out our objectives for the next five years.

In 2005 a Scrutiny Review was undertaken by Elected Members which looked at Homelessness Prevention. The findings highlighted that the Council needed to change its approach to Homelessness and ensure that a greater number of Council Officers were involved in Homelessness Prevention as opposed to Homelessness Investigation. It also recommended that greater use should be made on the Private Sector in housing Homeless households and called for better use of discretionary housing benefit in the prevention of homelessness. In response to the recommendations the Council launched a new Housing Options Advice Service which opened in January 2007.

Since the initial launch of the Housing Options Team the Council has consulted with its customers regularly and responded to their needs and wishes by adapting and transforming its services through a continual improvement plan. The number of successful Homeless Preventions has gone up and the number of Statutory Homeless Acceptances has reduced. The Council is also offering specialist housing advice and assistance to far more customers than in previous years.

In 2005 work began on the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy “Working Together to Change Lives” and the draft strategy was endorsed by the Chief Officers Group in December 2007. Redditch Borough Council contributed to the document which took a long time to develop and now includes an update which is the latest version of our local Homelessness Action Plan for 2008/09. A lot of progress has been made in improving Housing Advisory services in Redditch since 2005 and this has made parts of the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy already outdated. The findings of this local review, and the priorities set in our Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and

Action Plan will be fed into the Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy which is due to be reviewed in 2010.

All local authorities were required by Communities and Local Government to move away from the traditional method of allocating social housing and implement a new Choice Based Lettings system by 2010. Redditch Borough Council responded to this challenge by launching our "Redditch Home Choice" scheme in September 2007. A review of this scheme after twelve months was undertaken and some amendments to the scheme were subsequently made in 2009.

Wychavon District Council submitted a bid on behalf of the sub-region for Communities and Local Government funding to develop a County Wide Choice Based Lettings system. The bid was successful and officers from Redditch have been involved in designing and developing the County Wide scheme. The first 6 districts have joined the scheme. Redditch Borough Council has not yet made a decision regarding whether they should join the County Wide Scheme but the Housing Advisory Panel has endorsed Officers being involved in a feasibility study to identify the advantages and disadvantages for Redditch Residents. A report regarding the study will be presented to members in 2010.

As part of the Council's commitment to improving accommodation for Homeless families Members approved the closure of the Council's homelessness hostel Upper Norgrove House in October 2008. In its place temporary accommodation was re-provided in the form of 22 units of furnished temporary accommodation units taken out of the existing Council housing stock. The success of the Council in preventing Homelessness has resulted in reduced demand for temporary accommodation so twelve properties have since been returned to Council stock.

In May 2008, Redditch Borough Council Officers, along with a number of key partners from the Voluntary Sector and other Statutory Agencies, commenced compiling this review of the services available to households in housing need in Redditch. The review involved consultation with all the major service providers in the area and former and future customers of the services. The findings of this have identified some priorities for service improvement which have formed the basis of the Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and Action Plan.

The Legal Context

The Housing Act 1996 (As amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) required local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness services in their area, and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review.

The Local Authority is required to keep the strategy under review and to consult with other local or public authorities and voluntary organisations before adopting or modifying the strategy. The first strategy must have been published within 12 months of the Act coming into force (which was July 2002). The Bill also requires Local Authorities to renew their homelessness strategy every 5 years. The strategy cannot be amended without prior consultation with the relevant stakeholders first.

The homelessness aspect of this local strategy must include plans for:

1. The prevention of homelessness;
2. Ensuring there is sufficient temporary accommodation available to people who are, or may become homeless;
3. Ensuring that sufficient support is available to people to prevent them becoming homeless again.

The strategy must include all homeless people irrespective of whether they are considered to be in priority need for accommodation; all people at risk of becoming homeless whether within 28 days or a longer period; people who may have become homeless intentionally; and homeless people in the area who may not have a local connection.

A Local Authority's legal duty to homeless people is contained within Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act was updated and amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (which includes an extension of the priority need categories).

The Act requires that a Local Authority must consider whether a homeless person is: eligible for assistance; homeless; in priority need; not intentionally homeless. A Local Authority may also identify whether or not a homeless person has a local connection with the authority they are presenting to.

A Local Authority must provide temporary accommodation whilst it carries out its investigation and should, where possible, make a decision within 33 working days, about what duty it owes a homeless person. The service offered to a homeless person therefore depends on what duty is owed by the Local Authority following a homelessness investigation and subsequent decision.

The main Statutory Homelessness duties in s.193(2) and s.195(2) of the 1996 Act (to secure accommodation or take reasonable steps to prevent the loss of accommodation) apply only to applicants who have a priority need for accommodation. Section 189(1) and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 provides that the following categories of applicant have a priority need for accommodation:

- i) a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside (see paragraph 10.5);
- ii) a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside (see paragraphs 10.6-10.11);
- iii) a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside (see paragraphs 10.12-10.18);
- iv) a person aged 16 or 17 who is not a 'relevant child' or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (see paragraphs 10.36-10.39);
- v) a person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a 'relevant student') (see paragraphs 10.40-10.41);
- vi) a person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a 'relevant student') (see paragraphs 10.19-10.20);
- vii) a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces (see paragraphs 10.21-10.23);
- viii) a person who is vulnerable as a result of:
 - (a) having served a custodial sentence,
 - (b) having been committed for contempt of court or any other kindred offence, or
 - (c) having been remanded in custody; (see paragraphs 10.24-10.27)
- ix) a person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out (see paragraphs 10.28-10.29);
- x) a person who is vulnerable for any other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside (see paragraphs 10.30-10.35);
- xi) a person who is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster (see paragraph 10.42).

Redditch has and will continue to meet its full legal obligations to those who present as homeless or who require advice and assistance regarding housing options.

The Council has already met its legal obligations by working with the other districts in Worcestershire to produce the County Homelessness Strategy 'Working together to Change Lives'. The Council has demonstrated its strong commitment to keeping local people at the forefront of service development by commissioning a more detailed review of Redditch Homelessness and Housing Advice Services and the development of a Redditch Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and Action Plan.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the review are:

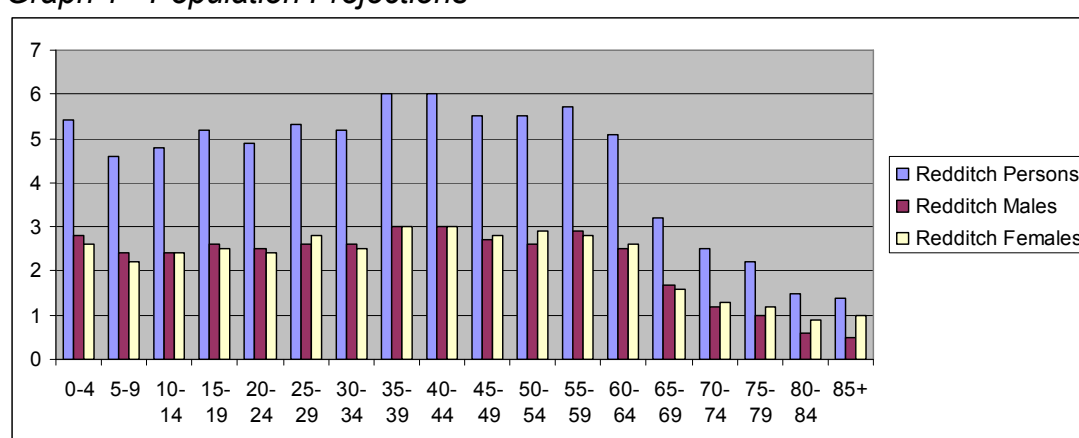
1. To identify the levels of housing need and homelessness within the District and to outline the advice and support available to those seeking accommodation or trying to sustain appropriate housing.
2. To identify any gaps in service provision and highlight areas where improvements could be made to better meet the needs of our customers.
3. To identify the opportunities for the Council and its partners offer an 'Enhanced Housing Options Service' so that customers are able to consider their options regarding education, employment and housing at the same time.
4. Inform the development of a Local Housing Advice and Homelessness Strategy for Redditch which sets the vision for Housing Advice and Homelessness and Housing Advice Services over the next five years.

Population Profile and Levels of Housing Need

In 2005 Redditch Borough Council commissioned a Borough wide Housing Needs Survey from consultants, David Couttie Associates, which assessed population growth and housing need up until 2011, with this information contributing to an assessment of types, sizes and numbers of housing units required to address existing and newly arising demand.

In 2006, Redditch Borough Council joined with the other Worcestershire Districts and Stratford on Avon and Warwick Districts to commission a sub-regional housing market assessment to update the housing needs assessment evidence base. This was published in a document called the South Housing Market Area Assessment.

Graph 1 - Population Projections



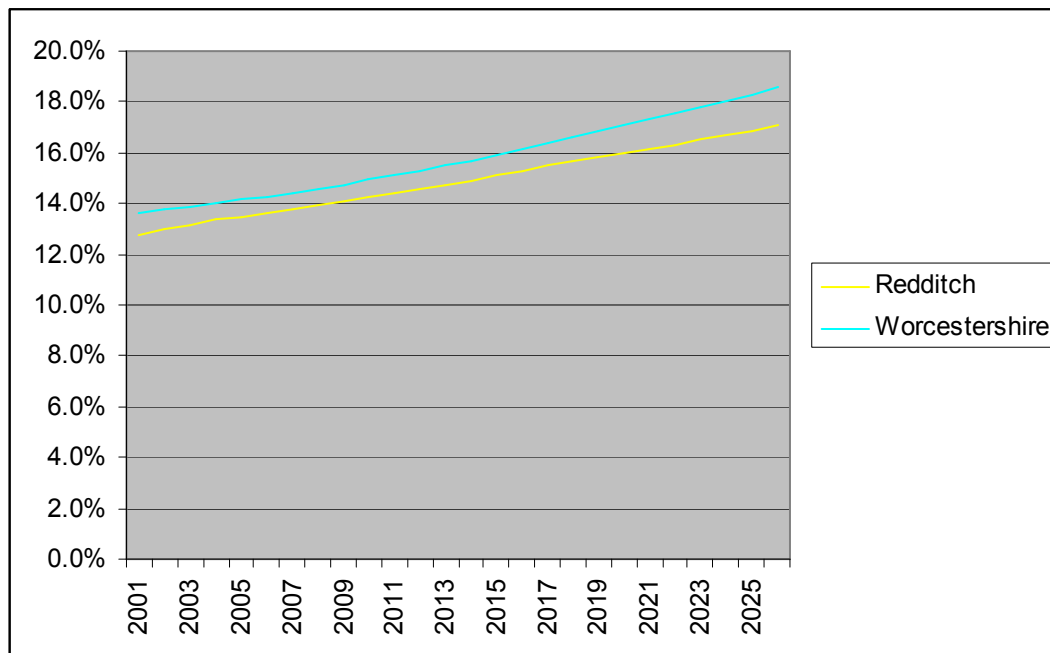
Official ONS Mid-2008 Population Estimates %

According to the 2005 DCA Housing Needs Survey Redditch would have had an estimated population of 79,940 in mid 2008. The projections also indicate that by 2021, Redditch will have over 30% of the population who are aged over 65 which has implications on the design and development of housing stock in the borough. The development of the Redditch Older Person's Housing Strategy 'My Home, My Future, My Choice' has identified the priorities for Older Person's housing in the future and the implementation of the action plan will mark the beginning of the work required to meet the needs of the aging population.

The West Midlands Regional Assembly is responsible for developing and co-coordinating a strategic vision for improving the quality of life in the wider West Midlands region (including Redditch). They are responsible for developing the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy which covers subjects such as housing, economic development, historic and natural environment, renewable energy, minerals, waste and transport. The strategy guides the preparation of local authority development plans and local transport plans. According to this strategy Redditch will need to supply a further 6,600 homes up to 2026 in order to meet the housing needs of the rising population. As there is insufficient land available in the borough to accommodate the additional housing provision the strategy suggests that 3,300 houses should be provided in Redditch while 3,300 houses should be built in the surrounding districts of Bromsgrove and Stratford on Avon. The numbers

of dwellings required includes all housing tenures rather than being exclusively affordable housing units.

Graph 2 - Disability projections



Source: Research & Intelligence Unit, Worcestershire County Council

You can see from the above graph that in line with the rest of Worcestershire households that contain someone with a disability are projected to increase. In Redditch it is predicted that the number will increase from 14.1% of households in 2009 to 15% in 2015 and to almost 20% in 2025.

Based on the predicted growth in the population and increase in the number of households suffering with disabilities it is likely that there will be greater demand for homelessness, housing advice and housing support services in the future. A greater number of households are likely to fall into the Priority Need criteria and it is likely that more will require assistance with accessing and sustaining accommodation.

Access to home ownership is beyond the reach of a significant number of households in Redditch. The South Housing Market Area Assessment showed that just over a quarter of properties sold in Redditch went for a price of £120,000 or less in 2007/08. As the average wage in Redditch is proportionally low compared to other parts of Worcestershire the average household would need to borrow seven times their salary to buy a property worth £120,000. As most mortgage lenders will not grant mortgages much over two and a half times the average yearly household income there are a significant number of newly forming households who will not be able to purchase their own home.

The impact of the economic recession has been significant in Redditch with the number of individuals claiming jobseekers allowance rising rapidly in 2008/09. A large number of people have found themselves unable to meet existing mortgage commitments and the number of individuals who have missed mortgage payments has risen sharply. Repossessions are likely to increase in the future if interest rates go up and as

households come off more favorable fixed term mortgage deals and find themselves unable to re-finance in a more stringent lending climate.

From the needs analysis available it is anticipated that there is an annual affordable housing shortage in the borough of 171 properties. That number may well increase as the number of households unable to purchase goes up due to the present economic uncertainty. The private rented sector may be used to meet some of the affordable housing deficit and the Council is already working with a number of private landlords to assist those households in need to access this type of accommodation.

Redditch Borough Council's Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 has been developed. The two priority areas and focus of the action plan are:

1. Raise the standards in housing conditions in the private sector; and
2. Give support and advice to private sector tenants and vulnerable households.

The initiatives in the Redditch Borough Empty Homes Strategy – May 2009 will also be central to the delivery of sufficient accommodation to meet the level of housing need in the borough. The Empty Homes Strategy identifies opportunities for homes that have been vacant for long periods to be brought back into use for households in housing need in the Borough using a range of enforcement tools. The Council must also work hard to ensure that best use is made of Social Housing Stock. Encouraging under-occupied households to move to smaller or more suitable accommodation for their needs to free up sought after family accommodation and the use of "POD" technology to tackle over-crowding are two initiatives being piloted via the Housing Options Trailblazer Program (2009 to 2011).

Analysis of the Redditch Home Choice Housing Waiting List in 2007/08 showed that:

- Approximately half of all applicants in housing need were living with parents/relatives, sharing housing with other households or living in an institution.
- Around two thirds of those living with parents/relatives sharing or in an institution were single people. The majority of other applicants from this group had one or more children.
- Over 20% of households considered themselves to be over-crowded and in need of larger accommodation.
- A total of 11% of housing applicants were owner-occupiers; these were nearly all single people and couples who had no children and were generally elderly.
- Finally 27% of all applicants were in the private rented sector which was an increase of 6% from 2005/2006.

The number of social housing properties let to new tenants has decreased year on year since 2003/04 when 737 properties were let, to 482 properties let in 2008/09 (source – HSSA). If that trend continues we will see even greater pressure on social housing in Redditch. The Council must work to encourage the development of social housing and consider various forms of low cost market rent or sale to help alleviate the shortfall. In 2009 the Council and Persimmon Homes worked to convert a stalled housing site at Enfield, Redditch originally intended for open market sale, to a scheme for intermediate rent to sale properties with the help of a local housing association and the Homes and Communities Agency. This has generated an additional 20 affordable housing units at

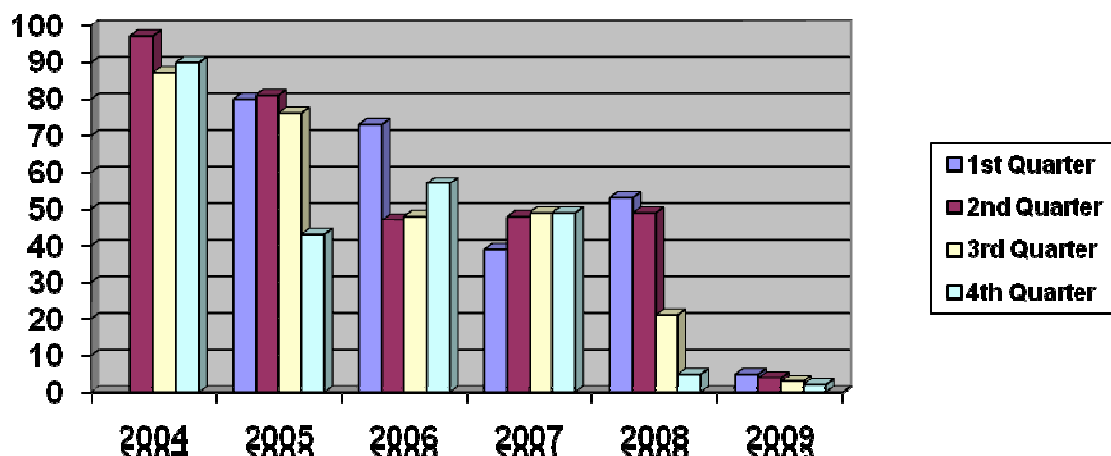
phase 1 of the development and an additional 30 units at phase 2. The Council's Housing Enabling Officer has also worked hard to deliver additional rented units on Section 106 sites and Council owned land, when due to the economic conditions, the shared ownership tenure was not viable.

Redditch has a particularly high proportion of 1 bedroom social housing properties. 3 bedroom houses account for just under a third of the social housing stock. Only 2.7% of the stock consisted of properties with 4 or more bedrooms. Redditch has seen a high proportion of new development containing only 1 and 2 bedroom flats (60% of the total completions). The demand for family housing in the area is extremely high but the Council has experienced reluctance from developers to provide family housing on new developments. In order to address this, the Strategic Housing Team and Planners have worked in the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance to state that Council owned land that is released for development should be prioritised towards family housing.

It is likely that the economic recession has had a more significant impact on the housing market in Redditch than that was predicted in the Housing Needs Survey and South Housing Market Area Assessment. A brand new Borough wide needs analysis is due to be undertaken in 2010 which will allow the Council to make more accurate predictions regarding the levels of housing need over the next five to ten years. From the information available it is clear that there is huge demand for affordable housing in the borough and that the Council must play a central role in assisting local people into suitable accommodation that can be sustained. The rise in the age and disability of the population is likely to put additional pressure on housing advice and support services.

Graph 3 - Levels of Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention

**Number of Statutory Homelessness Acceptances
April 2004 - December 2009**



The overall number of Statutory Homeless Acceptances has drastically reduced since 2004 despite the amount of people approaching the Council for assistance increasing each year.

There was a big reduction in Homelessness Acceptances between 2003/04 and 2006/07 but Redditch’s overall Homelessness Acceptance level increased slightly between 2006/07 and 2007/08 from a level of 5.9 per thousand households to 6.1 per thousand households. A ‘critical friend’ assessment carried in August 2008 by Jim Crawshaw from Communities and Local Government reported that:

“It is clear that Redditch have come a long way in re-modelling their service to provide one that is based on a Housing Options approach. Additionally the service appears to be aimed at all groups of people in housing need and from the evidence of my visit a very good service is provided to non-priority and intentionally homeless households. I believe that the focus of the service has been on providing an options service to all clients and whilst this is commendable I believe that Redditch need to refocus on priority homeless households in order to reduce the acceptance level.”

Percentage Homelessness Acceptances per 1000 households

Region	2007/08	2008/09
England	2.9	2.5
West Midlands	4.1	3.9
Redditch	6.0	2.4

Despite the improvement in August 2008 Redditch had the second highest acceptance rate per one thousand population in the West Midlands, the 8th in England (not including London Boroughs) and the 13th highest of all 354 Local Authorities in England. By the end of the year in 08/09 Redditch had improved its position considerably with the number of homelessness acceptances dropping to 2.4 per thousand households and Redditch

being ranked 14th in the West Midlands and joint 100th highest out of 326 Local Authorities in England (some areas have become unitary which is why the number has changed). Redditch has continued to improve their performance and are confident that they will be even better in the rankings per 1000 households in 2009/10.

Trends in the cause of homelessness within the Borough over the last five years have predominately remained the same with 3 main causes being Parental/Family exclusions, relationship breakdown resulting in lack of affordability within the owner occupier sector and end of assured short-hold tenancies.

The number of households approaching the Council for advice due to a threat of Homelessness has increased steadily since 2004. Over 35% more customers approached the Council for advice and assistance in 2009 compared to the number that approached in 2004.

What has been done to improve Homelessness Prevention?

In 2005 an Overview and Scrutiny Review was undertaken by Members which looked at Homelessness Prevention. The findings highlighted that the Council needed to change its approach to Homelessness and ensure that a greater number of Council Officers were involved in Homelessness Prevention as opposed to Homelessness Investigation. In addition it recommended that greater use should be made on the Private Sector in housing Homeless households and called for better use of discretionary housing benefit in the prevention of homelessness.

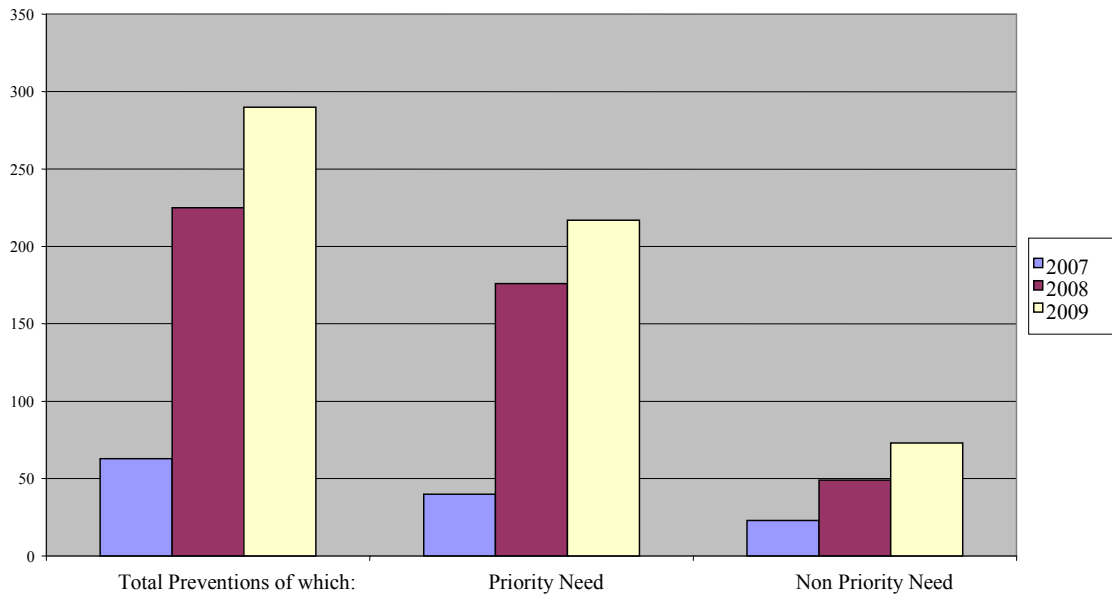
In response to the review the Council launched a new Housing Options Advice Service which opened in January 2007. In the new structure, some of the Officers had their roles changed from Homelessness Investigation to Homelessness prevention. Those Housing Options Officers were encouraged to proactively research housing solutions and to come up with innovative ways of preventing homelessness.

The Council's role has now become far more about informing the customer about their 'Housing Options' and empowering them to make their own decisions and choices about where they live and the type of accommodation that they occupy. Customers are encouraged to play an active role in preventing their own Homelessness and are encouraged to contact the Council much earlier before they reach crisis point.

Prior to the launch of the Housing Options Team, homeless individuals to whom the Local Authority did not owe a Statutory Duty were given limited advice or assistance. Effective homelessness prevention has now freed up valuable staffing resource and has allowed us to make the service available to all customers regardless of their tenure and whatever the circumstances.

Every client is now offered a tailor-made Action Plan describing the Housing Options available to them and outlining the steps that need to be taken to access appropriate Housing and/or relevant support services.

**Graph 4 - Number of Homeless Preventions
January 2007 - December 2009**



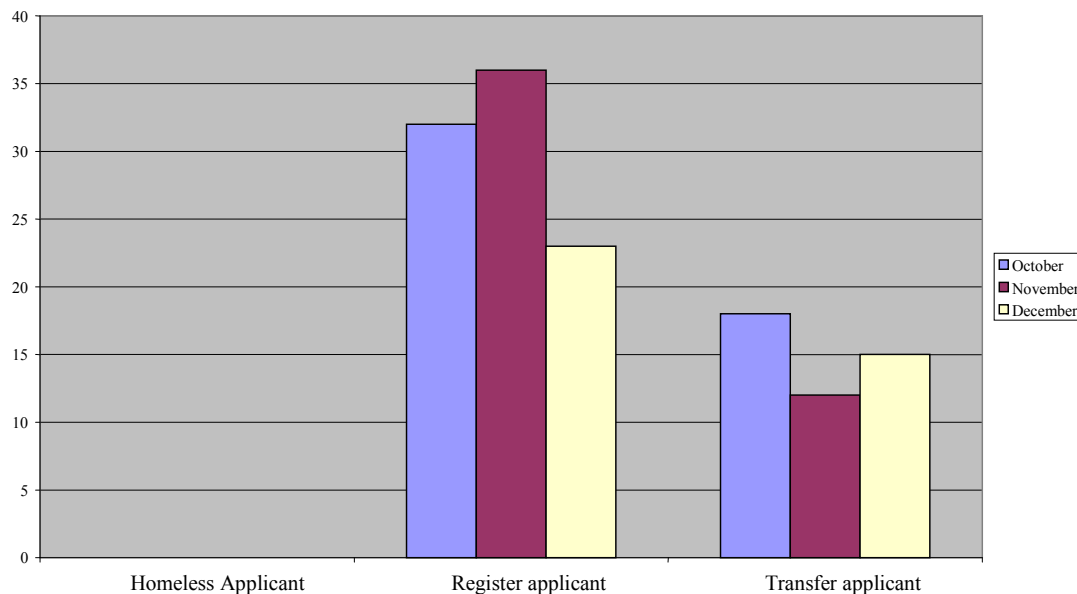
Graph 4 demonstrates that the number of successful Homelessness Preventions has gone up each year since 2007 in both priority need and non-priority need client groups.

Table 1 - Homelessness Prevention (September 2007 to December 2009)

Prevention Category	Priority Need	Non Priority Need
Repossession prevented by advice & assistance	14	5
RBC tenant threatened with Eviction – Resolved	7	0
Resolved via Housing Benefit	30	15
Assisted with Private rented – No deposit provided	84	52
Assisted with rights to Matrimonial Home	3	2
Mediation with parents	16	2
Housed from Waiting List	148	47
Negotiated with landlord to remain in Assured Shorthold Tenancy	7	6
Provided rent deposit	79	8
Assisted with supported accommodation, YMCA, ST Basils, etc.	22	4
Mediation with relative/friends/other	26	1
Assisted with housing association	1	2
Ex offender assisted with housing options trailblazer initiative	1	3
Referred & Accepted onto Mortgage Rescue Scheme	2	0
Assisted with the Sanctuary scheme	3	0
Referred to the inspire project	4	1
Trailblazer, Training Flat	2	0
Preventing Repossession Fund	2	0
Client acted on advice from Housing Options	12	0

You can see from Table 1 that a significant number of people can actually access accommodation via the waiting list to prevent their homelessness without making a Homeless Application. Table 2 highlights the fact that the majority of new lets go to tenants transferring within Council or Housing Association properties and newly registered applicants from outside Social Housing Stock and that there are very few allocations to Homeless Applicants.

Lettings October 2009 - December 2009



The ability for customers in housing need to access accommodation via the waiting list without reaching crisis point and making a Homelessness Application has come about since the launch of Redditch Home Choice in September 2007. The new Housing Allocations Policy was designed to assist customers who were overcrowded or in unsuitable accommodation to access accommodation before they reached the point that they were actually homeless. In particular it has become easier for single people with no fixed abode or who are very overcrowded in accommodation with friends or family to get allocations of bed-sits or one bedroom flats.

When the Housing Options Service was initially launched, all customers were first seen by a Housing Options Advisor who outlined all the housing options available to them. If the customer still chose to pursue a Homelessness Claim then they would be passed over to a Housing Options Officer for a further Homelessness appointment.

In the majority of cases after the full Homelessness assessment by a Housing Options Officer the same conclusion was reached as that of the Housing Options Advisor. In many cases it was concluded that a household was Intentionally Homeless but by this stage households had often not taken action that could have prevented their own Homelessness and there was now a need for Temporary Accommodation. Customers also reported via satisfaction questionnaires that the change in officers caused them to have to repeat information already given.

The Council responded by reviewing the structure of the team again so that Housing Advice Officers and Housing Option Officers would carry out a more generic role giving both housing options advice and carrying out Homelessness Assessments where necessary. We have seen an improvement in customer satisfaction and performance of the department since the new structure was adopted in September 2008.

In many cases, homelessness is threatened due to perceived 'lack of affordability' but it can often be avoided by consolidation of unsecured debts; reducing expenditure by increasing a customers' skill in respect of budgeting; accessing additional benefits such as Housing Benefit or Discretionary Housing Benefit.

Table 1 highlights the number of cases that are prevented by customers acting on advice given or through fast tracking benefit claims. The primary agency offering specialist money advice in Redditch is the Citizens Advice Bureau. The Housing Options Team is able to make emergency referrals to this service for cases that are threatened with Homelessness. This partnership approach has led to the numbers of successful homelessness preventions increasing. Housing Options Officers and Benefits Officers also work together to prioritize benefit claims of those households at risk of Homelessness through the Housing Benefit Fast Track Service. The use of the fast track service has increased in 2009 the Council is looking to promote the service even wider in 2010. The housing benefit department has recently undertaken consultation with its customers and partners and in response has developed a Housing Benefit Uptake Strategy which highlights the priorities for improving the service to 2011.

Table 1 shows that the Housing Options Team has a large amount of success in assisting customers to access accommodation in the private sector. Not all Landlords require a deposit and assistance is offered for both Priority and Non Priority Need cases. The Council currently operates a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme for Priority Need Cases using money awarded via a government Homelessness Grant. The money is used to pay a deposit or rent in advance to secure accommodation with a Private Rented Landlord. The success of the rent deposit guarantee scheme has improved following a review of the process by Officers who felt that the system of getting the money was too time consuming and resulted in missed prevention opportunities. The finance department have assisted the Housing Options Team to re-design the process of obtaining money and now issue priority cheques where required which has made a big difference to the success in the scheme.

As part of the DCLG Trailblazer Initiative, Redditch Borough Council has been piloting the use of the rent deposit guarantee scheme for customers who do not meet the Priority Need criteria but are considered to be socially excluded due to offending, drugs or mental health problems. Customers must demonstrate that they have a willingness to work with agencies to get the support they need to get their lives on track. As at January 2010, Housing Options have assisted 7 customers into private rented accommodation and all but 1 has sustained their accommodation to date. The money is gradually paid back by the customer at a small amount per week via the Credit Union to ensure that funds are replenished for future customers.

The Housing Options Team regularly negotiates with landlords and tenants to resolve disputes and sustain accommodation. Communication often breaks down between the two parties for a variety of reasons such as disputes about outstanding repairs, rent

arrears, antisocial behavior. The Housing Options Team acts as an intermediary and tries to reach a resolution that is mutually agreeable for both parties. In some cases they are able to intervene to speed up housing benefits claims or put landlords in touch with Private Sector Housing Officers to advise regarding building improvements. They are approached by both landlords and tenants and treat this as a partnership between all parties. There are regular meetings between Council departments to identify areas for service improvement in the Private Sector and it is hoped that the development of the new Private Sector Housing Strategy and Action Plan will further enhance these relationships and improve the quality of private sector accommodation. Between May 2007 and July 2009 Redditch Council assisted 18 Landlords gain the Midland Landlord Accreditation.

The Housing Options Team also negotiates with Mortgage Lenders to try and avoid homelessness through repossession. All Housing Options Officers and team leaders have recently attended training on the Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme and Repossession Prevention Fund. Since the introduction of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in April 2009 Redditch Borough Council has implemented an action plan to ensure the scheme is successful and adequately promoted in the area (attached as Appendix B). Two households have successfully been prevented from becoming homeless through the scheme and continue to remain in the family home as tenants. A further ten cases are currently under negotiations for the scheme. Four repossessions have successfully been prevented through negotiations with lenders and nine households' have been assisted into alternative accommodation without making a homelessness application. Early action is essential to preventing repossession cases and amendments were made under the Civil Procedures Rules (part 55) in 2009 so that lenders must notify local authorities when possession proceedings have commenced. This allows Housing Options teams to seek solutions to avoid repossession. Since October 2009 when the amendments were implemented. Redditch Borough Council has received thirty-seven notifications from lenders.

Housing Options Officers can, in some cases, negotiate with family members to maintain accommodation for someone in a household that has been asked to leave. Families may require some more intensive work from a trained mediator to ensure that good relationships are maintained. Redditch has a choice of two Mediation Schemes. The schemes are both geared towards 16 to 25 year olds. Relate is funded via a CLG grant and operates across the whole of Worcestershire. The other is operated by the charity Redditch Nightstop and is aimed at 16 to 25 year olds. Uptake for mediation services has increased this year and the number of preventions has also improved regarding parental exclusion. Often families will be prepared to keep young people living with them for the time required for them to get an allocation from the housing waiting list once they realize that that will happen reasonably quickly and give their child more choice about the property that they move to.

The Council has a Sanctuary Scheme to assist victims of Domestic Violence by providing them with security upgrades within their home to improve their physical and psychological security. A panel of specialists from the Community Safety Team, Housing Options Team, Police Domestic Violence Unit and Stonham make recommendations regarding the suitability of applicants and the work required. Since the introduction of the Scheme, 3 households have successfully been prevented from becoming homeless. Security upgrades are tailored to the needs of the client, the circumstances of the

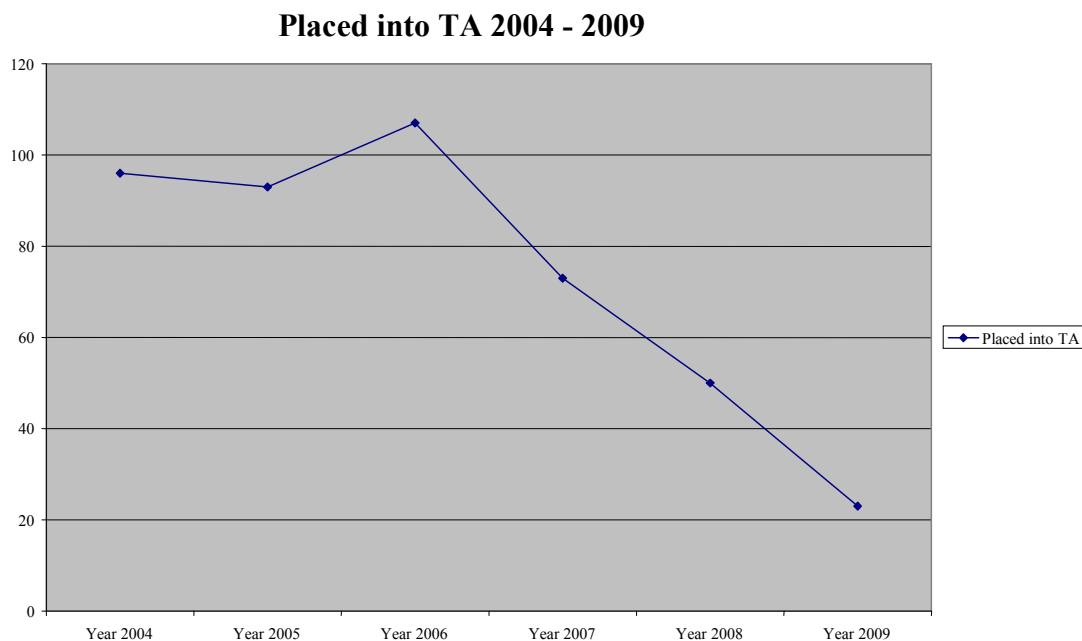
property and the nature of the risk posed by the perpetrator. Upgrades can vary in expense and complexity and may include:

- a) Replacing an internal door with a security-tested door and frame to create a “safe room” within the property that provides refuge in the event of intrusion / attack
- b) Adding security film to ground floor windows to reduce the ease with which the perpetrator can break in
- c) Adding a door chain, spyhole or CCTV system to allow the client to see who is calling at the property before having to let them in
- d) Adding window locks to accessible windows
- e) Securing side and rear gates and fences to reduce the likelihood of intrusion at the rear of the property.
- f) Adding dusk-til-dawn security lights to illuminate the outside of the property

Referrals and meetings are coordinated by the Council's Community Safety Team but referrals can come from any statutory agency or voluntary sector partner. Financial support for the scheme has been given by Supporting People, Redditch Community Safety Partnership and Homelessness Grant Funding to date. Funding for the scheme has been found for 2010/11 but beyond that future funds have not been secured.

Temporary Accommodation in Redditch

Redditch temporary accommodation use for homeless households in Redditch Borough has fluctuated since the base line figure was set on the 31st December 2004 when 26 households were in Temporary Accommodation. In order to achieve the CLG's target to end use of TA for homeless families by 2010, the Council has to reduce its temporary accommodation to 13 households. Four households were in temporary accommodation by December 2009, so Redditch Borough is therefore clearly on track to achieving the target set by Communities and Local Government.



In 2003 the Government outlined its vision to improve the quality of temporary accommodation for Homeless People. In response Redditch Borough Council carried out an options appraisal regarding its current use of B & B and Hostel Accommodation. As a result the Council first proposed to close Upper Norgrove House and to develop a new hostel in a more central location in the Borough. This proposal was later abandoned and Members instead agreed that Upper Norgrove House should be closed and the Borough should adopt a 'dispersed unit' temporary accommodation service with 22 self contained furnished dispersed properties being taken from the Council's housing stock.

The new temporary accommodation properties were selected based on their close proximity to amenities, bus routes and Sure Start Centres. The demand for temporary accommodation has reduced following increased success with prevention.

In response, the Housing Options Team has been able to return twelve properties to the Council housing stock to be re-let on a more permanent basis. If demand for temporary accommodation increases in the future then up to twelve properties would be removed from stock and used as Temporary Accommodation. All customers placed in temporary accommodation are referred to a support agency relevant to meet their needs. A part-time Officer is responsible for looking after the management of the Temporary

Accommodation and ensuring that they are kept in a good state of repair and that utilities are in place. That Officer is supervised by the Housing Options team Leader for Allocations.

B & B accommodation is used for all client groups to which we may owe a Homelessness Duty if an approach is made outside of normal working hours. The costs associated with having an out of hours response service to give individuals access to dispersed units 24 hours per day is considered too costly for the number of individuals who require temporary accommodation and the size of the Borough. As soon as the Office is open again then every effort is made to move the customers from B & B and place them into more suitable Temporary Accommodation. The Council has made good progress towards the requirement to no longer place families or 16 / 17 year olds into B and B accommodation and use of B & B overall has significantly reduced since 2003.

We have no temporary accommodation in the borough for individuals who are assessed as having no priority need under Homelessness Legislation. Homeless Individuals would be assisted in finding suitable hostel accommodation outside of the Borough with most clients going to Birmingham or Worcestershire. All One Stop Shops have advice sheets detailing how to look for vacancies and who to contact.

Nightstop works with the Authority to provide Temporary Accommodation for young homelessness people in the homes of trained volunteers. The project covers Redditch and Bromsgrove and referrals can be made Monday to Friday. The service is aimed at 16 to 25 year olds. The hosts are volunteers who have been through a Counselling course designed to support young people. Young people stay with the host family on a short term basis while move on accommodation is secured.

Supported Accommodation provision in Redditch

Organisation	Provision
Stonham Housing Association	212 Mount Pleasant which is a six bed unit giving priority to ex offenders including men at risk of offending.
St Basils Beoley Court and Grange Court (Roof Top Housing Association)	24 units of move on accommodation for young people with Floating Support and 9 units of Supported Accommodation. Supporting People Funding pays for the support costs. This facility is currently under review as part of Worcestershire's Options Appraisal of Housing & Support Services for Young People (aged 16 to 25 years)
Y.M.C.A	170 units for young people in 3 schemes one of which provides support for 25 young people requiring extra support needs.
Bromford Corinthia Arms Houses	16 units with support needs specifically for young parents.
Stonham Refuge	10 units for domestic violence, 1 of which is suitable for the disabled

Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

The ethnic structure of Redditch is shown in the table below. Figures for England are shown for comparison purposes.

Percentage of resident population in ethnic groups:	Redditch	England
White	94.8	90.9
Mixed	1.3	1.3
Asian or Asian British	2.7	4.6
Black or Black British	0.9	2.3
Chinese or other	0.3	0.9

Source 2001 Census, ONS

Within Redditch there are a lower percentage of black and minority ethnic groups compared with the national average. There is a particularly high concentration of people from ethnic minorities living within the Enfield and Smallwood areas. Research undertaken has identified that there is a general fear of crime within the Asian Community who request housing within certain areas of the Borough for family support. The greatest demand in terms of black and ethnic minority housing needs comes from the Asian community where there is the requirement for larger family accommodation.

A snapshot Survey conducted in 2008 demonstrated that 6.8% of customers who approach approached the Housing Options Team for advice and assistance were from Black or Ethnic Minority Groups. That percentage was slightly higher than the number expected based on census information. In terms of homelessness, 182 Homelessness Acceptances were made between 6 September 2007 and 6 September 2008. Of these Homelessness Acceptances 3.85% of them were from Black or Ethnic Minority Groups. This percentage is lower than you would expect based on the population and the numbers accessing the service for advice and it raised questions with the Council regarding why the outcomes for housing advice were different based on ethnicity.

Further research was undertaken and it became clear that one reason for the disparity was that several customers accessing the advice service had no recourse to public funds and were therefore not eligible for assistance under Homelessness Legislation. Some minority groups also appear to prefer accommodation in areas which tend to be privately owned and have limited social housing stock. The Council committed to record more information from customers about the outcome of the advice given in 2009 to ensure that every customer was receiving a fair service.

The number of Homelessness Acceptances has dropped so low in 2009 that it is difficult to draw any conclusions from those figures due to the small sample size, but analysis regarding the outcomes of prevention work is now summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 - Successful prevention by Ethnicity (Sep 2007 to Sept 2009)

Asian Any Other	1
Asian Bangladeshi	2
Asian Indian	1
Asian Pakistani	10
Black Caribbean	5
Refused	32
White Any Other	7
White British	461
White Irish	13
total	532
6% refused	
7.3% ethnic minority groups	

From the information in table 3 it is clear that Homeless prevention in Ethnic Minority groups is proportionate with the overall population. The Council can be confident that the advice accessed via the Housing Options team is having a positive effect in averting homelessness. We can see that proportionally a large number of those who have their homelessness prevented do so by accessing the waiting list.

All statutory and voluntary sector partner organizations that were involved in the review of Housing Advice and Homelessness Services in Redditch advised that they do record information about the ethnicity of clients accessing their services. Very little has been done with this information to date to inform the development of advice and support services across the board to see if all needs are being met appropriately. Further work will be required to establish if there are gaps in current service provision for minority groups.

The Council has improved its services for minority groups by introducing Language Line, which is a verbal translation service. Leaflets are made available in all the major languages that are represented in Redditch. Housing Options Action Plans are also translated in cases where it is felt that clients would benefit. The Council has also recently installed a translate feature on the Redditch Home Choice System and Housing pages of the Council's website so that customers are able to read the advice and information given in their own language. An impact assessment has been undertaken in respect of the Redditch Home Choice System and Housing Options Service and the Action Plan has been attached as Appendix D.

Summary of Housing, Benefits and Money Advice Services

There are currently four Council **One Stop Shops** in Redditch which are located in Redditch Town Hall, Batchley Shopping Centre, Winyates Centre and Woodrow Centre. All of them have Customer Service Advisors (CSA's) on hand to offer advice on all Council services including Housing. CSA's offer advice regarding the Council Allocations Policy, Redditch Home Choice System, Mutual Exchange, support services for vulnerable clients, information regarding private rented landlords and temporary accommodation. They also are able to give advice regarding Environmental Health issues including removing domestic refuse and arranging special collections. They are also able to assist with Council rent issues, repaying arrears, checking balances etc. Housing options advice is offered in conjunction with housing benefits advice to ensure that customer enquires are dealt with holistically.

CSA's use a Benefits Calculator to predict how much each individual will be entitled to. There is also a Housing Benefit Fast track system so that if customers provide all the information to do with their claim at one time their Housing Benefit can be assessed within 7 days. At the One-Stop-Shop, customers can apply to go on the Redditch Home Choice System which is used to advertise all the Council's vacant properties and those belonging to our Partner Registered Social Landlords in a weekly advertising cycle. CSA's are also able to place bids on properties if customers do not have access to a computer. CSA's carry out Medical Assessment questionnaires to gather information aimed at establishing if clients should be given priority for housing through the Redditch Home Choice waiting list due to their living conditions having a detrimental affect on their Health. Where appropriate, CSA's are able to make referrals to the Housing Options Team or Special Needs Officer, who are able to carry out further assessment of Medical or Social Needs which may warrant households being awarded additional priority through the housing waiting list.

The **Housing Options Advice Service** is a Council Service based in the Town Hall and gives customers the opportunity to talk to a housing specialist on a one-to-one basis in the form of a 45 minute appointment. The service is focused on giving customers an outline of their housing options so that they are better able to make informed decisions about their housing situation and where they want to live in the future. Advice is tailor made depending on the customer circumstances and focuses on preventing homelessness and empowering customers to play an active role in locating and accessing accommodation. Officers are also able to assess clients eligibility under Homelessness Legislation should all prevention initiatives be exhausted. The service is available to all customers regardless of age, priority need, their existing housing tenure, whatever the circumstances. The service can be accessed by making an appointment over the telephone or via the One-Stop-Shops where full details are taken in advance to ensure that Officers are able to research all the options prior to the meeting. All clients are given a personalized action plan which outlines the Housing Options available to them, and the actions they can take (including the likely timescales involved) which will improve their housing situation. There is also an emergency Housing Options Officer available during working hours for customers who find themselves in crisis situations where early intervention is key to successful prevention or where they are literally homeless on that day.

Council **Tenancy** and **Rent and Welfare Officers** are able to offer customers specialist advice regarding their tenancy and or rent accounts. They work with tenants and residents to oversee the management of council housing stock and ensure that properties and communal areas are kept appropriately. They administer the mutual exchange process, carry out tenancy enforcement and support tenants experiencing problems. Their role predominantly involves working with tenants, residents' groups and other key partners such as police, social services and the antisocial behavior team to ensure Redditch is a safe green and clean place for residents to live.

The Council's **Control Centre** coordinates an emergency out of Hours service to respond in case of emergency. It is accessed via a telephone number which is listed on the Council Website, on an automated message if individuals ring the normal Redditch Borough Council switchboard number and is listed through directory enquiries. The Control Centre is able to contact the duty Housing Options Officer who is on duty if a customer finds themselves in an emergency Homeless situation outside of working hours. In most cases the Housing Options Officer will make the decision on whether we have a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation or not. If the case is not straightforward and further guidance is required the Officer can contact a Manager for a decision.

Where possible before providing temporary accommodation Officers try to prevent the Homelessness by negotiating with friends or relatives to allow them to stay there if only on a temporary basis. Emergency placements for Statutory Homeless individuals is accommodated in local Hotels or B & B's but stays are kept to a minimum with households being made an emergency appointment with a Housing Options Officer the following working day. Following the interview households are transferred to more suitable accommodation such as our dispersed unit temporary accommodation while a social tenancy becomes available or more permanent accommodation in the Private Rented sector. Non Statutory Homeless individuals would be given advice and details of hostels out of the area that may have suitable vacancies.

The **Homelessness Prevention Officer** is a specialist individual within the Housing Options Team who provides specialist advice regarding Assured Short hold Tenancies and offers a mediation service between tenants and landlords with the aim of preventing homelessness. They actively seek landlords and letting agents with Private Rented Accommodation for rental, assess the properties to ensure they reach the required quality standards and then pass the properties to the Housing Options Officers who actively match them with suitable Households. The prevention officer monitors expenditure through the Council's Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme and the payback service offered through the Credit Union which enables customers to pay back rent deposits that have been loaned to them. They also proactively refer potentially vulnerable clients to appropriate support agencies and facilitate a fast track benefits service geared towards supporting our most vulnerable customers.

Jobcentre Plus is a government agency supporting people of working age from welfare into work, and helping employers to fill their vacancies. They are part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and play a major role in supporting the Department's aim to 'promote opportunity and independence for all through modern, customer-focused services'. There is an office in Redditch where clients can obtain benefit advice or can

complete claim forms. Client can also use this organisation to apply for Social Fund Assistance (Crisis Loans, Budgeting loans etc) to assist with 'rent in advance'.

Connexions provide specialist information, advice and guidance service to young people aged 13 to 19 years (up to 25 years age with additional needs). They are able to offer advice regarding benefits, employment and training. Housing is one area that they also provide support. Each client is given the opportunity for a one to one meeting with a Personal Adviser who will discuss the needs of client and then refer him/her onto the one stop shop at Redditch Borough Council. If housing needs are urgent, with the client being homeless, a referral to Nightstop can be made. Clients can book a one hour appointment or simply drop in. They can also access help via the telephone. These young people would be assigned their own Personal Advisor who would provide on going support and monitor their progress with the housing agencies. The Personal Advisor can also accompany clients to interviews with other organizations such as the Council. Connexions are centrally located in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre.

The **Redditch Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. The CAB help people manage their problems effectively and help prevent insolvency and potential homelessness. The CAB is able to work with customers to resolve their financial difficulties and reduce the likelihood of people losing their home. Advisors are trained volunteers who have reached the advice standard required nationally to give advice to clients. Every individual approaching the service is financially appraised to ensure that they are in receipt of all the benefits and tax credits that they are entitled to. Access to the service is initially via an advice line and assessed through a gateway assessment tool so that those in urgent need are fast tracked.

The Housing Options and Rent and Welfare Team at the Council are also able to refer clients who are potentially homeless or in housing need to the CAB. During 08/09 they advised on 779 Housing related issues, of these 52 were actually homelessness and 136 were threatened with homelessness. During the first quarter figures for 09/10 (April – June 2009), they dealt with 188 housing related issues, of these 14 were actually homelessness and 17 were threatened with homelessness. The CAB is a key partners in the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. They have also recently launched a Debt Relief Order Scheme, where clients on low incomes with debt below £15,000 can pay £80 to become bankrupt. The CAB work closely with the Credit Union to encourage customers to save.

Health Services

Primary Care Trusts (PCT) have a Public Health Directorate with a role to improve health in the community and to address health issues and homeless people are identified as one of the priority groups. A representative from the PCT sits on the Countywide Homelessness Steering Group to assist in the development of protocols and services designed to support vulnerable Homeless People.

At present there is no special provision set out for homeless people by GP's within the Borough. The review has limited information as to the ability for homeless people to access GPs. Consultation undertaken prior to the closure of the Councils Homelessness Hostel Upper Norgrove House established that customers living in this facility often experience difficulties traveling to health facilities due to poor transport links and limited affordability. The location of the new dispersed temporary accommodation units has been selected to ensure close proximity to transport links and GP surgeries. The Authority has employed Temporary Accommodation Officers to work, in the future, with support agencies to monitor if these individuals have success in accessing health services.

Priority Need of Homelessness Applicants is assessed by reviewing information provided by customers through their own Medical Practitioners. Where Housing Options officers require specialist guidance about how this information relates to the assessing vulnerability using the Priority Need legislation; the information is forwarded to an external organisation called Now Medical for further assessment. Where a specialist second opinion is required Now Medical is able to have the information assessed by more than one specialist. Now Medical also has access to psychiatric specialists for assessing priority based on Mental Health.

Properties available through the Redditch Home Choice are advertised in local GP Surgeries on their public Notice Boards (news letters are distributed via a weekly mail shot).

Whilst the PCT were heavily involved in the 2003 Homelessness Review and Strategy, they have been involved to a lesser extent with the development of this updated Review. It is planned to undertake detailed consultation with them to ensure that their priorities form part of the updated Homelessness Review and Strategy for the Borough.

An information sharing protocol has been implemented between the Housing Options Team and Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust (excluding Mental Health Hospitals) which means that staff can share information regarding service users to ensure the successful operation of the housing advice and re-housing service when customers give their signed consent. It covers:

- Hospital patients who may or may not have dependent children and may or may not be actually homeless because of access to accommodation (in which case the duties owed may alter).
- Homeless applicants that the local authority would have a statutory duty to secure accommodation under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002).

The protocol sets out the appropriate time scales for information to be shared by Health Professionals with Local Authority Homeless Teams to ensure discharge patients can be found suitable accommodation and reduce the likelihood of 'bed blocking'. The protocol also sets out the time scales in which the Local Authority partners should reasonably take to find such accommodation to keep 'bed blocking' to a minimum.

Whilst there are examples where this protocol has been followed and the system worked very well, Officers from the Redditch Borough Council Housing Options Team have recorded five occasions during the review period where information has not been shared early enough with them prior to the release of a patient to ensure a planned move into alternative accommodation. It is felt by the Council and the PCT that an update of the protocol and further training for all team members may improve the service for customers.

The Council's in-house Adaptation Works Team carries out adaptations for Council Tenants who are being discharged from hospital within the target time of 5 working days. The Equipment & Adaptation Service receives faxed recommendations from the Occupational Therapy Service and allocates the work to the Adaptation Team immediately for action.

If a customer is an Owner Occupier or is in Private Rented Accommodation, the Occupational Therapy Service will instead refer the customer to the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency. They work to help older and disabled owner-occupiers in Redditch to remain in their own homes, within their own community, to live as independently as possible. They do this by providing information about the choices they can make to improve safety, security, comfort and convenience.

The North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency are able to bring together the expertise and finance needed to carry out necessary repairs, improvements and/or adaptations so that older or disabled people can remain in their own homes. They are able to assist customers to apply for grant assistance where needed, offer practical assistance by finding professionals to carry out repair works quickly. The work undertaken can range from small items, a dripping tap, the installation of handrails or new locks, to major jobs such as building a specially adapted bathroom or replacing a roof. The Agency provides support to older and disabled people throughout the process and where necessary signpost links them with other agencies that may also be able to assist.

In some cases a medical need cannot be met through the adaptation of a property or the costs associated with doing so would be too great. In recognition of this in 2006 the Council introduced a Special Needs Officer who works with vulnerable or clients with physical disabilities to support them to access more suitable accommodation which meets their needs. They offer advice regarding all possible Housing Options and offer practical support and assistance through the process.

The Special Needs Officer keeps a register of all Social Housing properties that have been adapted in the borough and also a list of candidates who require particular properties to meet their Special Needs. The Special Needs Officer works in partnership with the Occupational Health Team from the Primary Care Trust to identify cost effective

solutions for meeting customers needs. In addition they manage a budget which has been set up to assist vulnerable or elderly clients with the costs associated with moving to a property which better meets their needs or has already had adaptations carried out. The Special Needs Officer has proved successful in freeing up under occupied family accommodation occupied by elderly or disabled clients.

The Occupational Health team and Special Needs Officer have recently produced a draft Protocol which sets out when clients should be passed over for assessment and the circumstances where adaptations or housing moves should be given. The document is designed to ensure that all professionals understand the requirements of them and that budgets are spent appropriately. It is hoped that the Draft document will be endorsed in early 2009.

Services for Mental Health

The Council has worked in Partnership with Social Services, the Mental Health Team and a local registered Social Landlord to improve the services and accommodation to people suffering from severe and enduring mental health. In February 2000 the Redditch Accommodation Action Group (AAG) was established. The membership of the group comprises of one representative from each of the following: -

- 1 Redditch Borough Council
- 2 Social Workers
- 3 Community Psychiatric Nurse
- 4 Care and Support Providers
- 5 Registered Social Landlords
- 6 Mental Health Staff Nurse

A protocol set up between Redditch Borough Council and the Redditch Housing Forum gives the A.A.G the ability to nominate referrals onto the Gold Band of Redditch Home Choice. Referral nominations are agreed through a panel, who meet bi-monthly, which consists of one representative from Redditch Borough Council, one from Social Services and one from the Health Authority.

The key objectives of the AAG are: -

1. To actively seek appropriate accommodation for vulnerable individuals who are suffering with mental illness;
2. To support development of a partnership and working protocol;
3. To ensure the provision of support for clients to help sustain their tenancies;
4. To share key information and improve communication between housing providers and the Community Mental Health Team.

The AAG is both an example to good working practice and partnership working and has been recognise as a model of good working practice with the Chartered Institute of Housing (C.I.O.H.) and is displayed on the C.I.H Good Practice Unit Website. Following joint training, the partnership has increased awareness of mental illness and the impact on provision of suitable housing, and how to ensure that tenancies are not failing by the lack of appropriate support.

In Redditch there is no specialist supported accommodation for those with mental health problems and one of the recommendations made during the consultation for this Homelessness Review and Strategy was to investigate the opportunities for development of such a scheme.

Services for Families

We currently have six SureStart Children Centres in Redditch; these are located in Batchley, Riverside, Lodge Park, Woodrow, Churchhill and Matchborough. These have been working since 2002 to improve access to advice services and bring together family support, advice on nurturing, health services, early learning, training and employment opportunities for parents.

Sure Start employs a number of family support officers and translators to ensure that young families get all the help they need. Housing Options, Citizens Advice Bureau and Housing Benefits work with parents via a number of outreach workshops in SureStart Children Centres to ensure that families have access to all the advice they need so that they can sustain suitable accommodation and maintain an appropriate standard of living for their families.

Surestart have recently obtained a grant to support the employment of a teenage pregnancy working to work with teens and assist them to access suitable accommodation and support services. The member of staff has undertaken some training with the Housing Options Team to ensure that they are able to advice customers of their options and to promote the sharing of information to enable the service users to be appropriately supported.

Bromford Corinthia Housing Association offers supported accommodation for young families, singles or couples with children under the age of 5. The accommodation consists of 16 self contained flats, which consist of 1 bed or 2 bed flats. The scheme intends to provide a stepping stone to independent living, to furnish its residents with the skills necessary to live independently and to ensure a successful move on scheme. Support is given in all areas concerning young people and their families e.g. Benefits advice, parenting skills, budgeting, cooking, healthy lifestyles, training. They also offer a Floating Support service to families or singles of any age to prepare for successful independent living either in a first tenancy or to promote tenancy sustainment.

Services for Young People

Redditch has one of the youngest populations in the country with 34% of people aged 25 or under. The 2007 Centre Point Regional Strategy highlights that Youth Homelessness has reduced slightly since 2006 but increased since 2003. Between 7 and 10 young people in Redditch become homeless every week. 21 Organisations across Worcestershire recorded information to form part of a snapshot survey which sought to establish why the high level of youth homelessness had occurred..

The percentage of those approaching the organisations from each age group, were as follows:

Age Group	Percentage
16 – 17	19.7
18 – 19	31.3
20 – 25	49

The snapshot survey reported that there were a varied number of reasons that resulted in homelessness, but significantly 82% of young people reported the reason as being breakdown of their relationship with family members or friends. 68% of young people reported that if a Medication Service was available they would not wish to use it. Our local Homelessness Prevention Statistics do demonstrate that in some instances the relationship breakdown that caused the eviction from the parental home can be repaired and reconciliation reached using Mediation. Young people often have reacted to the suggestion of 'Mediation' with fear of the unknown but those who are persuaded to take part later report that it was useful.

A protocol for addressing 16 & 17 year old Youth Homelessness was developed by Worcestershire Social Services Department all six District and Borough Councils within the County of Worcestershire and had been in operation since the strategy in 2003. The protocol is currently under review following a change in the law in 2009. The review involves all the key agencies involved with Homeless 16 and 17 year olds. It is hoped that the new protocol will be endorsed by the Worcestershire Chief Officers Group in 2010 and training on the new protocol can be arranged for all operational staff relatively quickly.

17% of the total individuals presenting as Homelessness in Worcestershire reported to be 'Sleeping Rough' with no fixed abode. Based on the information provided by agencies in the development of this review it is felt that this is a larger number than actually seen in Redditch. A considerable amount of time has passed since a formal Rough Sleepers count was undertaken in Redditch.

When young people were asked about their preference for future accommodation 54% indicated that a self contained rented / flat or house would be the best option. 50% felt that they would require support and advice. Approximately 25% of young people reported that they would find the use of a training flat useful when making the decision about whether to live independently.

The Council believes that many 16 & 17 year olds require supported accommodation to enable them to learn the skills required to sustain a tenancy. With this in mind, the increase in homeless 16 & 17 year olds has resulted in the Council increasing nominations to supported housing schemes. In order to ensure that this type of supported accommodation does not become “blocked” with older individuals who would not qualify under Homelessness Legislation for priority after 18 years old Redditch Borough Council has developed a “Move On Scheme”. The “Move On” scheme enables young people to move out of supported accommodation and into independent Council (or housing association) accommodation, with the provision of floating support to help them settle into their home, and maintain their tenancy in the long term. This frees up much needed places in supported housing schemes so that other homeless young people can be accommodated.

Since the launch of the scheme in June 2003, approximately 15 young people per year have been re-housed into independent accommodation with St Basils, Nightstop and YMCA providing floating support. A review of the scheme has taken place to monitor success of the young people sustaining their tenancy. In particular issues have been raised in relation to arrears. 20% of cases were identified as having rent arrears within the first two years of independent living and floating support has been offered again to help resolve the issues and avoid the arrears escalating to the point of eviction. The key success to the scheme is the excellent partnership working within the agencies concerned.

Key Partners in the “Move On Scheme”:

- Redditch Borough Council
- Redditch YMCA
- Redditch Nightstop
- St Basils
- Stonham Housing

The Supporting People Partnership and Children’s Services (16+ Targeted Services Team) commissioned a joint strategic review of young peoples services in 2008. The aim was to evaluate the current housing and support options available for young people in Worcestershire. This appraisal was designed to compliment the work undertaken for the ‘Children and Young People’s Plan’ and the ‘Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy’. The review was countywide, and holistic, in order to take account of the views of current and former service users, staff, management and stakeholders/referrers. It included a range of organisations who have an interest in helping young people to achieve their potential in life. The review across the whole of Worcestershire outlined that the Supported Accommodation provision in Redditch is far greater than those in other districts. As a result of this shortfall in other areas it is believed that there may be a natural migration of Young People into Redditch from the other areas. Measures to redress the balance and increase provision in other areas is likely to be proposed through the strategic review. There is also a general acceptance among the project team that the number of options for accommating young people needs to increase as young people are individuals with varying needs. Officers from Redditch Borough Council have been actively involved in the work surrounding the review and are assisitng in the design and procurement of future services.

The “Inspire Project” is an initiative being piloted as part of the Trailblazer Programme and is designed for young people with low support needs who are in low paid work or in education. The accommodation consists of two five bedroom properties which have been furnished to a high standard of decoration. Tenants have their own room but share facilities such as lounge, bathroom and kitchen. The accommodation is owned by a private landlord who has been accredited by the Council sponsored Midland Landlord Accreditation Scheme and floating support is given for tenants by Nightstop. Move on accommodation is provided via the Council’s move on scheme.

Summary of Advice Services for Young People

Services	Providers
Floating Support & resettlement	St Basils, Night Stop, Stonham Housing Association, Bromford Housing Association, Fry Housing Trust
Family Mediation	Redditch Nightstop, Relate
Welfare, Benefits, Education, Employment & Training	Connexions, Advice Bureau (CAB), Job Centre Plus, Redditch Careers Service, Redditch Co-operative Homes, Redditch Borough Council One-Stop-Shops and Housing Options Team, The REDDI Centre, the All Women’s House, Children’s Sure Start Centres
Health	Community Drugs Team (CDT), SMART, Young Person Friendly Services, Contraception & Sexual Health, Arrowside Unit (Alexandra Hospital), Family Planning, Social Services, All Women’s House, Children’s Sure Start Centres

Emergency Accommodation for Young People

Redditch Borough Council’s provision of emergency accommodation for young people includes 10 Dispersed Units of Temporary Accommodation, referrals to Redditch Nightstop and hostels for young people outside the area. B & B Accommodation may be used if a vulnerable young person accesses the service outside of working hours but they would quickly be moved to more suitable accommodation when the Town Hall reopens.

Services for Older People

Redditch has a generous supply of housing specially designated for older persons, providing over 1100 self-contained units of accommodation, in the form of flats, bungalows and older persons sheltered housing.

The numbers of older people presenting themselves as homeless in the Redditch Borough is very small, and when homeless applications are made the older person can usually be accommodated very quickly due to the low demand for older person flats, especially bed-sits.

In 2006, the Council published the results of our Housing Needs assessment which called for a review of elderly person's accommodation in the Borough. In response the Council embarked on extensive consultation which gathered our customers' views on how elderly person's services should be shaped in the future. It has been acknowledged that many older people may be living in accommodation that is unsuitable to their needs or aspirations of accommodation. Some of our sheltered stock has now become 'difficult to let' and are advertised through Redditch Home Choice several times before being re-let.

Following this consultation the Council has recently produced a strategy for the housing and support of older people entitled 'My Home, My Future, My Choice'. This document forms the vision for future Older Person's accommodation and outlines the key priorities for the future generation of older people. The strategy makes recommendations regarding the de-designation of Council stock that does not meet the required specification for elderly people. It is possible that some unsuitable sheltered stock will then be used to house alternative clients groups in the future but further consultation with customers is required before decisions can be made.

In Redditch we have a Community Warden Service (or Home Support Service) which is funded via Supporting People. The service was initially set up to support Councils Tenants to remain living independently within the Councils sheltered accommodation and has since been extended to include all Council Tenants. The service promotes personal well being and good health which reduces the likelihood of loss of tenancy due to debt or ill health which prevents approaches under Homelessness Legislation. Tenants benefit from advice and support regarding maximizing their income, applying for benefits, fitness classes, social activities, and direct links to fast tracks to many Council Services including the Special Needs Officer. It is likely that this Warden Service will soon be extended to support older people living in Owner Occupied, Private Rented or Registered Social Landlord properties in the future.

The Council's Control Centre coordinates an emergency out of Hours service to respond in case of emergency. Linked to the Control Centre is the Lifeline Service, which is a service provided in all Council Sheltered and dispersed Elderly Persons accommodation. Each property has a lifeline unit which consists of either a telephone linked into the Call Centre at the Town Hall or a pull cord system fixed in the property. If the tenant requires assistance or is taken ill, by activating the phone or pulling the pull cord the Lifeline operators are able to contact the appropriate emergency service extremely quickly. The service enables elderly people to remain independent for longer.

Age Concern employ a “wellcheck” visitor who provides an assessment and signposting service for clients who need help or assistance to remain living independently. If individuals are struggling to cope with their current accommodation or are threatened with homelessness they are quickly directed to the Housing Options Team, Care and Repair Agency or other appropriate service. Age concern also operate a ‘Handy Man’ service which will undertake small items of repair work to assist elderly people who may not have the support of family or friends to remain living independently for longer.

Services for those with Learning Difficulties

The Council currently operates a “Key Ring” accommodation scheme which caters specifically for people with learning difficulties. Social Services and relevant support agencies work with the residents to ensure that they are supported to live as independently as possible. The Housing Options Team has worked with the learning disabilities team at the County Council to develop specialist leaflets and application forms for those with learning disabilities who wish to access accommodation. We also host an annual Housing Options Event in partnership with Worcestershire County Council which is hosted in Redditch and is designed for those with Learning Difficulties to come and discuss their options with specialist advisors.

Services for Domestic Violence Victims

In 2008/09 the number of Homelessness Acceptances due to fleeing from domestic violence from a partner or family member accounted for just under 16% of the total. Whilst this is not one of the highest reasons for approach under Statutory Homelessness, presentations in Redditch it is still a very large number and continues to rise. Whilst fleeing accommodation brings increased safety it is often coupled with significant financial hardship due to loss of belongings, loss of employment and also often brings instability for children as they change school, area or support networks. Individuals escaping violence will often need significant levels of support both emotional and financial.

The Housing Options Team at the Council provides advice and assistance to victims on their legal rights and liaises with agencies regarding accommodation for emergency placements. In general when families have been placed in temporary refuge accommodation in Redditch, it may take between 1 and 2 months before they approach the Council as homeless. By this time with the help of the support workers in the refuge, they may have decided they do not wish to return to their family home. In most cases individuals approaching the Council will have been placed in the local refuge from out of the area. To enable these people to set up a new home and sustain their tenancy once suitable permanent accommodation is found floating support services can be provided by the refuge which provided the temporary accommodation. The support worker works alongside the Housing Options Officer to ensure that the right accommodation is offered to the family and provides support and assistance with setting up the tenancy.

The Council's Control Centre coordinates an emergency out of Hours service to respond in case of emergency. Domestic violence victims can have a telephone line in their tenancy linked into the Call Centre at the Town Hall so if they activate the phone lifeline operators are able to contact the appropriate emergency service extremely quickly. This is a useful tool in the prevention of homelessness as many victims gain the confidence to remain in their own home and feel more secure knowing that they have a quick route to the emergency services if a further incident occurs.

There has historically been very limited temporary accommodation available for Male Victims of domestic violence in Redditch. The location of our hostel Upper Norgrove House was very well known and involved communal living which made it unsuitable for many victims. Since the move over to dispersed unit temporary accommodation housing male victims has become less problematic as victims can be accommodated in these properties and floating support can be provided via the Stonham or other support agencies of their choice. Stonham have got male support workers who are readily able to work with the male victims.

Specialist provision for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups is limited in Redditch. Stonham has a specialist BME Support Worker but the Council has no tailor-made accommodation. Domestic Violence is often complicated by the fact that victims do not meet the habitual residency test or have not recourse to public funds.

The Council has just introduced a Sanctuary Scheme to assist those victims of Domestic Violence who wish to remain in their own accommodation to do so by increasing the security in their home. A panel of specialists from the Community Safety Team, Housing

Options Team, Police Domestic Violence Unit and Stonham make joint decisions regarding the suitability of applicants and the work required. In some cases this involves installation of a safe room that victims can flee to should the perpetrator try to access the property; in others it can involve improved security lighting or stronger door and window locks. So far 11 cases of Homelessness have been prevented using this tool but we do hope that we can expand the scheme over the next twelve months to help far more people. Referrals and meetings are coordinated by the Council's community safety scheme but referrals can come from any of the partners who sit on the panel or from other statutory agencies via MAPPA or child protection meetings.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) meetings were set up in 2008 in North Worcestershire and are Police led. The meetings facilitate a coordinated response by partners in supporting domestic violence victims and identifying the risks to victims. Membership consists of the Police, Social Services, Primary Care Trust, Housing Providers, and Domestic Violence Support Services. Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) have recently reviewed the MARRAC and have commended the progress made to made and made some suggestions for service improvement.

The Domestic Abuse Forum Tactical Steering Group for North Worcestershire meets regularly to discuss service development across the region. A key action in the Worcestershire Young Peoples Plan and North Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy is looking at supporting Black and Ethnic Minority Groups and improving their access to DV Services offering more services for male victims, providing better training for front line teams supporting Domestic Violence Victims.

Services for those with Substance Misuse

It has been recognised that substance misuse often results in a chaotic lifestyle that in itself causes problems in accessing housing services.

There is reluctance among landlords to accept potential clients known to be drinking or using drugs. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find appropriate accommodation for this client group. This client group may find it difficult to sustain their tenancies. In Redditch there is no specialist accommodation for persons with substance misuse problems.

As part of the trailblazer initiative the Council has recently introduced a piloted a scheme for individuals who are engaging with health and support agencies to receive assistance with their substance misuse. A number of local landlords are prepared to accept individuals who are trying to turn their lives around providing that support is offered as a condition of the tenancy. Four individuals have been helped so far and all have managed to sustain their tenancies for over 6 months.

The Substance Misuse Action Team (SMAT) commissioned Centrepoint to undertake a research project into homelessness and substance misuse among young people in Worcestershire. The research project was entitled 'Accommodating Drugs' and highlighted:

1. The lack of accommodation for young people who use drugs or are recovering from the use of drugs;
2. The impact of new legislation which restricts housing providers accommodating drug-using clients;
3. The difficulty in accessing drug treatment;
4. The lack of awareness between housing providers, substance misuse services and health about the availability of services.

Work has already been done to address these priorities but the Council needs to consider the housing options available for this client group. The strategic review commissioned by Worcestershire Supporting People and Children's Services (16+ Targeted Services Team) also highlighted this client group as a priority for increasing housing options and support.

Services for Ex-offenders

Consultation with stakeholders has highlighted issues concerning homelessness with ex-offenders. The Council currently has protocols with the Police regarding dangerous offenders and Officers have recently received training on the implementation of Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

The Worcestershire Supporting People and Young People (16+ Targeted Services) Strategic Review highlighted that provision of accommodation and floating support for offenders is lower than required. This was also reflected by the consultation exercises carried out during the Council's review.

The Council has recently obtained money via the Trailblazer funding to introduce a scheme for individuals who are socially excluded due to offending history, substance misuse etc. A number of local landlords are prepared to accept individuals who demonstrate that they are genuinely trying to turn their lives around providing that appropriate support is offered as a condition of the tenancy. Seven individuals have been helped and have managed to sustain tenancies for over 6 months with Rent Deposits being funded via the Trailblazer Initiative.

Fry Housing Trust offer support to males over the age of 18 with an offending history, or at risk of offending through their current lifestyle or actions. They assist people in their own tenancies via Floating Support or they have supportive accommodation in Bromsgrove. The Key Worker assists each Client in identifying support needs and empowering them to acquire the skills to achieve their objectives.

The Council will accept a Statutory Duty towards ex-offenders who have had long term prison sentences and are deemed to be vulnerable through institutionalization or those with a priority need. Other services are directly involved in helping and assisting offender and ex-offenders. These include the CAB, Fry Housing Trust and Stonham Housing Association who work directly with the prisons and offenders on discharge when they do not have any probationary support.

Services for those persons who are Homeless through Disrepair

The condition of a property can have a direct impact on homelessness through poor repairs, sanitation or design. Therefore, when reviewing homelessness it is important to take this into account.

All Council owned properties meet the Government's "Decent Home Standard". The Council is currently undertaking a new stock condition survey but the existing study revealed that the stock has been well maintained with a limited need for urgent work in the short term. The Council has focused on improving the internal fabric of the properties e.g. kitchens, bathrooms, heating and wiring in recent years but it is believed that future capital programs may need to focus more on the external envelope such as roof, brick work and windows.

In April 2009 the Building Research Establishment (BRE) completed a stock condition survey of Redditch Private Sector Housing. The survey highlighted that there are significant issues in older areas of the borough and hot spots in part of the former new town. A private sector strategy has been developed and focuses resources on the areas in most need (which predominantly relates to older properties in the Central and adjacent wards); grant to improve energy efficiency, disabled facilities grant and lifetime loans will be promoted in these regions and used to improve the condition of the stock.

Attendance for the private landlords forum has continued to grow and is now complimented by Redditch Private Landlords' newsletter "Ahead of the Game", which is distributed to over 300 private landlords operating in the borough. The forum and Redditch Borough Council have joined up with the Midland Landlords Accreditation Scheme, a nationally recognized scheme operating a code of practice for standards of property and management. It is hoped that by supporting good landlords and working in partnership, the quality of private rented accommodation in the borough will rise.

The number of homelessness acceptances due to disrepair has been low since 2003 despite the findings of the recent Stock Condition Survey. This is largely due to the fact that in order for households to qualify for assistance under the Homelessness Legislation the condition of the property has to be very poor. The Government has shown its commitment to ensuring that every household is given the opportunity to live in a property that meets the Decent Home Standards. Given the reliance on the Council on the Private Sector in order to meet the housing need in the Borough it is clear that priority should be given to improving the condition of the stock. At present the Council has limited resources to monitor, review and enforce quality in the private sector.

In cases where customers do approach the Housing Options Team asking for advice regarding issues with disrepair, Housing Options Officers will try to negotiate with landlords on behalf of the tenants or signpost to grants and loans available for tenants and owner occupiers. Where necessary they seek the support and assistance of the Private Sector Housing Team who do carry out inspections on properties where there are particular concerns for the welfare of households living in them. It is hoped that the new Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 will enable the Council to take a more strategic approach to tackling the standards in the private housing sector and that additional

resource will be found to support the Private Sector Housing Team to deliver the priorities raised in the stock condition survey.

Services for those Homelessness through Antisocial Behavior

The Council's current Housing Allocations Policy is focused upon dealing with the perpetrators of anti-social behavior rather than moving the victim unless there is very serious reason to believe someone's safety is at risk. The Antisocial Behavior Team was formed after the development of the 2003 Homelessness Strategy.

The team was developed in specific geographical project to improve areas that were identified through Redditch CDRP (Redditch Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership). Through multi-agency working a great deal of success has been attained since developing the service and it has now been expanded to include all Council tenants. Projects include a wide range of interventions such as environmental works, youth work and enforcement against individuals. The team have also had input to the PACT (Partners and Communities Together) to support local policing and encouraging local communities to come forward with issues within areas that directly affect them. A number of members of the team are currently involved in delivering a preventative project through local schools with the aim of raising awareness of the issues surrounding Anit Social Behaviour.

PACT Meetings and Neighbourhood Groups operate throughout the Borough and customers have the opportunity to talk to their Councilors, hear about initiatives in their local area and talk directly to Council or Police officers so that resources can be prioritised to meets the needs of local people. A scrutiny review has recently recommended the development of 'enhanced pact meetings' to improve the use of resources and services received by the community.

The Council is currently in the process of developing a new Antisocial Behavior Strategy to highlight the priorities for customers regarding this subject which should be completed in 2010.

Findings from Consultation

Customer Satisfaction

One-Stop-Shop Customer Satisfaction

All the customer Satisfaction surveys demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with the services that they received. The latest survey undertaken through One-Stop-Shop showed an improvement from previous years:

Percentage of customers who said they were satisfied with the service received:

<i>04/05</i>	<i>06/07</i>	<i>07/08</i>
88.5%	89%	96.5%

Percentage of customers who believed the advice they were given was sound:

<i>04/05</i>	<i>06/07</i>	<i>07/08</i>
84.25%	89%	94.25%

Housing Options and Homelessness Customer satisfaction

There was a limited response to the satisfaction questionnaires with only 18 being returned. The overall satisfaction rate was 89%. There are no comparison statistics available as Housing Options was a new service. Individuals that were dissatisfied stated that services could be improved by the Council giving more priority for housing to those that work and that greater support should be given to those who were likely to be homeless but did not meet the Priority Need criteria. 94 % of customers rated the Housing Options Officer as friendly, polite and knowledgeable.

All Housing Options customers reported that any documentation that they were given at the interview was easy to understand. Only 82.3% of people stated that they were satisfied with the length of time that they had to wait for an appointment. Waiting time is due to the high demand for the service but efficiency in resources through increased prevention may bring this down in the future. 11% of Homeless Applicants felt that their Homelessness could have been prevented but gave their reasons for this answer as 'they could have not got pregnant by using contraception' or 'their ex-partner's could have not been violent'.

Summary of customer recommendations for service Improvement

- Increase the amount of Council and Housing Association properties;
- Simplify the website to make it simpler for customers to understand;
- Provide more information regarding the length of time that customers might have to wait for a property;
- Reduce the time that homeless households spend in Temporary Accommodation before being given a property;
- Increase the number of housing options available;

- Improve housing provision and support for those suffering with mental health issues;
- Look at ways to tackle child care costs as a barrier to education / employment;
- Provide more help for those applying for benefits;
- Increase money advice in the borough;
- Provide more skills training to support new tenants in budgeting, confidence building and life skills.

Summary of overall Priorities for Service Improvement

Increase the number of Housing Options

This review has clearly shown that some client groups have very limited housing options to choose from. This is particularly true in the following groups:

- Single 16 to 25 year olds;
- Elderly homeowners struggling to remain living independently in larger properties;
- Socially excluded individuals such as ex-offenders, individuals with or recovering from Drug or Drink addictions, those suffering with Mental Health or personality disorders.

Whilst we have a relatively large amount of Supported Accommodation there is limited affordable self contained accommodation for young people who do not need support. Due to the Housing Benefit regulations young people under 25 can only claim single room occupancy. It is clear that the young people who participated in the Centre Point Snap Shot Survey aspired to more than that. There is also very limited shared accommodation in the Borough. Landlords are particularly reluctant to accept housing benefit which results in many youngsters having no options at all. In addition individuals on low incomes are often unable to afford to rent self contained private rented accommodation and the Council allocates properties according to Priority Need. If individuals go into Supported Accommodation and then seek employment they are often financially worse off as they come off benefits and are responsible for paying their rent and support costs themselves. The result is that many young people stay out of employment or education. The Worcestershire Options Appraisal of Housing & Support Services for Young People (aged 16 to 25 years) project also in supports this view. We need to work together with Supporting People, our Private Landlords Forum and Support Providers to increase the number of Housing Options for young people and look at them more as individuals.

“My Home, My Future, My Choice”, the Council’s Older Persons Housing Strategy has already outlined solutions for encouraging independent living through increased adoption of Assisted Technology and extending the Warden Service into the Private Sector. Another area that older people have highlighted as a priority is that the Council should encourage the development of affordable older person’s accommodation that can be purchased following the sale of their family accommodation. Many older people do not wish to remain in their family accommodation and want to downsize but cannot due to the high demand and inflated prices of bungalows in the area. The proposed re-designation of former sheltered elderly person’s accommodation may be useful for alternative client groups.

Most socially excluded individuals such as ex-offenders and those recovering from alcohol or drug addiction would not qualify for assistance with secure accommodation under Homelessness Legislation and Private Landlords are often reluctant to accommodate them. We have already highlighted the success of our rent deposit guarantee pilot scheme and now need to increase the number of people that we can help by looking for alternative funding streams such as the Trailblazer Initiative.

The Council must work to ensure the best use of existing housing stock in order to meet the needs of the maximum number of people. Methods of extending overcrowded accommodation should be investigated. The use of pod technology is being piloted via the Trailblazer Initiative and loft conversions or extensions might also be an option for consideration if funding sources could be identified.

One voluntary sector provider has expressed an interest in developing a 'crash pad arrangement' or supported lodging scheme to compliment the host family and supported lodging provision in the borough and offer a slightly longer term temporary accommodation for the younger people aged between 16 and 25 years.

Stakeholders have reported that young people are often excluded from Supported Accommodation following incidents which break provider's rules. Stakeholders feel that more 'second chance' opportunities need to be available for young people who have no family support. More work needs to be done, to avoid the number of exclusions and prevent homelessness from occurring. The use of a 'training flat' for young people has also been highlighted as key to providing young people with a taste of living independently without leaving home so that young people can be sure that they are making the correct decision. The training flat is being piloted via the Trailblazer Initiative.

Stakeholders believe that there is inconsistency in the level of service available for those who are suffering from substance misuse issues across the North Worcestershire Area. They would like to see a specialist support service for this client group initiated or the development of specialist housing provision for this client group within Redditch.

Specialist housing and support provision for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups is limited within Redditch. Stonham have a specialist BME support worker but we have no tailor-made accommodation. Domestic Violence is often complicated by the fact that victims do not meet the habitual residency test or have no recourse to public funds. Increasing the provision of temporary accommodation is essential for individuals at risk from domestic violence. Domestic violence within BME groups has been highlighted as a priority for action. We also need to identify additional sources of funding to support those individuals who have no recourse to public funds, are awaiting the outcome of immigration applications and who are believed to be at risk of persecution if they return back to their native homeland.

Improve Services for those suffering with Emotional or Mental Health Issues

It is clear that there is limited support available within Redditch for customers suffering from lower level emotional or mental health problems or those without a clinical diagnosis. Existing support providers suggest that their contracts with Supporting People make it difficult to provide the appropriate level of support to these individuals. Supporting People have acknowledged this problem in their Strategic Review and the Council will work with them to improve service provision in Redditch. A recent adjustment to the Bromford Corinthia supporting people contract does now allow them to work with clients with low Level Mental Health problems or depression between the ages of 18 and 55. We are not aware of any specialist services of this nature for those under 18 or over 55.

A concern of stakeholders was the poor uptake of Mediation from young people and it was suggested that local support organisations, in addition to the Council, should also be allowed to refer to the schemes operating in the area. Better access to counseling services to complement mediation is also seen as key to service improvement. Stakeholders have also suggested that the contracts be extended to support those younger than 16 as it is believed difficulties at home start earlier than that and partners would have a greater chance of success with mediation if they started earlier.

Stakeholders see social isolation and a lack of informal support networks as key barriers to young people sustaining a tenancy in permanent accommodation. The developing of 'befriending' or mentoring programs in Redditch to offer more emotional and social interactions is seen as key to service improvement. One suggestion arising from consultation is that people who had experienced Homelessness should be trained as mentors to support other people going through the process. The Trailblazer initiative has given an opportunity to pilot this approach

Increase Money Advice Provision and promote financial inclusion

Over four million people in the UK live on the margins of financial services provision. Those considered most at risk are in receipt of welfare benefits or low, disjointed incomes. The issue is linked to poverty, poor health and education, work-less-ness, family breakdown, exploitation from illegal and predatory lenders, exposure to crime and community breakdown.

- Individuals who are considered most at risk of exclusion are lone parent women 20-35 years, who are dependant on welfare benefits and living in social housing (*Jones, 2001*).
- Low income consumers spend an average of £129 a month on interest, some 11% of their income (NCC, 2005). Of those who have no bank account, 70% of these are social housing tenants.
- 74% of customers of doorstep lenders are social housing tenants
- The total UK personal debt at the end of September 2008 stood at £1,457bn and this has increased 5.4% in the last 12 months.
- Personal debt has increased by 5.1% over the past year. Total consumer credit lending to individuals has increased by 6.0% in the last 12 months.

- The average household debt in the UK is £9,740 (excluding mortgages). The average household debt in the UK is ~ £59,715 (including mortgages).

Essential to the delivery of Housing Options Advice is easy access to good money and Benefits advice. In order to consider a customer's possible Housing Options, officers must first be able to assess an individual's ability to afford particular accommodation, their lifestyle, aspirations and expectations in relation to housing. The CAB has advised that the number of people approaching them for assistance has increased by 22.6% between 07/08 and 08/09. Of the total enquiries received by CAB, 73.6% of them related to Benefits, Debt or Financial problems.

According to the Office of National Statistics the West Midlands region has been hardest hit by the economic recession. Redditch has been highlighted as a priority area having been affected most by increased unemployment, a greater dependency on benefits and a large number of mortgage repossessions. Coupled with increases in fuel bills and reductions in the amount of affordable credit available, local money advice services are likely to continue to be over stretched and under pressure.

The Housing Options Service has seen a widening in the type of customers seen with the current housing market difficulties affecting homeowners considerably. These customers have been particularly affected by the increased difficulty in obtaining credit or re-mortgages. Many have borrowed more in recent years to cover outstanding liabilities. Global market recession has led to an increase in repossessions. In order to assess eligibility for assistance for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme the public will require a financial assessment so a strong working relationship between the CAB who offer our money advice service, Housing Options and Partner Registered Social Landlords are essential to ensuring that customers in Redditch will benefit from the scheme. All the stakeholders who were consulted in the process of this review highlighted that increased access to Money Advice services is key to service improvement in Redditch.

70% of people financially excluded in the UK are tenants of a social housing provider (Council or RSL). As social housing landlords, Redditch Borough Council and our Partner Registered Social Landlords must take a proactive role in reducing financial exclusion. By helping tenants to become more financially included they will be more likely to pay their rent, less likely to have rent arrears and less likely to leave their home as a result of high levels of debt. The ultimate sanction for someone who does not pay their rent is eviction but there are significant costs attached to that action including staff time, legal costs, inability to recover the debt, potential rental monies lost whilst the property is void, property repair costs and storage costs. There are also the very great emotional costs that the families bear through being homeless and an increased workload for social services to support the families affected through this time. The Housing Services Team must review resources on a regular basis to identify if more provision can be focused towards providing financial and welfare information and advice rather than taking legal action through the courts with a long term view to reduce the number of evictions.

The Worcestershire Partnership Poverty Task Group will also be an essential agency to facilitate improvement in enhancing partnership working to address poverty within the Worcestershire area. This group is part of the Worcestershire Partnership (Local Strategic Partnership). The task group was set up by the Worcestershire Partnership to

bring together individuals who could influence and work on projects together in order to tackle poverty across the County. The group began meeting in October 2007 and consists of members from statutory and voluntary organisations such as Housing providers (eg Redditch Borough Council), CAB, Worcestershire Credit Union, Age Concern, Worcestershire County Council, Job Centre Plus, DWP, Hereford and Worcester Fire & Rescue Service and Worcestershire PCT.

The aim of the Worcestershire Poverty Task Group is to improve the lives and life chances of Worcestershire's communities through joint working to tackle issues of income deprivation, with specific focus on child and pensioner poverty.

The objectives of the Worcestershire Poverty Task Group are to deliver on the existing local area agreement targets, to develop and deliver actions, to promote a better understanding, to work in partnership with other theme groups such as Health and Well Being to address the underlying issue of income deprivation.

The group is split into core work areas:

1. To reduce over indebtedness and financial exclusion;
2. to improve benefit administration, with an emphasis on benefit take up;
3. to reduce levels of absolute low income, relative low income and material deprivation.

Two sub- groups have been created to focus on the core areas:

1. Financial Inclusion;
2. Uptake of Housing Benefit.

The Council's Housing Services Manager and Housing Benefit Manager are active members of both sub-groups and involved with projects that are underway or in development.

The Financial Inclusion Group began working together and is currently in the process of identifying appropriate projects to achieve the aim of addressing financial exclusion. Group Members have recently visited the Birmingham Financial Inclusion Partnership to learn from their experiences. At Redditch Borough Council it is envisaged that the work of the Poverty Task Group will improve the lives of Councils tenants and residents in Redditch and Housing Services are committed to work in partnership and realise the benefits of close working relationships and sharing best practice and experiences with group members of the task group.

Redditch Borough Council cannot meet the needs of our customers in this changing economic climate without the help of our partner agencies. Good quality financial advice is essential and will continue to be a fundamental basis of homelessness prevention and the uptake of Housing Benefits. We must work towards ensuring that all customers manage to access financial advice services within appropriate time scales and are encouraged to proactively seek assistance before it is too late to prevent their homelessness.

Provide Better Access to Housing and Benefits Advice

Worcestershire Partnership Poverty Task Group and the uptake of Housing Benefit sub group will again be essential to driving improvements in the Worcestershire area. Initially the uptake of Housing Benefit sub group has focused on the take-up of benefits among residents aged over 80 living in Redditch Borough. The group have identified that fourteen areas in Worcestershire are within the top 10% most deprived areas nationally for income deprivation affecting older people, with eleven of these areas in the borough of Redditch. The population of over 80's across the Borough, currently around 3000 people, representing 3.5% of the population, is estimated to rise to 4,000, or 4.45% by 2016.

In Redditch work has already been undertaken to develop Redditch Borough Councils priorities to improve access for customers to Council Services including Housing and Benefits Advice. The key priorities highlighted from the Customer Access Strategy are:

PRIORITY 1: Greater efficiency and effectiveness by identifying service failure and changing business processes.

PRIORITY 2: Establishing service standards across the Council enabling consistent and accurate information and resolution at a customer's first point of contact.

PRIORITY 3: Ensuring that the use of technology improves customer service.

PRIORITY 4: Working with partners to ensure that services relevant to customers are available and are easily accessible.

PRIORITY 5: Working with council members to enhance the councils approach to managing its access to services performance. (Audit commission Access to Services recommendation R3)

A member of the project team involved in implementing the Customer Access Strategy project team was actively involved in the consultation during this review and will continue to be involved in implementation of the Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and Action Plan.

Improved links with partner agencies is also essential to delivering efficiency savings and improved customer service. Voluntary sector stakeholders have made some specific recommendations regarding how we can improve our Housing Advice and Benefits Services. They have suggested that the Council should look at the application process for Redditch Home Choice, Statutory Homelessness and Housing Benefit with a view to simplifying it and making it easier for customers to understand. Customers have also highlighted this as a key priority for improving the Housing Advice and Benefits Service. Customers have suggested that there is too much duplication between housing and benefit applications. Customers would like to see services freely sharing information, identification and proof of residence as opposed to providing the same documents multiple times.

Stakeholders working with young people also reported that their customers feel that the Council is an intimidating environment in which for young people to seek help. Partners would like to see more outreach work undertaken by Housing Options, Benefits and Money Advice Services in schools and within the offices of other agencies so that young people feel more comfortable asking for help and information.

Stakeholders feel that there are limited services to assist the immigrant communities living in Redditch and that more should be done to meet their needs.

Link Housing Advice with Employment and Education

In March 2008 the CLG published a good practice guide called Expanding Choice: Addressing Need. The document outlines the Government's vision for the future provision of housing advice in England. The Enhanced Housing Options Approach takes as its core values the principles of choice, empowerment, and excellent customer service. Based on a holistic assessment of a customer's circumstances, service providers using this approach provide customers with personalised housing options advice, working in partnership with supporting services - such as providers of employment and benefits advice - to tackle the root causes of housing need.

Housing Services have not previously worked in partnership with Job Centre Plus or education providers to try and reach our joint objectives. The priorities highlighted by customers in this review are a good starting point for taking this work forward:

- Improve access to Skills Training (such as budgeting, confidence building, Life Skills);
- Tackle skills gap as a barrier to employment;
- Tackle child care costs as a barrier to employment.

Many of the customers accessing Council Services such as Housing Options, Surestart Centres and Reddi-Centre are the same as those contacting Job Centre Plus and in some instances the CAB. It is clear that if we are to meet the demands of the emerging Government enhanced housing options agenda and our shared customer needs, we need to strengthen the links we have between partner organisations, prospective employers and education providers in Redditch. The review has to date provided very limited information regarding the existing links and therefore does not offer a clear picture of the way forward. In order for the Council to take a more strategic approach to tackling housing, employment and education collaboratively further consultation will be required with all stakeholders.

The development of a partnership agreement between key organisations and further investigations to outline the shared objectives and how performance can be monitored will also be required.

Given that many of our Homeless Households in temporary accommodation are later Tenants of a Council or RSL property, it would be a great opportunity to adopt a preventative approach and offer Homeless families in temporary accommodation greater information and support with regard to finding employment or accessing education at this stage. If households consider their options in respect of work and employment alongside

the type or location of accommodation they live in, it may give them a greater chance of becoming self-sustaining members of the local community. Housing Officers believe that this is the driving priority behind the enhancement of the Housing Options Service.

Given that the Reddi Centre have got close links with the Council it makes sense to make this central to any skills training required for Homeless People. The Reddi Centre has recently been accredited by the Guidance Accreditation Board in recognition of the quality of its information and advice on getting back into education and work. It provides a whole range of services to anyone living in Redditch. It provides people who have some idea where they want to go but don't know how to get there with services including:

- Up to date information on a wide range of opportunities in education and training, paid and voluntary work;
- One-to-one advice from an experienced and qualified advisor within ten days;
- Access to computer packages providing personal profiles and career options;
- Group workshops and presentations;
- Basic skills assessments.

The Reddi Centre is extremely experienced in organizing training for individuals on benefits or low incomes. Further research will also be required to map courses offered by other facilities in the Redditch area and potential employment opportunities for individuals who have completed training. We must ensure that the individuals being trained actually improve their chances of securing employment in the future.

Stakeholders would like to see more financial incentives to encourage people into post 18 education or training and this has been highlighted this as a possible service improvement area.

Stakeholders have also identified a lack of work placements and apprenticeships across the Council and believe that we should lead by example and offer young people more opportunities to gain experience of work. Stakeholders have already suggested that a mentoring or befriending service for individuals suffering from social isolation or emotional problems would be helpful in meeting customer needs. Mentoring schemes could be linked to potential paid employment with support providers or the Authority.

The Enhanced Housing Options agenda links to the wider need to improve Economic Development in the Redditch Borough and generate economic growth by improving and diversifying Redditch's economic base to create more employment opportunities for local people. The Council's success in securing £180,000 as part of the Communities and Local Government Trailblazer Initiative has allowed the Council to address some of the suggestions made during the consultation. Details of the Trailblazer Action Plan are attached as Appendix B.

Methodology

Critical Evaluation of 2003 Homelessness Strategy

Council Officers critically evaluated the 2003 Homelessness Review and Strategy against current best practice research. Officers highlighted the weaknesses in the 2003 Strategy and looked at ways in which these could be addressed. The main weaknesses were highlighted and suggestions were made about how these could be addressed in the future. The findings of this critical evaluation are summarised in Appendix A.

Stakeholder Consultation

Officers implemented a programme of consultation with internal and external stakeholders. The methods of consultation used included email and postal correspondence, personal interviews or telephone interviews. The findings from this consultation have been used to outline current service provision and identify gaps and strengths and make recommendations for priorities for the new Local Housing Advice and Homelessness Strategy.

Detailed consultation was undertaken with the following Stakeholders:

Homelessness Applicants

Questionnaire surveys were provided to all individuals who had approached the Council under Homeless Legislation over a twelve month period irrespective of whether a statutory duty (in view of homelessness legislation) was accepted. The questionnaire surrounded the reasons for homelessness, their level of satisfaction with the Council's service and how they felt the service could have been improved or how they could have been better supported.

Housing Options Customers

A questionnaire survey was designed and provided to all customers who attended an appointment with the Housing Options Team over a five month period. The questions asked about the service received, the Housing Options Officers performance and how the service could be improved to better meet their needs.

During 2009, all customers of the Housing Options Team were asked to complete a satisfaction questionnaire after their Housing Options appointment had ended and the comments and ratings given in those surveys have been used to make the recommendations for service improvement in this document.

One-Stop-Shop Customers

A questionnaire survey was designed and provided to all customers who attended an appointment with Customer Service Advisors at all Borough One Stop Shops. Customers were asked a series of questions about the service received including their overall level of satisfaction and how effective they felt the advice given was. The results

of that questionnaire have been fed into this review and used to make recommendations for service improvement.

Statutory Agencies and Voluntary Organisations

Questionnaire surveys were sent to all Statutory Agencies and Voluntary Organisations known to operate within the Borough of Redditch. The questionnaire asked those organisations to outline the services that they currently provide. In addition it asked them to identify the barriers affecting their client groups, finding housing, employment and education. It asked for details of the annual financial investment in their services. It also asked them to provide their ideas regarding how services could be improved to better meet the needs of customers in Redditch.

The Council have held a number of stakeholder consultation events within the community and attendees were asked to highlight the priorities for service improvements and development. Some of the events focussed upon Housing advice and Homelessness while others were concerned with promoting Education and Employment options. The details of the priorities listed have been used to form the basis of the Enhanced Housing Options Strategy and Action Plan.

Critical Evaluation of Redditch Borough Council's 2003 Homelessness Strategy

Weakness	How this should be addressed
Quality of data surrounding the level of Homelessness as clients sometimes access multiple agencies and figures become overstated.	Our current recording mechanisms still have this shortfall but an action has been put into the Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy Action Plan to develop a central recording mechanism which will overcome that for future strategies.
Mechanism for monitoring progress of Homelessness Action Plan	Requires review as the scope of Member panels has changed since the publication of the previous strategy in 2003. In addition partner organisations may also be responsible for actions new system must account for that.
The emphasis on the 2003 Strategy is towards the Council supporting the customer to find settled accommodation.	The current best practice emphasises the Local Authorities role in informing the customer about their 'Housing Options' and empowering them to make their own decisions and choices to allow them to access secure accommodation for themselves. The future strategy must take account of this shift in focus and ensure that future services put the emphasis on 'giving customers the tools / information to help themselves' as opposed to our previous 'do it for them' approach.
The consultation undertaken in producing the 2003 Review and Strategy did not involve non-priority groups. That may have led to our recommendations being skewed towards Priority Need customers.	Any consultation must include Council Staff, Voluntary Sector Organisations and customers across all client groups, age ranges, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation
Service users should be involved in service development in a more meaningful way with consultation being at the 'point of contact' as well as at the end.	Staff should be encouraged, through better working practices, to develop better techniques for capturing relevant information to better inform strategies and influence decision making.

Weakness	How this was addressed
The 2003 strategy provides limited predications in respect of the future of Homelessness in the Borough.	The new strategy must use the information obtained from the recent housing needs survey and information from current homelessness trends to predict the future requirements of housing advice services.
Whilst there are references made to other strategies within the 2003 Strategy it is not clear how these strategies link together to reach shared goals or objectives. In addition the consultation / reporting mechanisms for how the different partnerships / boards will work together to inform joined up service development is not clear.	The future strategy must link all these things up to make it more informative for customers and stakeholders.
In 2003 the Council published the Homelessness Review and Strategy together which means it is a very long and complicated document.	We must make sure that the strategy is delivered in a way which can be easily read and absorbed by our customers. The review of current services and the strategy must be published separately and consultation undertaken to inform development of both parts.
The Action Plan contained within our 2003 Strategy does not give clear base line information regarding where we are starting from and the proposed target.	Our future Strategy Action Plan must give quantitative targets.
In the Worcestershire County Homelessness Strategy there was limited voluntary sector involvement in its development. Whilst the local 2003 Redditch strategy was jointly written in partnership with stakeholders, the extent to which this was apparent was not necessarily evident in the final document.	Strategy should be jointly endorsed by Voluntary Sector and other Statutory Agencies and form the spring board for partnership works in the future.
Financial Information	There is limited financial information contained within the 2003 Homelessness Review or Strategy to show how the level resources which contribute to assisting the Homeless or offering Housing Advice in the Redditch Borough.

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APPENDIX B



Mortgage Rescue Scheme Action Plan

Communities and Local Government Trailblazer Program 2009- 2011

Redditch Borough Council,
Town Hall,
Walter Stranz Square,
Redditch,
Worcestershire, B98 8AH
Telephone: 01527 64252

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APPENDIX B

What will we do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Training or briefing for all one stop shop/call centre staff (1 st Contact points in the Council) so they know exactly what action they should take whether advice or signposting to help homeowners seeking help and advice in mortgage difficulties.	On-going training to be given quarterly - 31 October 2009	Housing Options Team Leader	n/a	Produce ongoing training / time table – 31 October 2009	All CSA's trained	All CSA's are aware of MRA and able to give basic advice on the scheme. Developments to the scheme and new initiatives are communicated via regular meetings.	All housing options officers and team leaders have already undergone training with CLG regional advisor at Worcester. Materials and guidance notes are centralised so all officers can obtain information at any time. Some training has been undertaken with CSA's at one stop shop but further is required
Produce self assessment form for customers and CSA's in one stop shop to assess eligibility for scheme and signpost to the most appropriate solutions MR scheme products.	9 th November 2009	Housing Options MRS working group	2 x Housing Options Officers 1 team leader 2 customer representatives 2 One Stop shop CSA's CAB MRS Champion (monthly meetings)	Invite staff, CAB and customer representatives to first meeting – 31 October 09 Agree terms of reference for Group – 9 th Nov 2009 Set up timetable for regular monthly meetings 9 th Nov 209. Introduce self assessment form 30 Nov 09. Put self assessment form on website 30 Nov 09	Customers and CSA's in one stop shop have a tool enabling them to establish if they are likely to be eligible for MRS. Self assessment forms are reviewed by Housing Options Team. Partners like CAB and Court Desk stock these forms.	Awareness of the scheme is raised and the process of MRS application is sped up as all the information required is available up front. Customers are able to establish if they are likely to be suitable for MRS prior to having a Housing Options Appointment. Housing Options Officers can do preparation prior to the interview in possession of all the facts.	

What will we do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Provide 1 st Contact Points with full information on the scheme and relevant leaflets	Already undertaken and information including Frequently asked Questions available on the website. Timetable in place by 31 October 2009	Housing Options Assistant	Housing Options Assistant to check questions submitted via website and supplement questions when required	Set up timetable for refreshing website, checking stocks of leaflets in outer offices.	Review information available in the Court 29 September 2009. Update information in the Court 31 October 2009. Put timetable for reviewing stocks and materials in public areas by 31 October 2009.	Information up to date and available on MRS for all customers visiting the Council or court or the Council website.	We have already undertaken a review of the information available and all outer offices stock some MR Scheme leaflets
Add MRS to corporate mystery shopping schedule and review results	31 October 2009	Housing options Manager	£250 – Housing Options revenue budget	Write out written order 31 October 2009.	MRS process assessed quarterly	Information available by CSA in one stop shop and Housing Options Service is regularly reviewed and updated	
Training or briefing to all key stakeholders in what advice/action they can take if approached by a homeowner with mortgage problems	30 November 2009	Housing Options Manager	Room Hire, refreshments and lunch £250 budget – from Housing Options revenue budget	Undertake training day on MRS and Housing Options Team with all relevant partner agencies including floating support, Court desk solicitor, CAB, CSA, Local Charities, Benefits staff, Job Centre Plus and Redundancy Task force, Partner Housing Association	Arrange date for training and book room and refreshments etc – 31 Oct 2009. Invite agencies via letter – 31 October 2009. Produce presentation on MRS and support materials / written instructions 9 November 2009. Undertake training – 30 November 2009. Feedback questionnaire produced and circulated 14 December 2009. Further training requirements identified and organised – 20 December 2009	All partner agencies have an understanding of MRS and have detailed instructions regarding what to do. Ongoing training is set up to support process and address changes.	

What will we do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Implementation action with Money Advice	30 November 2009	Housing Options Team Leader	Team Leader Time	<p>Appoint individual within CAB to be MRS champion – 29 September 2009.</p> <p>Agree procedure and working protocol – 29 Sept 2009.</p> <p>Provide one to one training equivalent to that given to Housing Options Officers to all CAB advisors – 30 November 2009.</p> <p>Review pathway of referral between CAB and Housing Options Team – 29 September 2009</p> <p>Review and emergency appointment system with CAB – 20 November 2009.</p> <p>Produce local workflow diagram to be included in literature held by all agencies for customers – 30 November 2009.</p> <p>Customer questionnaire regarding the process is introduced 30 Nov 2009.</p>	<p>All customers interested in MRS will be offered an appointment with CAB within fourteen days of initial contact and completing a self assessment form.</p> <p>Emergency Housing Options and CAB appointments will be offered to all customers where and imminent court date is scheduled.</p> <p>Customer questionnaire is introduced and monitored.</p>	<p>Referral system between agencies is agreed and works appropriately.</p> <p>Customers interested in MRS are prioritised and obtain advice within appropriate timescales.</p>	<p>We have already appointed a MRS champion with the CAB. We also undertake regular shadowing between officers from both organisations. Standard referral forms are in place and the process was discussed together during the set up of MRS.</p>

What will we do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Ensure that effective mechanisms are implemented to capture the number of people referred and any outcomes that are achieved	30 November 2009	Housing Options Team Leader	MRS working group	Review existing monitoring mechanisms 29 September 2009. Implement appropriate monitoring in outer offices and partner agencies to establish demand – 30 November 2009	All customer contact is recorded and monitored to ensure that resources are directed in the correct areas.	All customers who approach that are interested in MRS are captured and outcomes regarding advice is recorded.	
Implementation actions with Registered Social Landlords who have been appointed to purchase (or part purchase) the property	30 November 2009	Housing Options Team Leader	Existing staff	Set up regular meetings with partner RSL for next 12 months – 30 Nov 2009	Joint reviews regarding applications are carried out. Information regarding difficulties are recorded and reported back to CLG via monthly returns.	Partners are aware of progress of cases and work together to achieve successful MR.	We have already met with the RSL and undergone joint training with all team members
Meet with Court Desk provider to discuss how arrangements should operate for referrals into and from this service.	31 December 2009	Housing Options Manager	Existing Staff	First meeting undertaken with provider – 31 Oct 2009 All customers are offered a Housing Options Appointment prior to court date – 31 Dec 2009 The court provide Housing Options with schedule of all cases to be heard in court weekly in advance – 30 Nov 2009. A pilot is undertaken for Court Desk solicitor to hold regular drop in session in Town Hall so that customers can meet him prior to court date – 30 November 2009. Joint monitoring is undertaken between Court Desk and Council regarding number of repossessions 30 Nov 2009.	Fewer repossessions More customers seek Housing Options and Legal advice prior to the day in court. Planned approach to homeless prevention if re-possession continues.	Less potential re-possession reach the stage of going to court. Customers are given advice regarding MRS and options prior to the day in Court. Customers have greater awareness of Housing Options and repossession / possession fund.	
What will we do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments

Publicise Mortgage Rescue and drop in session with solicitor via Redditch Matters (quarterly Council Magazine going to all households in the borough)	31 December 2009	Housing Options Manager	Met within existing budgets	Magazine is published for 31 Dec 2009 and quarterly thereafter	Fewer repossessions More customers seek Housing Options and Legal advice prior to the day in court. Planned approach to homeless prevention if re-possession continues.	Less potential re-possession reach the stage of going to court. Customers are given advice regarding MRS and options prior to the day in Court. Customers have greater awareness of Housing Options and repossession / possession fund.	
Send out information on MRS to all households where there are Council Tax arrears or sporadic payments	30 November 2009	Housing Options Manager	£250 for printing of materials	Meet with Council Tax Manager 29 Sept 2009 Agree process for postage and selection of individuals 29 September 2009. All individuals receive this information by 30 Nov 2009. Set up monitoring system within all agencies to establish how households hear about MRS 31 Dec 2009.	Numbers of individuals receiving information recorded and monitoring undertaken regarding how they heard about MRS at Housing Options and Court and CAB	All households who fall into arrears receive information regarding repossession fund and MRS where appropriate based on tenure.	
Update information in Credit Crunch Packs regarding MRS and repossession Fund held by all partners including CAB, Age Concern, Job Centre Plus, King Fisher Shopping Centre, Support Providers, Credit Union	9 th November 2009	Housing Options Team Leader	£250 for printing of new materials from Housing Options Budgets	New credit crunch packs issued 9 th Nov 2009	All credit crunch packs updated.	Customers receive information regarding MRS and repossession prevention fund via packs held by all partner agencies.	
Provide information to the Landlord forum regarding re-possession prevention fund.	27 October 2009	Housing Options Manager	Existing Budgets	Carry out a presentation to Landlord forum regarding re-possession fund.	Raised awareness for tenants running into difficulties	Partner landlords are able to offer advice regarding how to apply for re-possession fund.	



Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazer Action Plan
Communities and Local Government Trailblazer Program
2009- 2011

Redditch Borough Council,
Town Hall,
Walter Stranz Square,
Redditch,
Worcestershire, B98 8AH
Telephone: 01527 64252

Overview

The Council has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve in Redditch and has set priorities that will enable it to achieve this. Enhancing the Housing Options Service via the Communities and Local Government Trailblazer Grant is one such priority which will play a key role in delivering our vision:

‘An enterprising community which is safe, clean and green’

Enterprising Community

The Enhanced Housing Options Action Plan includes increasing the supply of family accommodation through the use of POD technology; offering more accommodation for young single people to live independently; providing more support for those wishing to downsize to smaller properties; the development of a joint strategy between key agencies and the voluntary sector which identifies and breaks down the barriers which prevent people from becoming self sufficient members of the community; providing more training opportunities designed to raise the skills of our population; offering better support to those seeking employment and housing and encouraging outside investment into the area.

Safe

The Enhanced Housing Options Action Plan outlines how the Council will work in partnership with other agencies and members of the voluntary sector to assist former offenders, drug or alcohol users who have shown a commitment to turning their lives around to find settled accommodation in the Borough. This will reduce the likelihood of individuals re-offending or re-lapsing and contribute towards making Redditch a safer place to live and work.

Clean and Green

The introduction of a Befriending / Mentoring service in partnership with St Basils will support customers to access accommodation, education and employment and advise them how to get involved in the management of our estates and the design of Council services. Through working in partnership with the local community we hope to see an increase in community spirit and a reduction in littering, fly tipping and other behaviour which is detrimental to the environment.

1) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Promote the use of Pod technology as a flexible solution to over-crowding / meeting the needs of those with disabilities</p> <p>Our show flat has already welcomed visitors from other local authorities and housing associations.</p> <p>We have met the needs of two disabled individuals requiring additional space and walk in shower facilities who would otherwise have needed to move.</p>	<p>Publicity for the scheme and staffing of the show flat will continue up until Mar 2011</p>	<p>Project Manager Jayne Bough – Housing Services Manager</p> <p>Lead Officer Carol Cockette</p> <p><u>RBC - Project Team</u> Housing Options, Housing Services, Repairs and Maintenance, Capital, Procurement, Care and Repair Agency, Communications</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u> £50,000 Trailblazer Grant</p> <p>Staff time will be met via existing revenue budgets</p> <p><u>Show Flat</u> Community Warden - one day per week</p> <p>Capital will be supplemented via Equipment and Adaptations / Care and Repair Budgets</p>	<p>Project and design appraisal following pilot – completed by April 2009</p> <p>Expression of Interests requested – Sept 2009</p> <p>Tender process closed – Dec 2009</p> <p>Approved supplier Appointed – Jan 2010</p> <p>Households and properties selected - Jan 2010</p> <p>Work on Pods commenced – Feb 2010</p> <p>Produce 1st Case Study and Information leaflet April 2011</p> <p>Work on Pods completed – Mar 2011</p>	<p><u>Target</u> Meet the needs of at least five disabled or overcrowded families using Pod Technology</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Better use of housing stock & reduced overcrowding Wider range of housing solutions Reduced adaptation costs Raised awareness of Pod Technology</p>	<p>At least five overcrowded or households with a need due to a disability will have a completed POD.</p> <p>Lessons learned from the process are available to other Local Authorities looking to adopt a similar approach</p> <p>POD technology is adopted by other Local Authorities and customers get the benefit outside of Redditch area.</p>	<p>Three families have been short listed. The first family has been selected and the contractor has been instructed to commence work on site Jan 2010.</p>

2) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Increase information available to offenders and coordinate cross-agency training to reduce barriers in accessing accommodation and reduce financial exclusion following release from custodial sentences.</p> <p>We have extended this to include advice regarding tackling financial exclusion as the project team felt that this group were particularly at risk following changes to Housing Benefit direct payments.</p>	March 2011	<p>Project Manager</p> <p>Elise Hopkins – Housing Options Manager</p> <p>Lead Officer</p> <p>Glenda Davis</p> <p><u>Project Team</u> Housing Options, Housing Benefits, Probation, Prison Service, Police, Representatives from Poverty Task Force and Community Safety Partnership, Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Union</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u> £2,500 Trailblazer Grant</p> <p>Staff Time will be met via existing revenue budgets</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> If this initiative is successful we should see a reduction in housing related debt. Officers would seek to secure funding for future information from Rent and Welfare budgets.</p>	<p>Finalise Court Information pack – Jan 2010</p> <p>Carry out further snap shot survey with ex offenders - Jan 2010.</p> <p>Set baseline for satisfaction level – Jan 2010.</p> <p>Launch information pack in Redditch Magistrates Court – Feb 2010.</p> <p>Review success of pilot – July 2010.</p> <p>Extend pack to all North Worcester Magistrates Courts – Nov 2010.</p> <p>Undertake further snapshot satisfaction survey – Jan 2011</p>	<p><u>Target</u></p> <p>Stock Information Packs in all North Worcester Magistrates courts by November 2011.</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Improved customer service Reduced abandonment and subsequent housing-related debt Reduced re-offending and Safer Communities Reduced Financial Exclusion</p>	<p>All offenders likely to be placed into custody for over 12 weeks receive appropriate advice regarding managing their tenancies. 100% of long-term offenders are offered Housing Options and Money Advice prior to or immediately after release. More offenders secure settled accommodation and maintain it The level of financial exclusion in ex-offenders is reduced.</p>	<p>Milestones revised to reflect results from consultation and include adoption of pack across all North Worcestershire Magistrate Courts.</p>

3) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Develop a specialist rent deposit scheme to assist more ex-offenders or recovering drug or alcohol addicts into settled accommodation and reduce re-offending or substance abuse.</p> <p>Households will receive appropriate support based on their needs to ensure that they sustain their tenancy.</p> <p>All households that participate will be encouraged to take part in community events and activities.</p>	May 2009	<p>Project Manager</p> <p>Elise Hopkins – Housing Options Manager</p> <p>Lead Officer</p> <p>Glenda Davis</p> <p><u>Project Team</u> Housing Options, Probation, Prison Service, Police, Representatives from Poverty Task Force and Community Safety Partnership, Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Union, After Care Team, Supporting People, SMAT</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u></p> <p>£25,000 Trailblazer Grant</p> <p>Staff Time will be met via existing revenue budgets</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u></p> <p>A mechanism for funds to be paid back via Credit Union accounts would be set up to maximise the on-going funds available for future customers.</p>	<p>Set up Project Team May 2009.</p> <p>Introduce information sharing consent form to allow Landlord Forum, SMAT team, Probation, Housing Services and Housing Options to share information for the purpose of monitoring successes - May 09.</p> <p>Produce information to encourage involvement in community events / activities – May 09</p> <p>Identify how funding should be prioritised to maximise success towards LAA targets – May 2009</p> <p>Scheme ready to lend deposits by May 2009.</p> <p>System for monitoring uptake in education / employment / education / activities reviewed – Jan 2010.</p>	<p><u>Target</u></p> <p>At least 35 households are assisted into settled accommodation.</p> <p>75 % maintain accommodation for 6 months (to be monitored quarterly via Landlord Forum)</p> <p>75 % continue to engage with probation or in drug / alcohol rehabilitation programs for 6 months or duration of order (to be monitored via SMAT and probation figures)</p> <p>100% make choices about housing, employment and education (evidenced via action plans and support plans)</p> <p>30% take part in community events/activities</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u></p> <p>Greater number of Socially Excluded enter settled accommodation.</p> <p>Reduced re-offending and Safer Communities</p>	<p>The scheme has successfully allowed socially excluded groups to access and maintain accommodation.</p> <p>Offending behaviour has reduced as lifestyle becomes less chaotic</p> <p>Socially excluded groups are integrated into the community and take part in events and activities</p> <p>Socially excluded groups understand their options and make informed decisions about their own future.</p>	Scheme is operational and schedule

4) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Provide more quality single rooms in shared houses within the Private Rented sector for young singles looking to live independently.</p> <p>We would also like to develop a matching service for young people so that they can find other people with similar interests to rent on a longer term basis with them.</p>	<p>Scheme would be fully operational by March 2011</p>	<p>Project Manager Elise Hopkins – Housing Options Manager Lead Officer Sharon Samuels <u>Project Team</u> Housing Options Private Sector Team, Landlords Forum, Dave Broadbent (accredited landlord), St Basils Floating Support Service</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u> £10,000 – Trailblazer Grant Money will be used to fund furniture, rent deposit guarantees and rent in advance.</p> <p><u>Revenue Support Costs</u> Supporting People funding was secured as part of North Worcestershire Young Peoples Project and provided by St Basils</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> Customers will be asked to pay back the money owed via the credit union so that future funding is available.</p>	<p>Landlord identified March 2009 Service specification completed – May 2009 Essential work to property completed - June 09 Furniture is purchased and installed June 09 Tenants selected June 09 1st property is fully occupied by July 09 Negotiation with landlord for 2nd property completed – Feb 2011. Access to accommodation is linked to North Worcestershire accommodation gateway – March 2011</p>	<p><u>Target</u> Provide 5 units of affordable, good quality, single room Private Rented accommodation with low level support.</p> <p>Landlord agrees to 2nd property to increase the accommodation provision further.</p> <p><u>Outcome</u> Wider range of housing solutions - More accommodation available for Young Single People (which can be added to housing options tool kit).</p>	<p>Young people on benefits have the opportunity to privately rent good quality single room accommodation to prove that they can sustain independent living. Those requiring low level support learn the skills they need. A clear pathway allows individuals to move-on into other privately rented accommodation. Funding via Innovations fund is available to bridge gap between end of benefit payments and first pay from employer.</p>	<p>Inspire Project completed. Two 5 bedroom schemes fully operational and 10 young people have moved in. Case studies produced for individuals helped. All in full time education. Additional £10,000 funding was secured via RBC Capital to help develop the second scheme.</p>

5) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Develop a cross agency Joint Strategy which identifies and breaks down the barriers which prevent people from being self sufficient members of our community and encourages economic growth in the area.	January 2010	Project Manager Jayne Bough – Housing Services Manager Lead Officer Victoria Caney <u>Project Team</u> Housing Options, Benefits, Job Centre Plus, Primary Care Trust, Night Stop, YMCA, Worcestershire Supporting People, CAB, Credit Union, Sure Start, New College, CRV, Care and Repair, Reddi Centre	<u>Capital for Project</u> £2,500 Trailblazer Grant Money will be used to promote, distribute and train staff as required. Project support met via existing RBC revenue budgets.	Consultation with stakeholders – Jan 2009. Draft Homelessness and Housing Advice Review completed – May 2009. Current cost of service provision identified – May 2009. Partners have developed a Draft Joint Strategy and Action Plan – October 2009. Consultation with Service Users is completed - December 2009. Draft Joint Strategy is published January 2010. Strategy and Action Plan approved by members - March 2010.	<u>Target</u> Joint Strategy Developed which identifies SMART actions for change. <u>Outcomes</u> Greater partnership working Better Value for Money	Partners have developed a joint SMART Action Plan which breaks down the barriers to people being self-sufficient members of the community. Agencies are working together to offer joined up advice regarding housing, housing benefits, employment and education aimed at encouraging people into employment. Agencies have identified savings by joining resources to fund enhanced housing options services beyond Trailblazer grant. Economic Development in Redditch expands providing more jobs.	The draft strategy and Action Plan is currently being amended to include comments from partners and service users.

6) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Provide an Innovations Fund or flexible pot of money that the Council, partner agencies and the voluntary sector can access to incentivise or encourage individuals back into employment or education.</p> <p>Where appropriate customers may be required to pay funds back to ensure that fund is able to continue beyond the two years. This will be organised via the local credit union.</p>	<p>March 2011</p>	<p>Project Manager Elise Hopkins – Housing Options Manager Lead Officer Brenda Harbon</p>	<p>Trailblazer Grant £5,000</p> <p>We anticipate that this will be used to pay for transport costs, interview clothes, (possibly small rent shortfalls if part-time work is found while benefits are assessed), costs associated with obtaining ID required to access bank accounts or employment.</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> Dependant on the success of this scheme future funding may be requested from LAA budgets</p>	<p>Consult with partners and set up panel – April 09 Referral process agreed – May 2009 Service Level Agreement Developed – May 2009 Loan / Grant agreements formalised and recovery or payback process agreed – May 2009. Materials for scheme are developed and marketing is undertaken in the local area by June 2009. Scheme Launches – June 09 Lessons Learned guidance produced – March 2011</p>	<p>We anticipate being able to assist 35 people with maximum awards being in the region of £200.</p> <p>70% of those assisted through the Innovations Fund access education or employment. Case Studies and lessons learned guide produced.</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Skills of population increase. Individuals are assisted to get off job seeking benefits. (Refer to Tables 1 and 2 to see LAA priorities, and links).</p>	<p>A greater number of people are able to access education and work in order to better themselves and become self sufficient members of the community.</p> <p>RBC provide the CLG with customer case studies which highlight potential barriers to other Enhanced Housing Options Teams trying to achieve similar things and drive best practice.</p>	<p>Scheme fully operational. Has lent money to five individuals to date.</p> <p>Some education partners have similar pots of money but advise that their budgets are usually spent half way through term time. On the event in November 2009 partners welcomed the fund and said they thought it would be useful.</p>

7) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Set up a volunteer Befriending and Mentoring service using those who have experienced homelessness/housing need to encourage and support individuals approaching the Council for help to find housing to become self-sufficient and integrated into the community. Extend the Homelessness Prevention schools program to visit a larger number of schools and reach more people. Mentors and befrienders from a variety of ethnicities and ages will be recruited to try and meet the needs of all customers.</p>	Fully staffed mentoring program by March 2011	<p>Project Manager</p> <p>Joint Initiative:</p> <p>Redditch Borough Council - Elise Hopkins</p> <p>St Basils - Matt Green</p> <p><u>Staff Resource</u> St Basils Floating Support Service and Redditch Borough Council Housing Services Team in partnership with RBC Redditch Centre</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u> £10,000 Trailblazer Grant</p> <p>The money will be used to fund training of Befrienders / Mentors, fund travel expenses and activities.</p> <p>Existing "Redditch Centre" Courses attract learning skills council funding.</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> Depending on the success of this scheme future funding may be requested from LAA budgets to cover transport etc.</p>	<p>Course and service Specifications agreed (involving all key Redditch partners June 09).</p> <p>First intake of Befrienders start course Nov 09.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction questionnaire is developed – Jan 2010.</p> <p>Befriending Service is operational - May 2010.</p> <p>Schools Homeless Prevention Program commences May 2010.</p> <p>First intake of Mentors begin course - May 2010</p> <p>Mentoring service is operational – July 2010.</p> <p>Target numbers of Mentors and Befrienders are met – March 2011.</p>	<p><u>Target</u> At least 10 Voluntary Mentors are trained. 15 Befrienders are recruited. 80% of Mentors find employment / take part in further skills training (within 9 months). 50% of Befrienders / Mentors become involved in community activities or management of estates (to be monitored via Housing Services Survey). All four secondary schools agree to take part in Homeless Prevention Program (delivered to 2325 pupils from year 9).</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Improved confidence, greater number of individuals find employment or participate in skills training.</p> <p>(Refer to Tables 1 and 2 to see LAA priorities and links).</p>	<p>A 2 Tier course is designed to train Befrienders initially, a selection these are given the opportunity to move on and train as Mentors</p> <p>Service provides a friendly ear and sign posts to appropriate services and provide introductions to community groups to encourage community cohesion.</p> <p>Homelessness Prevention schools program is extended to Redditch based on Birmingham St Basils STAMP approach.</p>	<p>Milestones have been altered to reflect revised time scales.</p> <p>Additional £5,000 money was secured via RBC Capital to help develop the scheme.</p>

8) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Housing Services advisors offer joined up advice to individuals facing redundancy. This will be facilitated via a Multi agency team of specialist advisors or 'task force' who will attend employer premises to offer advice to staff.</p>	<p>March 2011</p>	<p>Project Manager Liz Tompkin Lead Officer Elise Hopkins <u>Project Team</u> RBC Housing Options, RBC Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus, RBC One Stop Shop, RBC Borough Tenants Panel, Homelessness Review and Voluntary Sector project teams</p>	<p>Task force to be resourced using existing staffing from partners.</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> We will look to fund this on an ongoing basis via efficiency savings derived from lean working.</p>	<p>Task force Service Level Agreement developed May 2009</p> <p>Avoidable contact survey is reviewed and recommendations to reduce avoidable contacts are implemented – May 2009.</p> <p>Targets are set for processing applications and outcomes – May 09.</p> <p>Introduce an income maximisation service for customers experiencing financial hardship Nov – 2009.</p>	<p><u>Target</u> Provide task force for companies where more than 10 members of staff face redundancy. (We anticipate having to undertake at least 2 task force events per month in the current climate (assisting up to 50 individuals).</p> <p>The number of un-necessary customer contacts to the Council about Housing is reduced from current baseline 20.60% (NI14). We aim to reduce this by 5%. Mobile technology would also be utilised by visiting officers and for community events.</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Increased Homelessness Prevention Faster access to Benefits Better customer service More Efficient / Leaner Services</p>	<p>Customers at risk of unemployment and possibly homelessness receive joined-up appropriate advice. Awareness of the Housing Options Service is raised within the Borough and customers approach the Council earlier so prevention of homelessness is easier (demonstrated through number of customers accessing service). The number of un-necessary customer contacts is reduced.</p>	<p>Multi-agency task Forces have attended three companies in Redditch and provided information to 98 individuals in total. Work ongoing to assist further companies.</p> <p>An income maximisation service has been launched by RBC using HRA revenue and DWP grant.</p>

9) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Promote the Enhanced Housing Options Service via road shows to raise awareness and encourage individuals to approach for support and advice before reaching crisis point.	March 2011	Project Manager Liz Tompkin Lead Officer Elise Hopkins <u>Project Team</u> RBC Housing Options, RBC Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus, RBC One Stop Shop, RBC Borough Tenants Panel, Homelessness Review and Voluntary Sector project teams	<u>Capital for Project</u> £15,000 Trailblazer Grant for Mobile Technology Project Support will be met via RBC existing revenue budgets <u>Sustainability</u> We will look to fund this on an ongoing basis via efficiency savings derived from lean working.	Train Residents in Housing Options to assist officers in informing the community June 2009 Identify target audiences for Events Oct 2009 Produce timetable of Events up until April 2011. Undertake an event every two months up until April 2011.	<u>Target</u> Contribute to the targets set for the Link Worker in assisting individuals to access education and employment. Record numbers attending events and undertake consultation regarding service improvements required. <u>Outcomes</u> Increased Homelessness Prevention (acceptances monitored via P1E, 198 acceptances in 07/08) Raised awareness of Education and Employment Options (recorded via questionnaires undertaken during consultation) Ensure that education providers provide courses required by community (recorded via consultation).	Awareness of the Housing Options Service is raised within the Borough and customers approach the Council earlier so prevention of homelessness is easier (demonstrated through number of customers accessing service). Residents involved in training other members of the community.	Events have been held every two months. The next is scheduled between 18 and 23 Jan 2010.

10) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Trial mobile technology to provide a more efficient Enhanced Housing Options Service and join the service up with Housing Benefits and other key partners.</p>	<p>March 2011</p>	<p>Project Manager Liz Tompkin Lead Officer Elise Hopkins <u>Project Team</u> RBC Housing Options, RBC Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus, RBC One Stop Shop, RBC Borough Tenants Panel, Homelessness Review and Voluntary Sector project teams</p>	<p><u>Capital for Project</u> £15,000 Trailblazer Grant for Mobile Technology Project Support will be met via RBC existing revenue budgets <u>Sustainability</u> We will look to fund this on an ongoing basis via efficiency savings derived from lean working.</p>	<p>Improve information and translation services on RBC Website – Oct 2009 Investment is made in technology allowing mobile working – November 2009. Benefits electronic claim form designed and introduced Jan 2010. Develop a combined Housing Enquiry / Application and Benefits claim form – March 2010. Work with Job Centre Plus to look at ways that information can be shared to deliver leaner services – Jan 2011.</p>	<p><u>Target</u> The number of un-necessary customer contacts to the Council about Housing is reduced from current baseline 20.60%(NI14). We aim to reduce this by 5%. Mobile technology would also be utilised by visiting officers and for community events. Increase uptake for benefit fast-track service. <u>Outcomes</u> Faster access to Benefits Better customer service More Efficient / Leaner Services.</p>	<p>Customers at risk of unemployment and possibly homelessness receive joined-up appropriate advice from housing and Benefits. We offer better value for money services but reducing duplication.</p>	<p>In light of the impact of the recession on Job Centre Plus the milestones have been revised to put more emphasis on joining up housing and benefits services.</p>

11) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Employ a link worker, based within the Enhanced Housing Options Team at Redditch Borough Council to facilitate joined up working between Housing Options, Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Education providers in the local area.</p> <p>115% more people were claiming JSA in Jan 09 compared to Jan 08. 44% more people were accepted to receive JSA in Jan 09 compared to Jan 08.</p>	Feb 2010	<p>Project Manager</p> <p>Elise Hopkins</p> <p>Project Lead</p> <p>Brenda Harbon</p>	<p>£60,000 (based on two year temporary post for grade 6 officer). Staff member would work to the Housing Options Team Leader</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u> Depending on the success of this scheme future funding may be requested from LAA budgets to cover this post.</p>	<p>Housing Options Manager to spend 5 days in Job Centre Plus service – March 09 09</p> <p>Write job description and skills required in partnership with all agencies – March 09</p> <p>Advertise post - April 09</p> <p>Recruit to post - Jun 09</p> <p>Information sharing agreement and monitoring arrangements agreed – Jun 09</p> <p>Produce initial Tool Kit for Skills and Employment – Jun 09</p> <p>Enhanced Housing Options service is Launched – Jul 09</p> <p>Amend customer satisfaction questionnaire to reflect enhanced service – Jul 09</p> <p>Produce recommendations for service improvement and future funding proposals - Feb 10</p>	<p><u>Targets</u> Link worker will see 430 individuals over 20 months. Of these individuals 50% will seek further assistance from Job Centre Plus or Training Providers to find employment or training. 25% of individuals seen will find Employment or commence skills training. Tool Kit is produced to outline funding opportunities, skills training and employment opportunities in the Borough. Produce recommendations for service development and long term sustainability of project.</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> More people accessing education or employment Improved efficiency Higher level of customer satisfaction</p>	<p>Customers accessing Housing Options Advice Services and are able to consider their Housing Options in conjunction with income and future employment and education aspirations. Information is shared between organisations. Areas where savings could be made by pooling resources between agencies are identified.</p>	<p>New Link worker joined team in August 2009. Enhanced Housing Options Service commenced. RBC working in partnership with Rooftop Housing to develop a proposal for LAA Reward grant to fund countywide service.</p> <p>On target regarding the number of customers assisted via the service.</p>

12) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Pilot the use of Council Temporary Accommodation for use as Training Flats for Care Leavers wishing to experience living independently According to information recorded since 2006, 77% of young people accessing independent accommodation after leaving the care system lose their accommodation due to Eviction in the first 12 months following non payment of rent or antisocial behaviour. 52% of Young People surveyed in a snap shot survey said that they would like the opportunity to use a training flat.</p>	March 2011	<p>Project Manager Elise Hopkins Lead Officer Brenda Harbon</p>	<p>As a result of increased prevention demand for Dispersed Unit Temporary accommodation has reduced so the use of these units as training flats can be accommodated within our existing provision. The After Care Service will fund the foster placement so that there is somewhere the young person can return if they do not wish to live independently immediately.</p>	<p>Establish baseline for housing related debt in care leavers contained in earlier survey – April -09 Negotiate rates with After Care Service - April 09 Review Licence Agreement – May 2009 Produce Service Specification – May 2009 Design mechanism for referral into the service – June 2009 Design Support Service with Supporting People – June 2009 Produce information packs for properties – June 09 Produce service user questionnaire to map success – June 09 Negotiate PCT regarding expanding the service - Nov 09.</p>	<p><u>Targets</u> Reduce the numbers of ex-care leavers losing accommodation to 50% (by end of 2 years). Widen the scope of training flat to include individuals leaving Mental Health Service or supported lodgings. <u>Outcomes</u> Reduced cases of Intentional Homelessness and Homelessness Acceptances Reduced housing related debts with appropriate life skills to maintain tenancies Young people will gain confidence to live independently</p>	<p>The training flat provides those leaving care with the opportunity to experience independent living without losing their long term care placements. It identifies where further work is required before formal tenancies begin. Where placements fail young people are not excluded from the housing register due to debt. Confidence is built and life skills are widened.</p>	<p>Three clients have entered training flat. Two out of three individuals have been referred to independent accommodation following a period in the flat.</p>

13) What we will do?	When we will do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target / Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
<p>Introduce an additional Special Needs Tenancy Officer who will target individuals in under-occupied Council or Housing Association properties and prioritise moves to smaller accommodation to free up family accommodation for overcrowded families,</p> <p>We already have a Special Needs Officer who freed up 49 properties and saved £117,000 from Equipment and Adaptations budgets by facilitating moves to more suitable properties in 2008.</p>	March 2011	<p>Project Manager</p> <p>Elise Hopkins</p> <p>Lead Officer</p> <p>Carol Cockette</p>	<p>Cost of additional post funded via Redditch Borough Council revenue budgets</p> <p>£10,000 incentives from Redditch Borough Council Capital per year to fund costs associated with helping vulnerable under-occupied tenants to move and fund incentives.</p> <p><u>Sustainability</u></p> <p>If successful further capital funding will be requested to continue the scheme.</p>	<p>Complete survey of under-occupied accommodation - February 2009</p> <p>Approve changes to allocations policy to enhance ability to free up under-occupied accommodation - April 09</p> <p>Undertake campaign to encourage people to downsize - May 09</p> <p>Sign Draft Equipment and Adaptation protocol between PCT and RBC – April 2010.</p> <p>Role out protocol to sub-region May 2010.</p>	<p><u>Target</u> Free up at least 80% of under-occupied properties where individuals are registered and bidding through CBL system (from waiting list information there are currently 39 households under-occupied).</p> <p><u>Outcomes</u> Improved customer satisfaction Better use of Housing Stock Better value for Money</p>	<p>Customers wishing to move from under occupied properties are given more opportunity, support and incentive to move.</p> <p>Better use made of existing housing stock.</p> <p>Money from the equipment and adaptations budget is saved to ensure a greater number of individuals have their needs met.</p>	<p>Targets have been amended as officers are over-achieving those set at the beginning of the project.</p>

Table 1

Number	Trailblazer Action
1	Use Pod technology to tackle Overcrowding and Disability
2	Information Packs for Offenders and Tackle Financial Exclusion
3	Specialist Rent Deposit Scheme for Socially Excluded
4	Shared House for Young Singles on Benefits
5	Develop a Joint Strategy to tackle the barriers to accessing employment / education and encourage economic development in the area.
6	Innovations Fund to encourage/assist individuals back into work or education
7	Volunteer Mentoring and Befriending Service, plus Homelessness Prevention schools program
8	Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Housing Services advisors offer joined up advice to individuals facing redundancy. This will be facilitated via a Multi agency team of specialist advisors or 'task force' who will attend employer premises to offer advice to staff.
9	Promote the Enhanced Housing Options Service via road shows to raise awareness and encourage individuals to approach for support and advice before reaching crisis point.
10	Trial mobile technology to provide a more efficient Enhanced Housing Options Service and join the service up with Housing Benefits and other key partners.
11	Employ a link worker, based within the Enhanced Housing Options Team at Redditch Borough Council to facilitate joined up working between Housing Options, Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Education providers in the local area.
12	Training Flat for Care Leavers or Looked After Children
13	Special Needs Officer and Move on Fund

Table 2

A tick indicates where a Trailblazer Action will contribute to delivering the LAA Priorities in Worcestershire

	Trailblazer Actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
LAA Priorities														
To continue to improve community safety and build confidence in communities			√										√	
To support and improve the leading of healthy lifestyles and well-being of adults and children and young people		√		√				√					√	√
To reduce the harm caused by illegal drugs and alcohol				√										

Table 2 (continued)

A tick indicates where a Trailblazer Action will contribute to delivering the LAA Priorities in Worcestershire

	Trailblazer Actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
LAA Priorities														
To ensure all children and young people have the opportunity to participate in positive activities				√				√					√	
To remove barriers to employment and improve skills in education, employment and training			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
To provide decent and affordable housing which meets the diverse needs of Worcestershire		√		√	√								√	√

Table 2 (continued)

A tick indicates where a Trailblazer Action will contribute to delivering the LAA Priorities in Worcestershire

	Trailblazer Actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
LAA Priorities														
To promote economic growth and enable the economy in targeted sectors and locations						√								

Table 3**Redditch Borough Council – Performance Indicators**

1) Use Pod technology to tackle Overcrowding and Disability					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
Eva 6	Number of minor property adaptations, small extensions or other small works intended to alleviate overcrowding that have been arranged by the EHO or undertaken for EHO clients.	0	0	0	Not expected to achieve target of 5 until March 2011.
RBC1	Number of organisations to visit Show Pod (target 150 for duration of project)	43	139	223%	Whilst the show pod has been extremely successful in the first seven months the target has not been increased as there is a limit to the organisations that will want to visit.

2) Information Packs for Offenders					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC2	Number of returns received from prisoner information packs.	0	0	0	Not expected to achieve results until after Feb 2010.
RBC3	Satisfaction level amongst ex-offenders about Housing Advice.	0	0	0	Snapshot survey to establish baseline will be set Jan 2010.

3) Specialist Rent Deposit Scheme for Socially Excluded					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
Eva3	Total number of households accessing new or different PRS property while clients of the EHO.	12	27	125%	We have seen an increased in the number of homeless preventions via our rent deposit schemes.
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC4	Number of households approved for assistance with PRS via Socially Excluded Rent deposit scheme (SERDS). Target is 35 over 2 year project.	11	11	0	This is on track.

RBC4.1 * only includes households helped via SERDS	% who sustain accommodation for 6 months.	75%	100%	25%	The majority of clients have not reached the six months stage so number is from a very small sample.
RBC4.2 * only includes households helped via SERDS	% of those helped who continue to engage with probation / drug / alcohol rehabilitation for 6 months.	75%	100%	25%	The majority of clients have not reached the six months stage so number is from a very small sample.
RBC4.3 * only includes households helped via SERDS	% of those taking part in community events / activities.	30%	0	30%	This relates to a very small sample size.

4) Shared House for Young Singles on Benefits					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC5	Number of single rooms developed for young people aged 16 to 25 years old.	5	10	100	Project completed ahead of schedule.

6) Innovations Fund to encourage/assist individuals back into work or education					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC6	Number of individuals assisted with innovation fund.	8	5	38%	Several education providers have this type of fund but report that they are usually out of budget by Jan. We have referred customers to their fund first and anticipate using this fund more later in the year.
RBC6.1 (just relates to households assisted via innovations fund)	% who successfully accessed education or employment	70%	100%	30%	

7) Volunteer Mentoring and Befriending Service, plus Homelessness Prevention schools program					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC7	Number of peer educators/befrienders completed course.	0	0	0	We will not see results until later in project.
RBC8	Number of Mentors completed course	0	0	0	We will not see results until later in project.

RBC8.1	% of Mentors that become involved in community activities / estate management.	0	0	0	We will not see results until later in project.
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8) Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Housing Services advisors offer joined up advice to individuals facing redundancy. This will be facilitated via a Multi agency team of specialist advisors or 'task force' who will attend employer premises to offer advice to staff.					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC8	Number of individuals assisted via multi-agency task force.	350	98	72%	The number of large scale redundancies in the local area has slowed. Target needs revising.
Eva1	Number of cases prevented/resolved. P1E (Published Indicator)				We have improved Homelessness Prevention considerably since last year
Eva2	Number of applicant households found eligible for assistance. P1E (Published Indicator)	112			We have improved Homelessness Prevention considerably since last year
RBC9	Number of individuals seen by Income Maximisation Service	35	43	23%	This is a new service so target may need revising as we move forward.

RBC10	£ saved by Income Maximisation Service (calculated over 12 months)	25,000	40,476	62%	This is a new service so target may need revising as we move forward.
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9) Promote the Enhanced Housing Options Service via road shows to raise awareness and encourage individuals to approach for support and advice before reaching crisis point.					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC11	Number of community events / road shows organised.	4	4	0	

10) Trial mobile technology to provide a more efficient Enhanced Housing Options Service and join the service up with Housing Benefits and other key partners.					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
NI14	The number of unnecessary customer contacts to the Council.	19.57	10.900	44%	This is a considerable difference and is largely due to introducing a fast track benefits service and making some modifications / improvements to the CBL website and phone system.

11) Employ a link worker, based within the Enhanced Housing Options Team at Redditch Borough Council to facilitate joined up working between Housing Options, Housing Benefits, Job Centre Plus and Education providers in the local area.					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC12	Number of clients engaged with IAG / employability service	65	70	8%	We have seen fractionally more clients than anticipated.
RBC12.1	Number of clients helped to move into employment.	Overall target set in indicator RBC12	6	n/a	
RBC12.2	Number of clients helped to move into training or education	Overall target set in indicator RBC12	64	n/a	
Eva17	Improved customer service (baseline 86%)	90%	100%	10%	50% said they were satisfied with the service received. 50% said they were very satisfied with the service received.

12) Training Flat for Care Leavers or Looked After Children					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
RBC13	Number of individuals provided with training flat.	3	3	0	Project on line

13) Special Needs Officer and Move on Fund					
Indicator Reference <i>* RBC indicators are specific to Redditch</i>	Description of Indicator	Target Performance as at 31 Dec 2009	Actual Performance	Difference %	Comment
Eva 5	Number of households downsizing.	12 <i>(Revised target was 20)</i>	21	75% <i>(revised target difference 5%)</i>	The target was revised up based on the success at quarter 2.

Equalities Impact Assessment Completion Form

1. What is the name of the service, policy, procedure or project to be assessed?

Housing Allocations Policy and Redditch Home Choice System.

2. Briefly describe the aim of the service, policy, procedure or project. What needs or duties' is it designed to meet?

The Allocations Policy aims to give clear criteria by setting out who is eligible to apply for social rented housing in the Borough and how applicants' priority is assessed.

3. List your customers/ stakeholders

Stakeholders represent all equalities groups and consist of those customers who register for the Redditch Home Choice scheme enabling them to bid for affordable housing vacancies.

4. How do you know who they are?

Information recorded via the Abrisas System regarding:

- Housing advice / assistance
- Homeless Prevention Statistics
- Waiting List Statistics

Housing Needs Surveys
 Housing Market Assessments
 PIE Returns
 Core Returns
 Census Data

5. Do any of your customers/ stakeholders come from the following Equality Groups?

Equality Group	Yes	No	Further Evidence Needed
Race / Minority Ethnic Groups	Yes		
Disability	Yes		

Gender (Male/ Female)	Yes		
Gender Re-assignment (Trans-sexual)	Yes		
Marital Status	Yes		
Sexual Orientation	Yes		
Religion/ Belief	Yes		
Age	Yes		
Income group	Yes		
Rural/Urban mix	Yes		
None of these	Yes`		Socially excluded individuals being released from custodial sentences or with drug or alcohol addictions were highlighted as potentially at risk.

6. What activities have you undertaken to establish the information to answer questions 4 and 5?

Redditch Borough Council operates an open housing register so that anyone can register an application with the scheme. Exclusions only normally apply to those involved in behaviour so severe that it makes them unsuitable to be a tenant, non eligible groups due to immigration status, and potentially those who have money outstanding to the Council or partner Registered Social Landlords. Exclusions to the housing register are determined on a case by case basis, taking the particular circumstances into consideration, and all individuals are given the decision verbally and in writing and given the opportunity to appeal the initial decision.

7. Who have you consulted and what methods have you used?

Whilst developing the Redditch Home Choice Scheme we undertook consultation via workshops and questionnaires. Several ‘working groups’ were set up to review officer proposals and they contributed to the final development of the policy. The groups were as follows:

Housing Advisory Panel (consisting of Elected Members from all parties);
 Council Tenants and Local Residents Panel;
 Young People Panel (consisting of individuals between 16 and 25 from the local college CSV who may be future customers);

The draft Allocations Policy was circulated to working groups, partner registered social landlords and partner agencies and their comments contributed to the design of the final scheme.

A review was undertaken on the Redditch Home Choice Scheme after twelve months to establish if it could be improved. A postal questionnaire, telephone interviews and face to face interviews were used to canvass the opinions of our customers. We also reviewed the complaints received during the first year of operation. A survey was also conducted with partner agencies.

Officers took note of relevant legislation, case law and the Codes of Guidance in respect of developing the Redditch Home Choice Scheme and the first review. They also consulted with regional Choice Based Lettings Advisers from Communities and Local Government to gain endorsement of the final scheme.

8. Is there evidence that any groups are being treated unfairly, directly or indirectly?

Equality Group	Yes	No	Further Evidence Needed
Race / Minority Ethnic Groups	Yes Translation of leaflets is provided in the 5 most common languages. We have a wider range of language options on the translation software featured on the website. Translation can also be provided via Ethnic Access Link. There does remain potential for some applicants to be adversely		

	<p>affected or not be aware of all the translation services available to them. Applicants who don't speak English as a first language would have to seek additional assistance to be able to access the service and to enable active participation in the Choice Based Lettings system.</p> <p>Another group that may be adversely affected are applicants who choose to live a mobile lifestyle such as Gypsies and Travellers. These applicants may experience more limited options for accessing the service from their home in terms of accessing the internet or the automated phone line.</p>		
Disability	<p>Yes</p> <p>Redditch Home Choice provides a range of access routes for applicants to choose from and various types of assistance for people with impaired sight such as braille, audio CD, large print and browse aloud.</p> <p>Training is offered to support workers from all agencies so that they can provide support to the more vulnerable applicants.</p> <p>It is recognised that there is potential for</p>		

	<p>some applicants to be adversely affected. Applicants who are housebound for example may experience more limited options for accessing the service being unable to view newsletters at local community outlets and receive the help available at community contact centres.</p> <p>Applicants with hearing impairments would be restricted from using the automated telephone line.</p> <p>Applicants who have mental health or learning disabilities and need help from family/friends or support services to access the service.</p>		
Gender (Male/ Female)		No	
Gender Re-assignment (Trans-sexual)		No We have a very small number of applicants who have declared this when registering with Redditch Home Choice but there are no obvious reasons why they would be disadvantaged in respects of the scheme.	
Marital Status		No	
Sexual Orientation		No We have singles and same sex couples who have been successful in	

		<p>accessing housing via Redditch Home Choice.</p> <p>We have a very small number of applicants who have declared when registering with Redditch Home Choice but there is no reasons why they would be disadvantaged.</p>	
Religion/ Belief	<p>Yes</p> <p>The Redditch Home Choice scheme enables applicants to bid for vacant properties 24 hours a day and 5 days a week but it is possible that some applicants could be adversely affected due to their religious belief should a religious festival occur towards the end of a bidding cycle. That would result in the applicants being restricted in making late bids or changing their bids to improve their chances of success.</p>		
Age	<p>Yes</p> <p>Redditch Home Choice provides a range of access routes for Applicants to choose from. One Stop Shop staff, Housing Options and Warden Staff are available to provide support and training on the use of the internet.</p> <p>It is recognised that there is the potential for some applicants to be adversely affected as</p>		

	<p>older applicants may have had less learning opportunities to enable them to use the internet. This may result in more limited options for these applicants in accessing the service.</p>		
Income group	<p>Yes It is recognised that there is the potential for some lower income applicants to be adversely affected.</p> <p>Applicants may be unable to afford a personal computer / internet access and may not live near a free internet access point. Those applicants will have more limited options for accessing the service. Applicants may be unable to afford to travel to community outlets to see newsletters or to visit Community Contact Centres for support.</p>		<p>We do not record information about income on our application forms which makes it difficult to monitor</p>
Rural/Urban mix	<p>Yes</p> <p>Urban areas of Redditch provide more free internet opportunities for customers to access the system and also more opportunities to get support from staff in placing bids etc. It is possible that those living in Rural areas could be disadvantaged by having fewer options for accessing the scheme.</p>		

9. Please detail the information you have gathered to support the answers to question 7.

Equality Group	Evidence gathered
Race / Minority Ethnic Groups	Further Evidence Required
Disability	Further Evidence Required
Gender (Male/ Female)	Further Evidence Required
Gender Re-assignment (Trans-sexual)	Further Evidence Required
Marital Status	Further Evidence Required
Sexual Orientation	Further Evidence Required
Religion/ Belief	Further Evidence Required
Age	Further Evidence Required
Income group	Further Evidence Required
Rural/Urban mix	Further Evidence Required

10. Is there any justification for any unfairness identified in question 7 - for example, disproportionate cost? Describe the supporting evidence.

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) gives priority to certain groups of people who are believed to be vulnerable. The Redditch Home Choice System is designed to ensure that priority is given to those groups and that may have an adverse affect on some others. There are also restrictions based on immigration and residency which can be justified based on legislation and government policy.

Translations

Research commissioned by Festival Housing 'Building Knowledge' The Housing Needs of the Black and Minority Ethnic Population in Herefordshire and Worcestershire 2006 has identified that there are issues in Herefordshire, a neighbouring county, about the level of understanding

of the bidding system for social housing and the ability of some ethnic households to participate. Whilst translations are provided in the 5 most prevalent languages, Redditch Borough Council has not provided translations into every language as the cost would be disproportionate compared to current need. Redditch Borough Council has addressed this gap in service provision by providing an interpretation service for those who require this help via Ethnic Access Link.

Internet Access

Whilst the Redditch Borough Council recognises that the most informative route to access Home Choice is through the web based system, not everyone has access to the internet. Free internet access points are provided in the libraries and in the Town Hall however this is still not easily available to everyone. The cost of providing personal internet access for everyone would be disproportionate therefore alternative ways to access the system have been put in place such as by phone.

Religious Festivals

Some applicants may celebrate certain religious festivals e.g. Christmas, Easter, Diwali, Eid-ul-Fitr or Eid-ul-Adh and it is recognised that this could impact on their ability to access the service. This is particularly important towards the end of the weekly bidding cycle where there could be some advantage in changing bids to properties where the applicant has a greater chance of being selected for an offer of a vacant property. There is currently a lack of evidence to justify changing the bidding cycle to accommodate religious festivals but Redditch Borough Council will continue to work with members of the community via our community forum to look at ways in which the Service could be improved.

11. If you have identified any area of unfairness that cannot be justified, how will you eliminate or minimize this?

It is anticipated that more opportunities for internet access can be achieved through training and raising awareness with libraries. Internet access is available at the Town Hall and staff have been trained on how to access the system and help people to place bids. Additional support will be offered to those applicants who are unable to access the system and have no support networks available to access it for them. Where appropriate, staff may be authorised to place bids on an applicant's behalf. This would only happen in exceptional circumstances as the whole ethos behind choice based lettings relates to empowering the applicant to have, and make, a choice. Further training will be provided to statutory and voluntary sector agencies who offer advice and support. We will look at Mobile technology that will allow Council staff to take the Redditch Home Choice system into customers homes if they are house bound or into areas of the community where access is poor.

- 12. The results of your research and any justifications must be easily available to the public. When, where and how will you publish this information?**

Redditch Borough Council will publish the Impact assessment on the Internet and also take it to the Community Forum for their comments.

- 13. In support of the Single Equalities Scheme, you are required to regularly monitor all policies and services for fairness. What plans do you have to monitor this particular service, policy, procedure or project?**

The Impact assessment will be regularly reviewed in line with corporate guidelines.

- 14. Your findings now need to be managed through your Departmental 3 Year Rolling Equality Action Plan. Please complete the final section of this form.**

Action Required	By Whom	By When	Signed when complete	Priority	How has this Promoted Equality?
Develop Access Strategy/Vulnerable Persons Policy.	Elise Hopkins	April 2010			
Develop a local directory of access routes for Redditch Home Choice including public internet access points or places where newsletters will be displayed. Review the information stored on access to services and outcomes and compare this to census information	Sam Wilkes	April 2010			
Take the policy and accompanying documents to the	Elise Hopkins	April 2010			

community forums and ask for recommendations regarding how services could be improved					
Introduce translation service on to the Redditch Home Choice System	Brenda Harbon	December 2009			
Implement Mobile technology to enable staff to take the system to hard to reach areas / customers homes / community events	Elise Hopkins	January 2010			

Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by
(Signed)

Full name (in capitals please) Elise Hopkins

Position in the council Housing Options Manager

Date: 2nd November 2009

When you have completed this form, please retain a copy and give a copy to Sarah Kelsey Strategy and Partnership Assistant and Claire Felton Equalities officer

Glossary

Adverse impact

- Where one or more group of people is disadvantaged by a policy or procedure.
- Direct discrimination
- Treating someone less favourably than someone else in the same circumstances, e.g.:
 - Racist or sexist banter, derogatory comments and innuendo
 - Failure to treat grievances seriously
 - Failure to investigate grievances effectively
 - Inconsistent, irrational and subjective behaviour by employer
 - Failure to train staff and managers.
- Indirect discrimination

Where an unjustifiable condition, e.g. in the provision of a service or job specification, has the effect of excluding a particular group. Even if this is unintentional, it can still be unlawful, e.g.:

- Unnecessary height restrictions
- Refusing training for promotion to part-timers
- Fluency in language
- Not allowing wearing of religious clothing
- Word of mouth recruitment
- Qualification requirements being too demanding for the level of the job.

Policy, Practices and Services

- Refers to any activity of the Council, be that a service we provide, an initiative we run, a policy we write or a procedure we observe.
- It may refer to the way we do things which are customary.
- It may refer to activities we undertake such as meetings, focus groups or publications we produce.

Equality Groups

- all equality groups referred to in the assessment can be broken down into further sub groups as follows
 - Race/ Minority Ethnic Groups - consider all the categories in the Census
 - Consider issues around race, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin
 - Ethnic origin legally applies to Jews, Gypsies, Sikhs Irish and Scottish Travellers
 - White British
 - White Irish
 - Any other White Background
 - Black Caribbean
 - Black African
 - Any other Black background
 - Pakistani
 - Indian
 - Any other Asian Background
 - White & Black Caribbean
 - White & Black African
 - White & Asian
 - Any other Mixed Background
 - Chinese
 - Any other Ethnic Group

Disability - consider all types of impairment, physical and mental, sensory, visible and hidden

- People with learning disabilities
- Disabled children
- Young disabled people
- Parents of disabled children
- People with mobility impairments
- Wheelchair users
- Mental health system users/ survivors
- People with HIV/ Aids
- People with visual impairments
- Deaf or hearing impaired people
- People with hidden impairments
- People with cancer

Gender (Male/ Female) - consider whether something has a different impact on men or women - particularly if it has more of an impact on women, consider the impact if they have carer responsibilities whether it is childcare or other types of care

Gender Re-assignment (Trans-sexual)

- Consider all stages of re-assignment, before, during and after

Marital status

- Consider all marital statuses
- Married, widowed, divorced, separated, co-habiting, civil partnership

Sexual orientation

- Consider orientations
- Gay – usually refers to men with sexual orientation towards other men although sometime refers to women with sexual orientation towards other women
- Lesbian – refers to women with sexual orientation towards other women
- Bisexual – refers to men and women with sexual orientation to either their own sex or the opposite sex
- Heterosexual refers to men and women with sexual orientation towards the opposite sex

Religion/ Belief – for more detailed information refer to the Acas Booklet – Religion or Belief in the Workplace - consider the main and the minority religions

- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Sikhism
- Baha'i
- Buddhism
- Jainism
- Paganism
- Parsi or Zoroastrianism
- Rastafarianism

Consider beliefs e.g.

- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Humanism

Age - consider all age groups

- Children pre school and school age
- Teenagers
- Young adults
- Middle aged adults
- The elderly

Income group - consider all income groups

- Those in employment
- Those on high incomes
- Those on low incomes
- Those on benefits

Rural/ urban mix

- Consider all types of location in the district
- Wholly rural areas
- Villages
- Towns
- Urban fringe areas

None of these