

South Bucks District Council

Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013



South Bucks
District Council

Foreword from Cllr Mrs Jennifer Woolveridge, Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing

Welcome to our latest Homelessness Strategy.

This document replaces our previous Strategy, published in July 2003. Over the last five years, we have achieved many successes in our approach to homelessness. We very rarely use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for vulnerable families, we are well on the way to meeting Government targets with regards to use of temporary accommodation and we have improved the number of homelessness preventions in the District.

All of our successes in this field are down to effective partnership working between agencies and a commitment to excellent customer service. South Bucks District Council will continue to work towards tackling homelessness and dealing with the differing needs of customers when we are approached for assistance.

This document gives a valuable insight into homelessness issues in our District, and how we will continue to work in partnership to achieve successes in what can be a challenging area of our work

July 2008

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Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 there is a legal requirement for all Councils to develop a Homelessness Strategy.

The Strategy must set out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless.

This can be provided directly or indirectly as long as its provision is effective and appropriate. It is incumbent upon each Council to make sure that their Strategy is consistent with other local plans, policies and strategies that relate to and/or have some impact on homelessness both to the individual and the wider community.

The Homelessness Strategy is a key component of the Housing Strategy which is produced in response to national Housing policy and the desire of the Council to best meet local needs.

This strategy contains the following;

- A brief overview of the South Bucks District;
- A review of Homelessness in the South Bucks District;
- A discussion on likely future trends;
- The Strategic Priorities for tackling homelessness;
- An Action Plan which details how this strategy will be delivered in the coming years.

Getting in touch

If you have any comments about this document, or would like to know more about housing and homelessness activities in the District please contact:

The Housing Services Unit
South Bucks District Council
Capswood
Oxford Road
Denham
Bucks
UB9 4LH

Tel: 01895 837200

Email: Housing@southbucks.gov.uk

Executive Summary

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to compile a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years. This strategy defines our strategic approach for 2008-13 and replaces our previous Homelessness Strategy covering 2003-2008.

Our Review of Homelessness in the South Bucks District

To inform the development of our strategy we have undertaken a homelessness review and consultation to gather together a wide range of evidence to establish the current levels of homelessness in the District, their causes and what more could be done to prevent homelessness.

Key Findings from the Review

Levels of Homelessness in South Bucks

The numbers of households accepted as homeless under current legislation (acceptances) have remained at fairly low levels in recent years, with a maximum of 48 acceptances in 03/04 and a minimum of 26 acceptances in 2002/2003. The average number of acceptances per year since 2001/2002 is 36.

Reasons for Homelessness

Our review shows that the main driver of homelessness in South Bucks is;

- Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate.

Other drivers, although to a much lesser extent are;

- Loss of Rented or tied accommodation, including rent arrears;
- Violent breakdown of relationship with partner;
- Other relatives or friends no longer able to accommodate.

Use of Temporary Accommodation

There has been a 32% reduction in the number of households staying in temporary accommodation since 2004. There were 13 households at the end of March 2008, compared to 19 in December 2004. Use of bed & breakfast accommodation with shared facilities for families has been all but eliminated. We also endeavour to not use B&B for 16 and 17 year olds, in line with the Government's 2010 target.

Homelessness Prevention

Prevention work has had significant successes in the past two years, with over 40 preventions in both 06/07 and 07/08.

Rough Sleeping

There is little evidence that rough sleeping is a significant problem in the District. When we are aware of a rough sleeper in the District we endeavour to contact them and refer them to the appropriate agencies.

Our Housing Advice and Homelessness Service

This has been a fundamental change since our last Homelessness Strategy. From April 2006, our Homelessness, Housing Advice and Housing Register Service has been run on our behalf by Paradigm Housing Group, whose staff are based at our District Council Offices.

Permanent Housing and Housing Need

There is a constraint in the supply of affordable housing in South Bucks, both in terms of re-lets from the existing social housing stock, and the development of new affordable housing for rent.

Numbers on the waiting list have risen in recent years, at the end of March 2008, there were 1768 live applications on the District Housing Register. This compares to the 1127 applications on the register when we prepared our first strategy in 2003.

Housing and Financial Markets

The slowdown in the housing market and the 'credit crunch' have potential implications for our strategy in terms of repossessions, availability of mortgages and developers' willingness to build and deliver affordable housing.

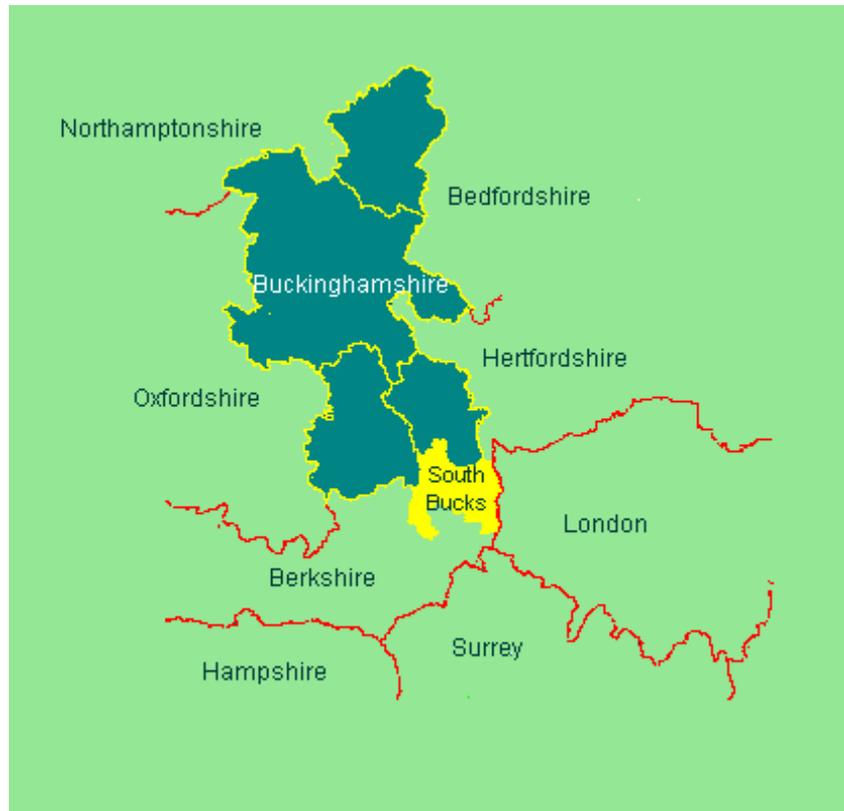
National, Regional and Local Agenda

The development of our strategy has also been informed by a consideration of the Government's main national performance priorities for tackling homelessness, which are:

- Bed and breakfast accommodation with shared facilities not to be used for families with children or a pregnant woman except in emergencies and then only for a maximum of 6 weeks.
- The same restriction on bed and breakfast accommodation to apply to homeless 16 and 17 year old young people by 2010.
- Year on year increase in the number of households prevented from becoming homeless.
- A halving of the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation by 2010.

Our strategy also links to the regional priorities, including the Local Area Agreement, priorities for the District - especially the emphasis on customer service.

South Bucks District Profile



The 2001 Census found that South Bucks has a population of 61,945 people. This represents an increase of 2.9% compared with 1991, which was a higher rate of increase than that for England and Wales as a whole (2.5%). Projections for the period 2001 - 2011 show that the population is expected to remain at around the 2001 level.

There are 26,685 households within South Bucks. The District has the highest average overall house prices compared to the surrounding areas. In the period April 2005 - March 2006 the average price for a house in South Bucks was £433,351 with the average price for a terraced house was £242,944.

House prices in South Bucks are significantly higher than the national average, which may lead to the migration of young people and low-income families out of the District.

Research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree foundation identified that South Bucks was ranked 23rd nationally in the authorities which had the highest proportion of households who were unable to purchase a home in the lowest price quartile range, with 79.5% being unable to do so.

The average household size in the District is 2.41. There is a high percentage of Owner Occupied Housing within the District at 78.0%, this compares to 74.0% for the South East and 68.9% for England & Wales.

Based on 2001 figures South Bucks has 12.6% of housing which is rented from a Housing Association or registered Social Landlord this is lower than the average of 14.0% for the South East and 19.2% for England and Wales

Denham North has the highest percentages in the District of: elderly people (37.4%); ill-health (9.1%) limiting long-term illness (20.5%); and households without a car (22.0% - double the district average). Burnham Church and Lent Rise have the highest level of lone parents with dependent children (5.0%) and features in the bottom half of the national Child Poverty Index.

Links to Other Strategies and Plans

The Government published statutory guidance in July 2008 titled, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*,

This publication contains statutory guidance under Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 in relation to the preparation or modification of Sustainable Community Strategies, the particular guidance with regard to Housing and Homelessness Strategies is detailed below;

Housing and Homelessness Strategies

The Local Government White Paper 2006 recognised the importance of housing as being “at the heart of achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives that shape a community and create a sense of place”. The Housing Green Paper *Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable* further emphasised the importance of the strategic housing role, in terms of delivering new market and affordable housing, making the best use of existing stock, and responding to the needs of all residents across all housing tenures.

Local authorities have a statutory requirement to revise their homelessness strategies at least every five years. Authorities will also want to periodically refresh their housing strategies. Local authorities will have discretion about how, when, and in what format they document their refreshed housing strategy. Whatever format is chosen, refreshed housing strategies should:

- Fully reflect the wider vision of the authority and its partners;
- Reflect a clear and evidenced approach;
- Provide a strong focus on how partners will deliver their commitments, including on the infrastructure needed to support housing growth.

In accordance with this guidance, this Homelessness Strategy, our Private Sector Renewal Strategy and our Housing Strategy will all contribute to the wider Sustainable Community Strategy of South Bucks District Council.

South Bucks District Council Corporate Plan

The Council has five stated Corporate Aims. Housing Services and in particular our services to those dealing with homelessness issues or requiring housing advice and assistance contribute to the following two aims;

- *Work with partners to improve the provision of and access for all to the right services, suitable housing and other amenities;*

- *Deliver value for money services that are driven by customer and community needs.*

Emerging Planning Policy

The Council's emerging Local Development Framework is looking to increase the number of planning options available to enable increased development of affordable housing.

Options which are being considered include;

- Seek affordable housing on developments of five or more dwellings, with a minimum of 35% affordable housing;
- 70% of new affordable housing to be social rented and 30% intermediate housing (shared ownership and sub market rental) units;
- Possibility of accepting commuted sums in lieu of on site provision in exceptional circumstances;
- A limited number of rural exception sites adjacent to specified rural settlements;
- The use of employment sites for 100% affordable housing where no longer suitable for continued employment use.

All of the above can potentially have an effect on the supply of affordable housing for rent and shared ownership in the coming years and have an impact on the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy

Homelessness Review of the South Bucks District

The review looks at the following areas;

- Accessing our Services and Customer Feedback;
- Levels of Homelessness in the District;
- Reasons for Homelessness;
- Who are the Homeless;
- Placements in Bed and Breakfast and Temporary Accommodation;
- Homelessness Prevention Work;
- Lettings via Registered Social Landlords and the Private Sector Rent Deposit Scheme;
- Indicators of likely future trends.

Accessing the Service and Service Provision - Customer Feedback

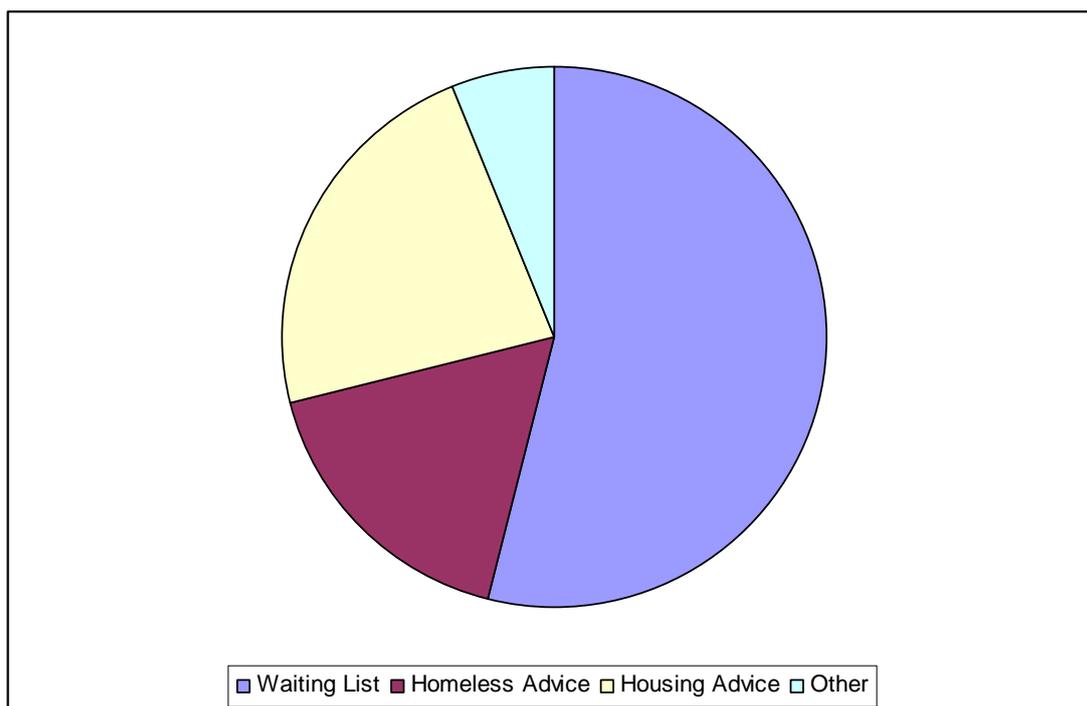
Following the transfer of the Council housing stock to Beacon Housing Association (now London and Quadrant Housing Trust) in 1991, the Homelessness, Housing Advice and Housing Register Service was also run by our local housing association partner.

In 2005/2006, the Council ran a procurement exercise to find a new service provider for these essential services. Following a successful tender the contract was awarded to Paradigm Housing Group, with the contract commencing in April 2006. There are benefits to our new contract;

- The Paradigm Team are based at the Council Offices, making joint working with other Council Departments easier;
- The Contract is governed by a performance related agreement, with bonuses being awarded depending on targets being met.

We engage in dialogue with customers on an ongoing basis to monitor access to and satisfaction with the service, some of the results are detailed below.

Why do people get in touch?

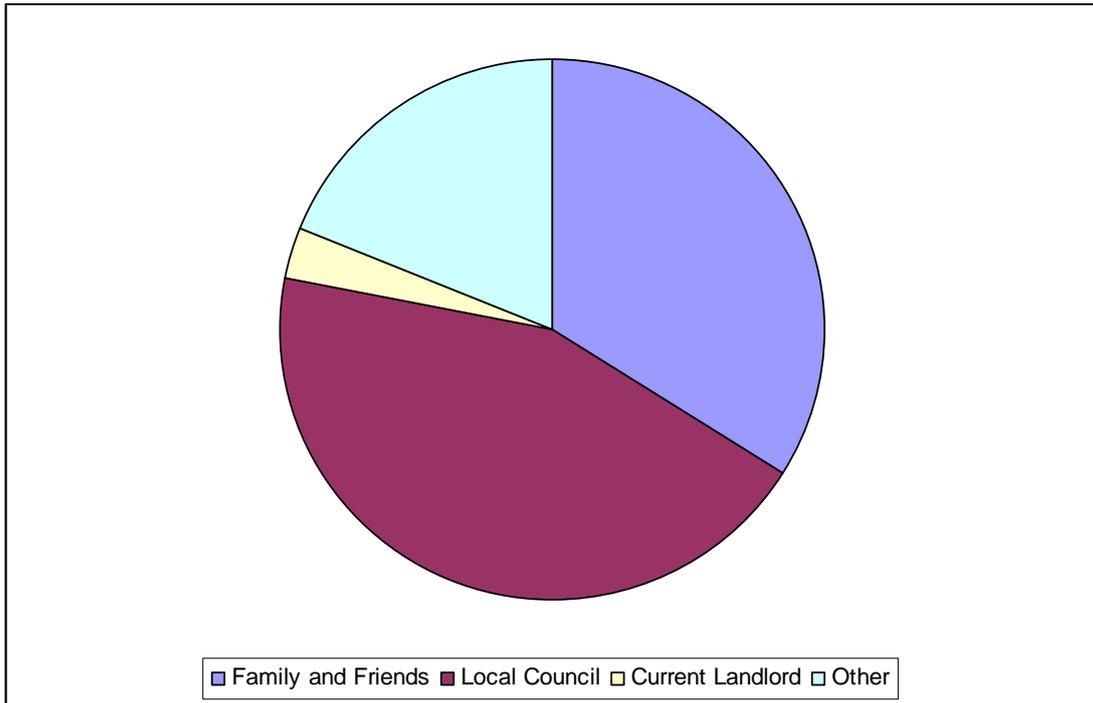


Source: SBDC/Paradigm Customer Feedback Returns

The majority, 54%, of contacts with Paradigm are to discuss existing waiting list applications.

40% of contacts are from customers seeking homelessness and housing advice.

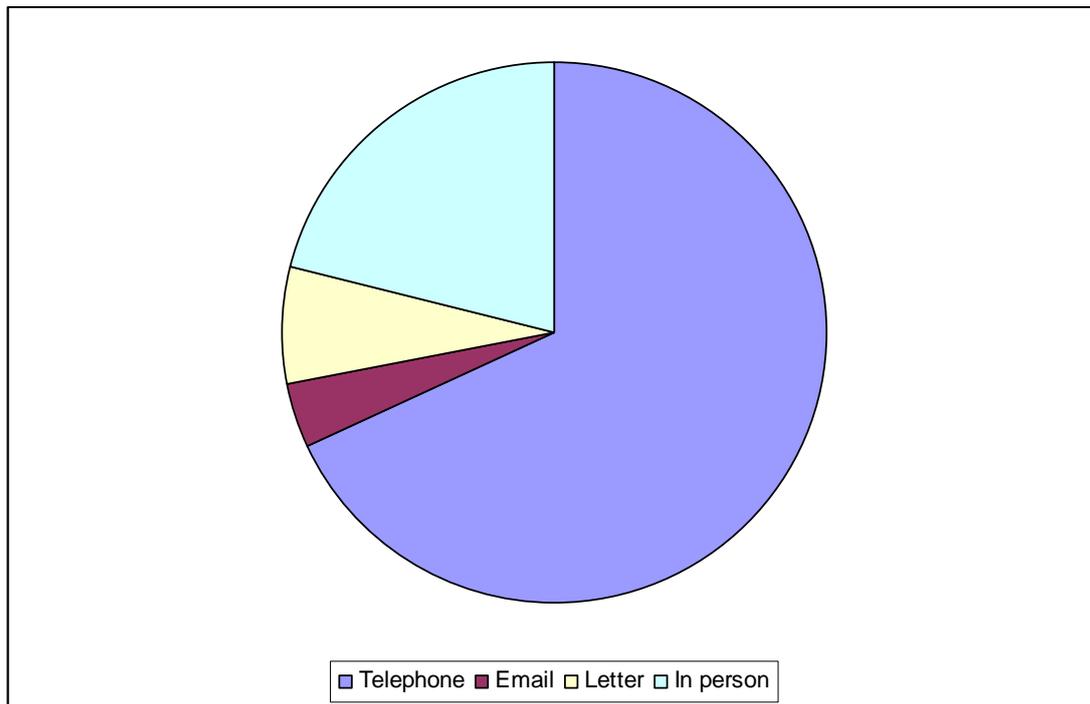
How do they know Paradigm is the right organisation to contact?



Source: SBDC/Paradigm Customer Feedback Returns

As this service is provided by a third party we are keen to monitor how customers find out about Paradigm. The chart above illustrates that the majority, 44%, are signposted via the local authority, either through our literature, website or direct from our staff. It is also interesting to note that 34% of customers are told about Paradigm by family and friends.

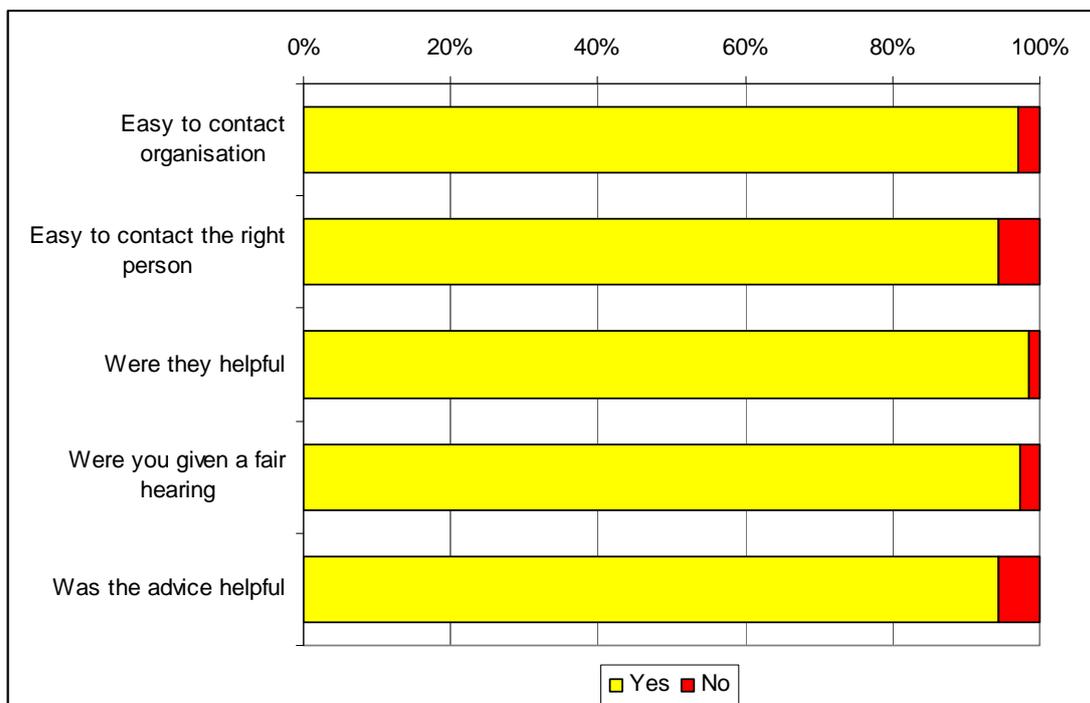
How do they get in touch?



Source: SBDC/Paradigm Customer Feedback Returns

68 % of customers get in touch via the telephone, 21% of customers present in person to the Council Offices.

What is the feedback on the Service?



Source: SBDC/Paradigm Customer Feedback Returns

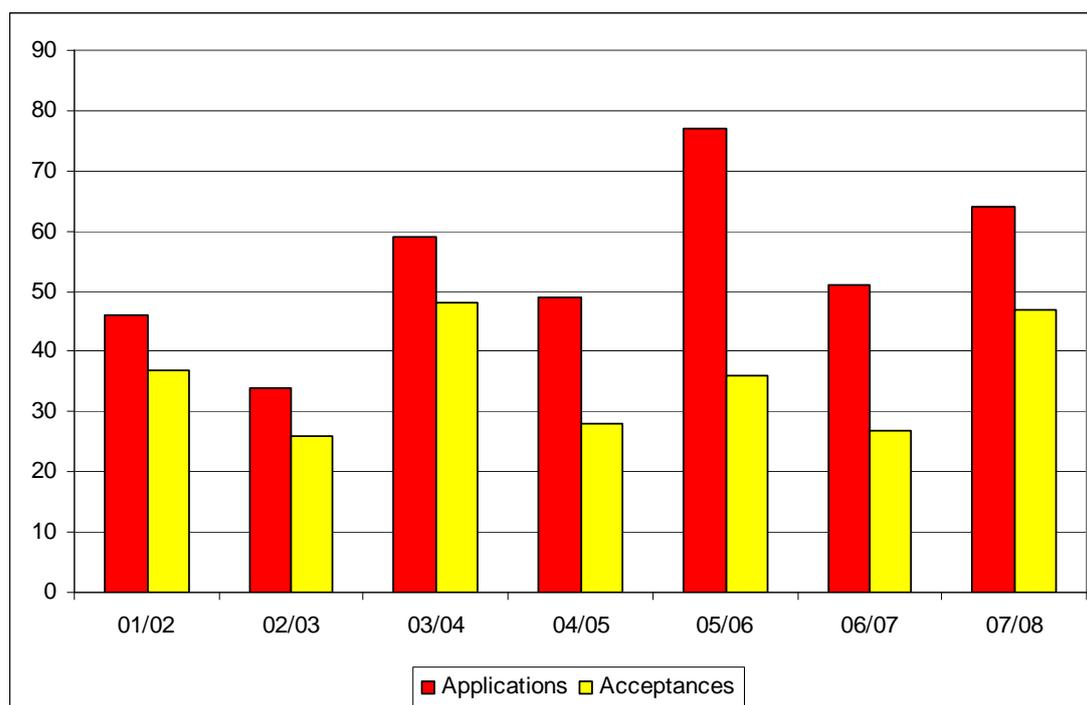
We monitor feedback on the service constantly and the results to date have been encouraging.

97% of customers tell us that Paradigm are an easy organisation to contact and following on from this 95% of customers tell us that it is then easy to contact the appropriate member of staff.

The majority of customers also feel that staff and advice given is helpful and that they have been given a fair hearing.

Applications and Acceptances

Homeless Applications and acceptances 2001-2008



Source: P1E Statistical Return

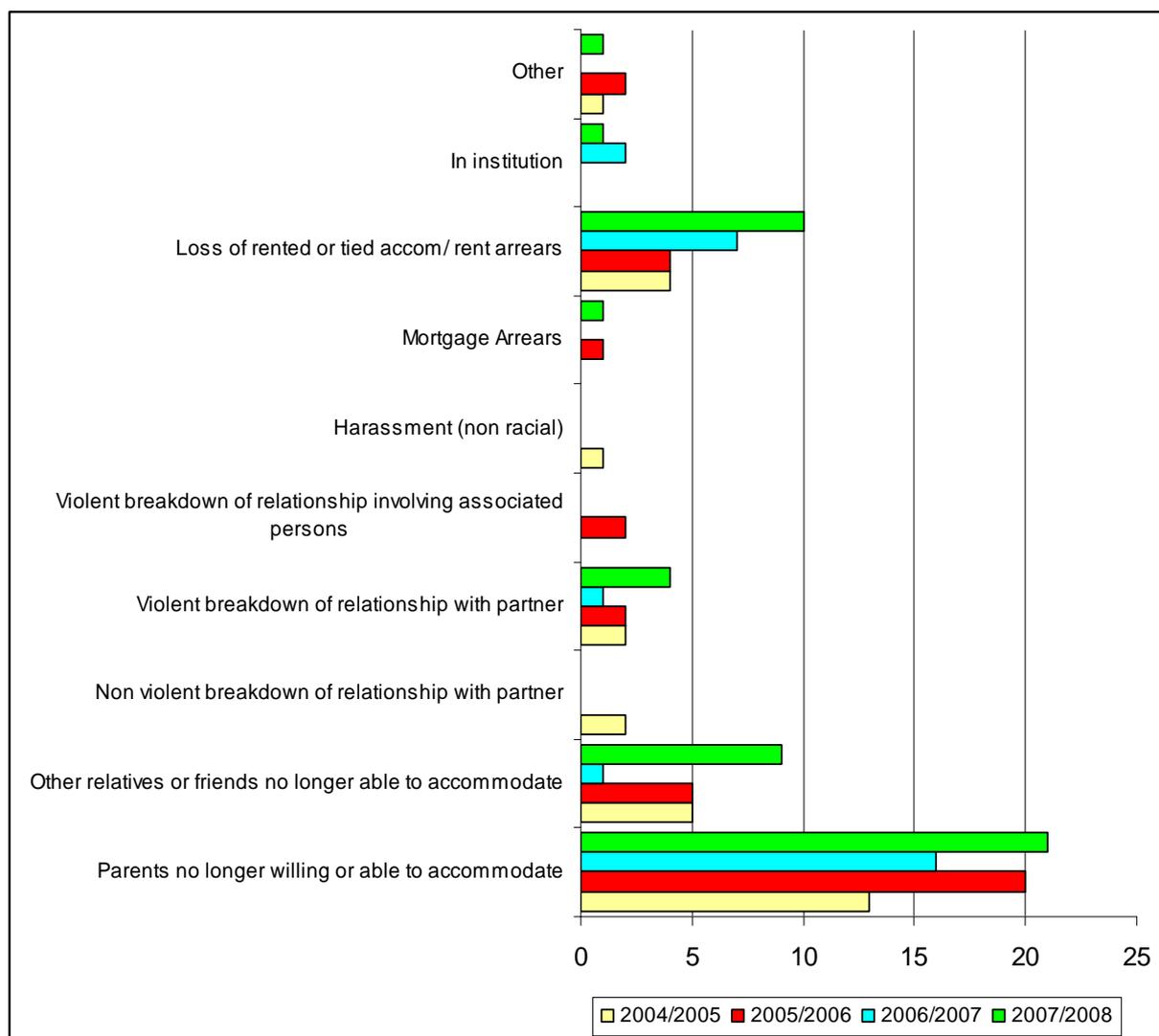
Over the last seven years, there has been an average of 54 homelessness applications per year made to the authority. Following on from these applications, there are an average of 36 households per year who are accepted as homeless by South Bucks District Council.

The trend for applications is a slightly increasing one, although the level of acceptances has remained fairly static in recent years.

The rate of acceptances to applications is 65.5%.

Homeless Acceptances

Reasons for Homelessness Acceptances



Source: P1E Statistical Return

The above graph illustrates the main drivers of homelessness acceptances over the last four years.

Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate has remained our main reason for homelessness in recent years, accounting for 44% of acceptances in 07/08, 59% in 06/07, 55% in 05/06 and 46% in 04/05.

The next main drivers of homelessness, although to a much lesser extent than parental evictions are;

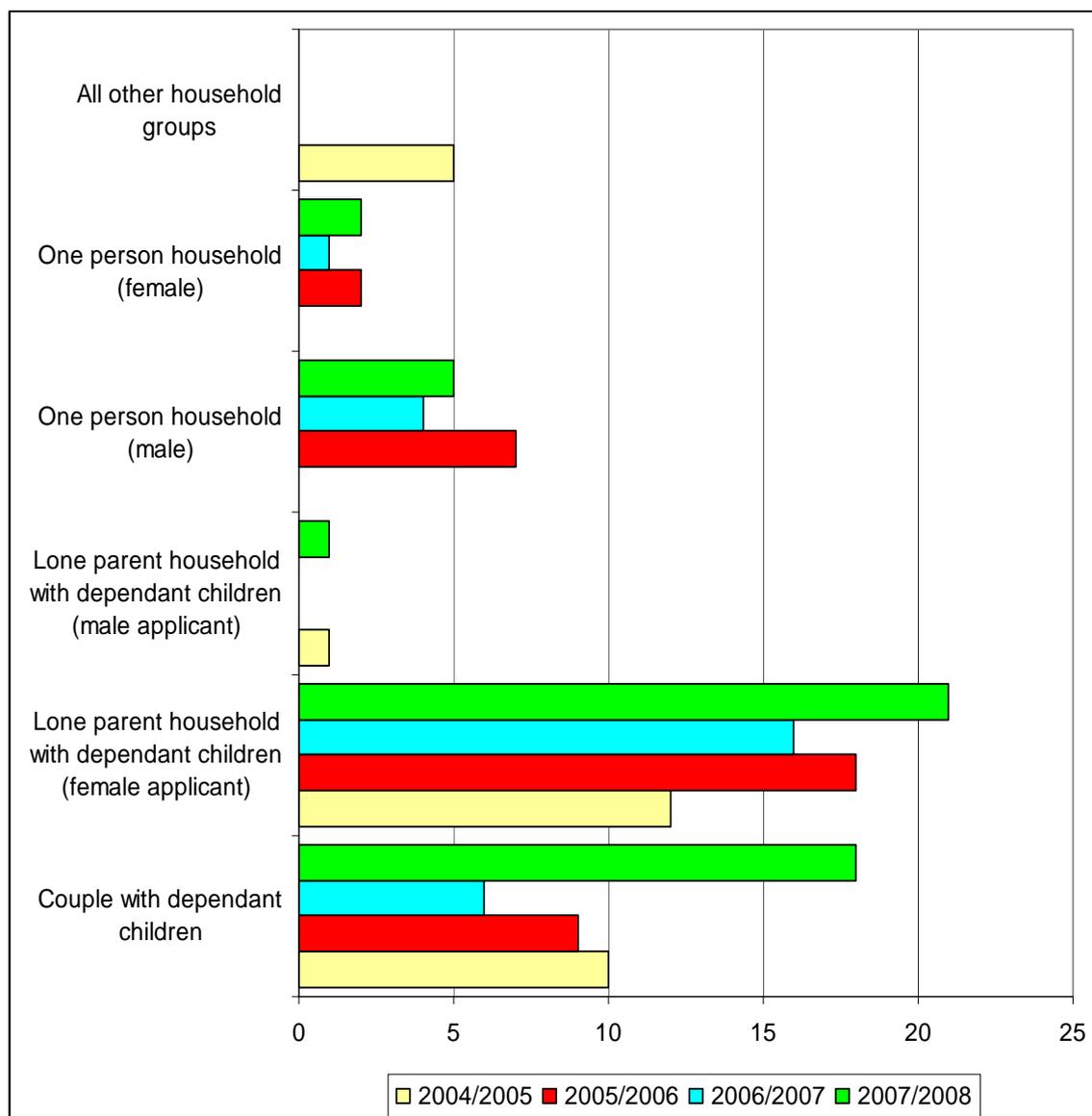
Loss of rented or tied accommodation, including rent arrears 21% of acceptances in 07/08, 26% in 06/07, 11% in 05/06 and 14% in 04/05.

Other relatives or friends no longer able to accommodate 19% in 2007/2008, 4% in 06/07, 14% in 05/06 and 18% in 04/05.

Violent breakdown of relationship with partner, 9% in 07/08, 4% in 06/07, 6% in 05/06 and 7% in 04/05.

Who are the Homeless?

Accepted Homeless Applicants



Source: P1E Statistical Return

The above table illustrates that the accepted homeless households are likely to be households with dependant children, and within that group, lone parent households (female applicant) are the largest cohort.

Black and Minority Ethnic Applications

The BME population of South Bucks is 6.6%, however over the last three years, of the 192 Homeless Applications made in the last three years, only 5 have been from BME applicants, representing a figure of 2.6%.

Our future work will try to ascertain the reasons for this under representation;

- Homelessness is not a significant issue for the BME population of South Bucks, or;
- It is 'hidden' in some way, or;
- The numbers are so low they lack statistical relevance.

Gypsies and Travellers

South Bucks has a number of Gypsy and Traveller sites in the District, with 59 local authority pitches serving both the Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities. There are also a significant number of private sites. Homeless Gypsies and Travellers seeking site-based accommodation will generally apply directly to the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Gypsy and Traveller Service, which manages the local authority sites.

The Minority Ethnic and Traveller Attainment Service (METAS) are routinely notified of any children on an unauthorised encampment, and aim to visit within 24 hours of arrival.

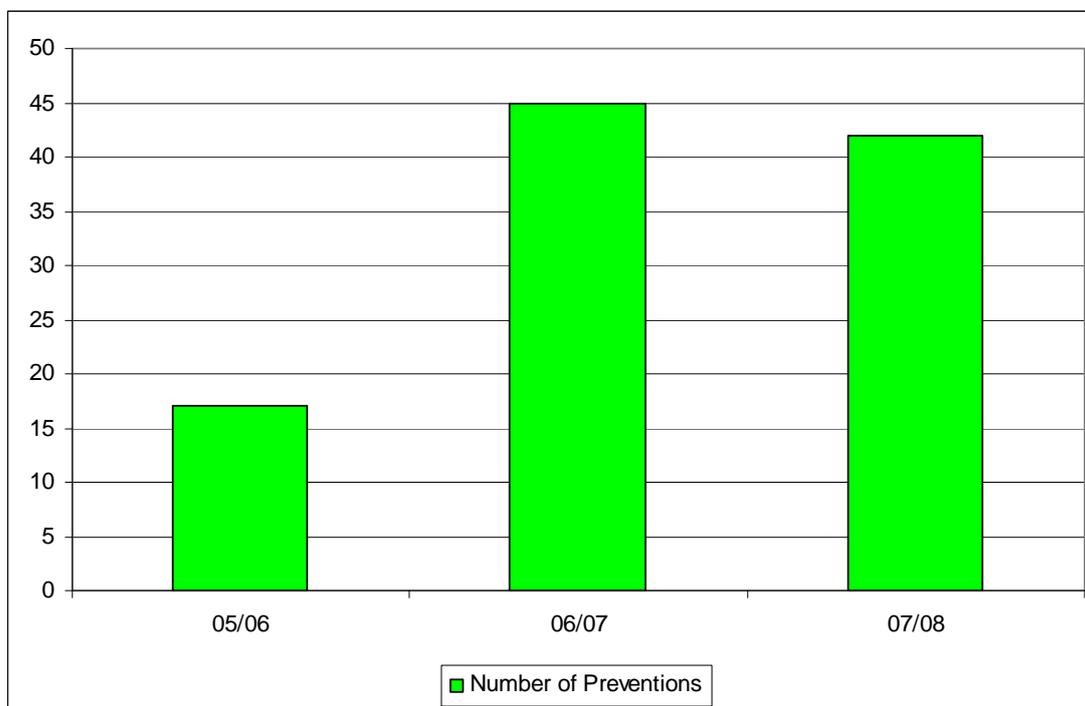
There is currently no formal monitoring of Gypsies and Travellers using homelessness services or applying for housing. However, a review of homeless applications over the last two years show that six applications were received from households who were claiming homelessness from a Gypsy or Traveller site

Rough Sleeping

There is little evidence that rough sleeping is a significant problem in the District. When we are aware of a rough sleeper in the District we endeavour to contact them and refer them to the appropriate agencies.

Homelessness Prevention Work

Prevention Work



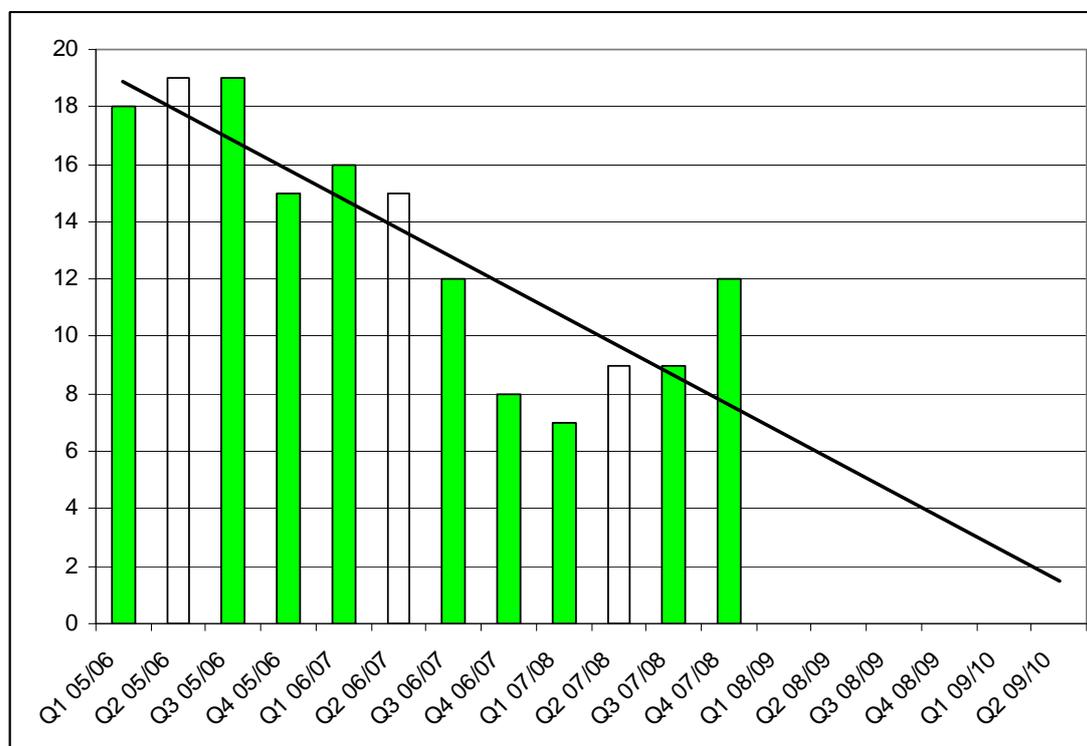
Source: SBDC Performance and Information Returns

Following closer monitoring of homelessness preventions in the last two years we can show that our work has prevented in the region of 40 potential homelessness situations per year for the last two years, as the chart above shows.

These are primarily made up through securing accommodation in the private Sector via our Private Sector Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. We have also signposted applicants to local hostels and provided advice which prevents the tenancy being ended in the first instance.

Temporary Accommodation and Bed and Breakfast Placements

Families placed in Temporary Accommodation



Source: P1E Statistical Return

In line with Government Targets, South Bucks is aiming to reduce the number of families placed in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010. Our baseline figure as at December 2004 was 19 households. We therefore need to reduce the number to 9 by 2010.

As the table above illustrates we have achieved a successful downward trend over the past two years, with the target already exceeded in some quarters.

How have we achieved this?

During the 1990's the Council grant funded the purchase of self contained units of accommodation, owned by LQ Housing Trust (formerly Beacon Housing Association) for use as temporary accommodation for homeless families. We also used some units on Wyatt's Covert Mobile Home Park and flats at Bells Hill shopping Centre as temporary accommodation.

Following a change of ownership of Wyatts Covert we no longer use this site for temporary accommodation. Bells Hill Shopping Centre has been demolished for redevelopment.

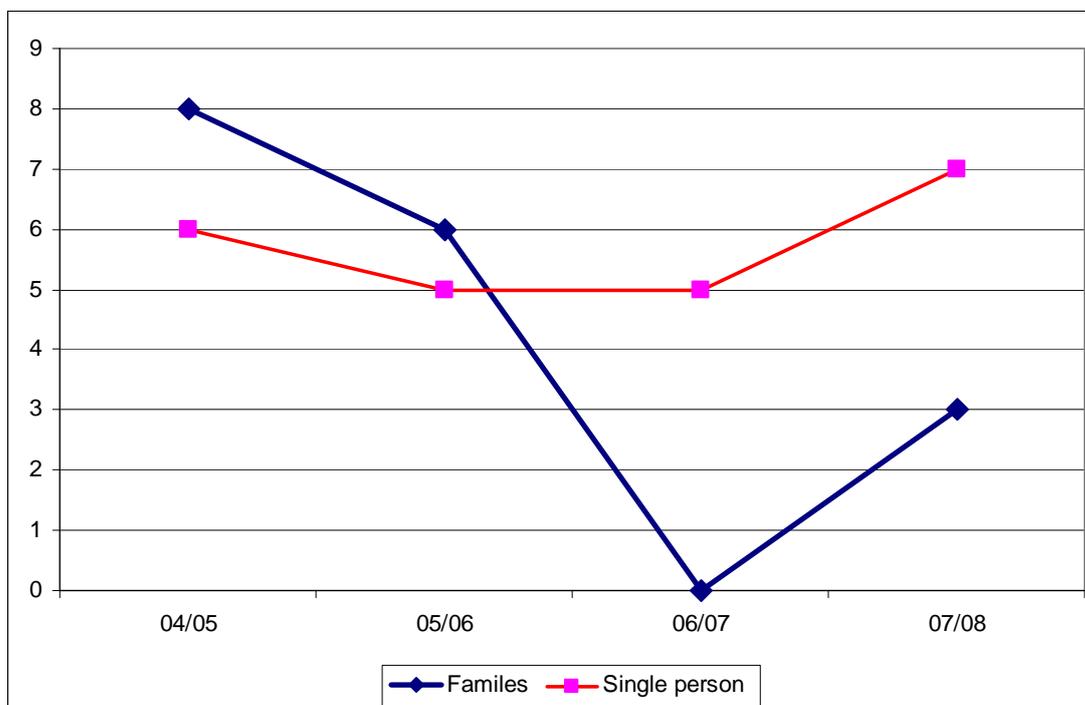
Better Prevention work and use of the private rented sector has also reduced pressure to use temporary accommodation.

Of the remaining temporary accommodation stock owned by LQ Housing Trust we have a phased annual reduction of these units as we transfer them to General

Needs accommodation and will retain a small number of 9 or 10 units for use as temporary accommodation by 2010.

We have also achieved reduced move on times for families in temporary accommodation, securing permanent accommodation for them sooner enables us to get the maximum use out of a reducing number of temporary units.

Placements in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation per year



Source: SBDC Performance and Information Returns

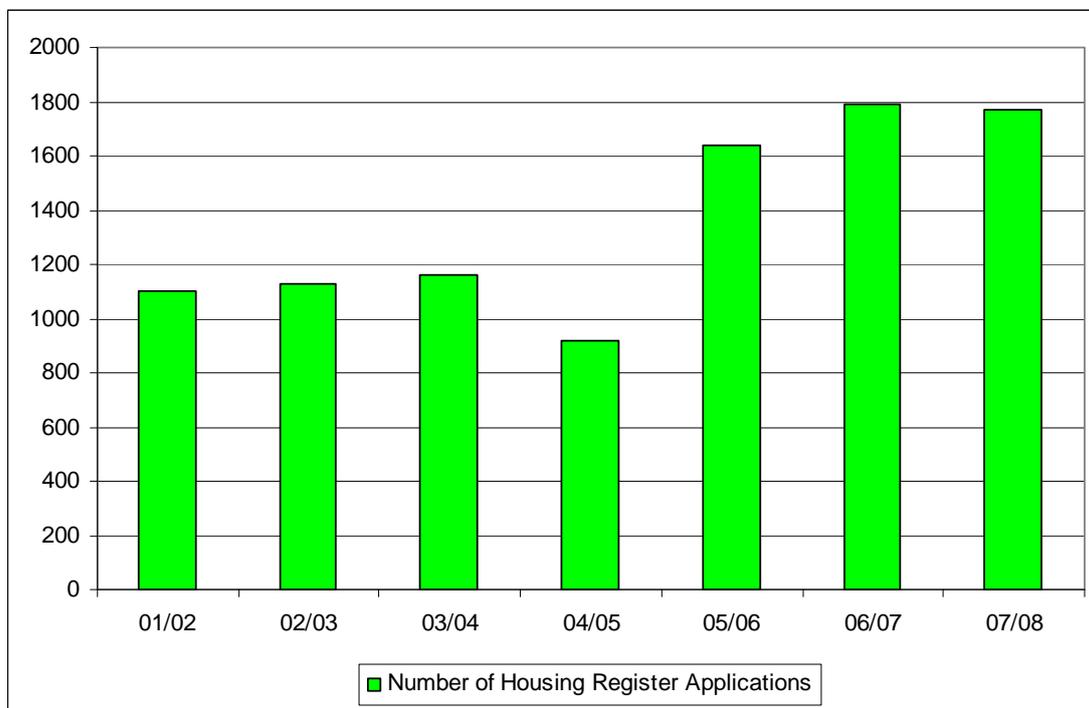
Placements of families into Bed and Breakfast Accommodation is rare in South Bucks, indeed in 2006/2007, no families or households containing pregnant women, who were accepted as homeless by the authority were placed in Bed and Breakfast.

Of those placed in Bed and Breakfast, none have stayed longer than the six week maximum with the normal stay being for a just a small number of days. Average stay in 2007/2008 was just under 4 days.

There are also a small number of placements of single applicants into Bed and Breakfast. Due to a lack of suitable accommodation in the District it does take longer to find these applicants a place in local supported accommodation or a flat of their own. The average stay in 2007/2008 was just under six weeks.

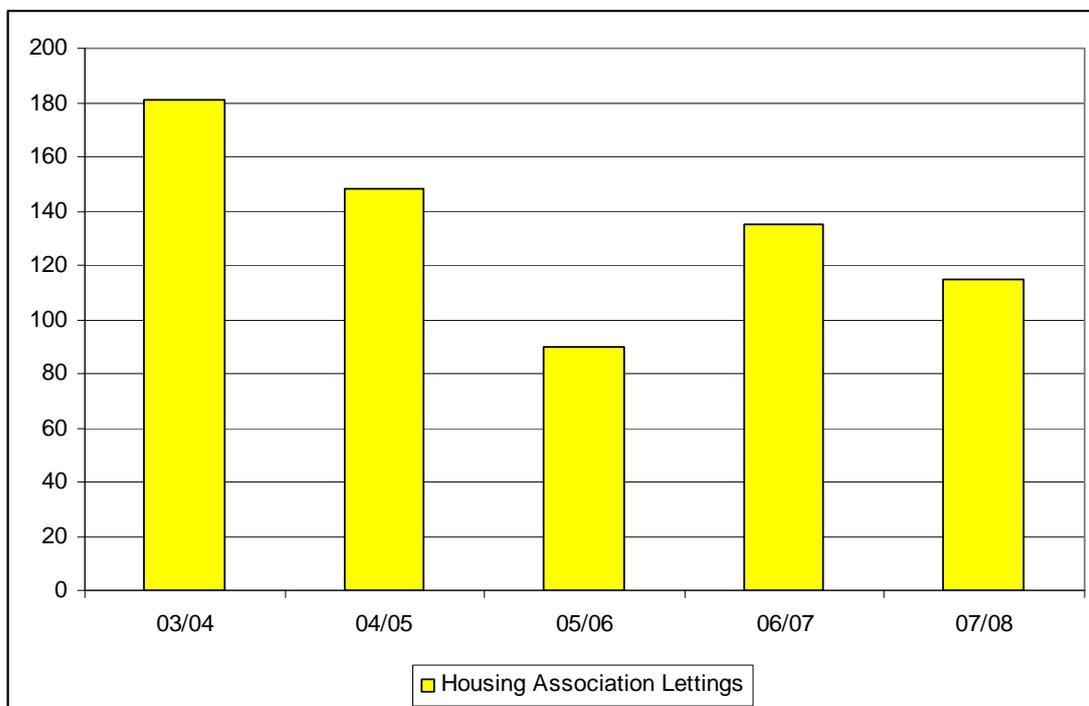
Lettings to local Housing Associations and the Rent Deposit Scheme

Number of applications on the Housing Register



Source: SBDC Performance and Information Returns

Number of lettings to Housing Associations in the District

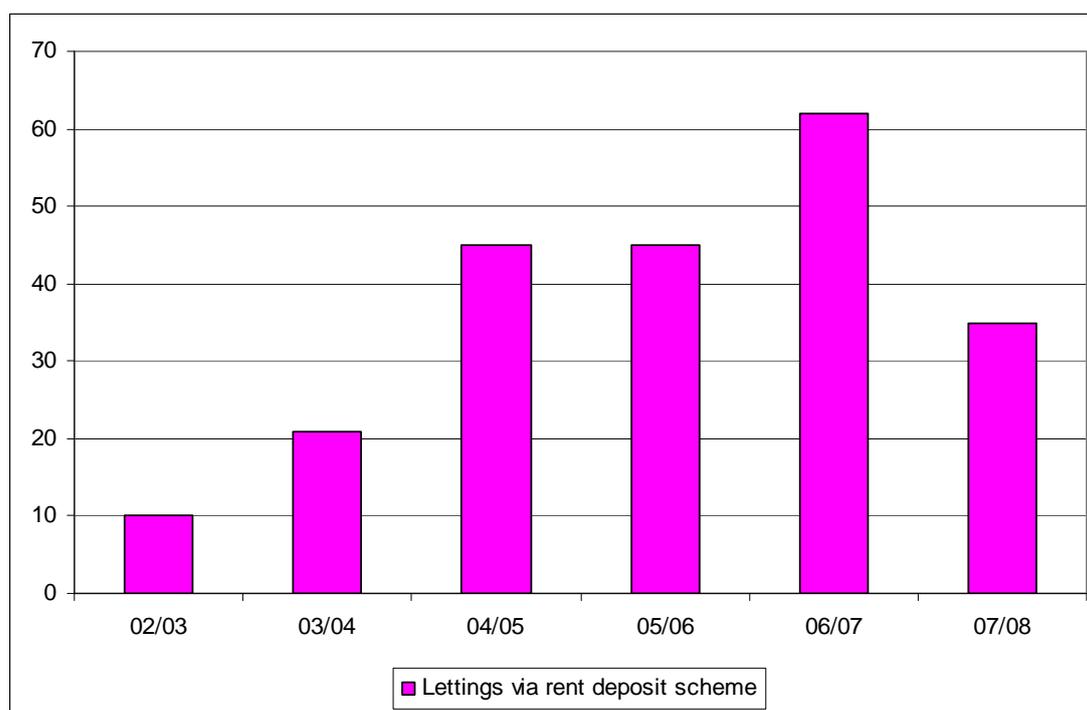


Source: CORE Returns

There has been a steady rise in applications on the housing register. Since 2001 the figure has risen from 1102 to 1768 in March 2008.

Despite the increase in numbers on the waiting list, there have been no significant increases in the availability of social rented accommodation in the District in recent years, with an average of 134 lettings per year by Housing Associations to waiting list applicants.

Number of lets via Rent Deposit Scheme



Source: SBDC Performance and Information Returns

Utilising the private rented sector has grown in importance in recent years. The chart above gives a breakdown year by year of the 218 lettings into the private sector we have facilitated via the Council's Private Sector Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme since 2002.

The rent deposit scheme is open to local residents who are in housing need or threatened with homelessness, but do not have the necessary means to raise a cash deposit to secure a private letting. To overcome this obstacle the Council acts as a guarantor in lieu of a cash deposit.

The drop in lettings between 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 is attributable to a drop in staff resources during the year. It is hoped that the Council will continue to facilitate at least 30 -40 lettings into the private sector year on year.

Specialist Accommodation available

The Council uses the following specialist accommodation providers for homeless applicants, of these only Padstones is in the South Bucks District.

Slough Foyer - supported living for young people.

Padstones - supported living for young people.

Life hostel - supported living for pregnant women facing homelessness.

East Berkshire and Wycombe Women's Aid - offer advice, assistance and accommodation to women fleeing Domestic Violence.

Burlington Road Hostel - supported living for single men and women

Future trends

Increases to the Social Housing Stock in the District

Development of brand new social rented stock in the District has been very low in recent years, with the majority of new build affordable housing being shared ownership.

However, it was announced by the Housing Corporation that over **£2.5 million** has been allocated to the South Bucks District for the period 2008 - 2011. The schemes chosen are all LQ Housing Trust schemes and are detailed in the table below.

Address of scheme	Developing Housing Association	No of Properties	No of Persons	Tenure	Amount of Grant	Likely Completion Date
Candlemas Mead	LQ Housing Trust	4	20	Rent	£311,000	May 2010
Cherry Orchard	LQ Housing Trust	12	44	Rent	£672,000	Nov 2009
Alexander Korda House	LQ Housing Trust	12	32	Rent	£500,000	Sep 2009
Savay Close	LQ Housing Trust	10	42	Rent	£653,100	Dec 2009
Colne Orchard	LQ Housing Trust	5	25	Rent	£388,750	Mar 2010
Total		43	163		£2,524,850	

Source: Housing Corporation NAHP Allocations 2008/2011

In addition to this future funding LQ Housing Trust were also awarded funding of **£342,500** for the 2007/2008 financial year to finance the development of the Orchardville Garage Site for 5 houses to rent, accommodating 25 persons.

Therefore, we currently have 48 general needs units in the pipeline for the next two years. There is a potential for this number to increase as developing housing associations can bid for National Affordable Housing Programme Grant on a rolling basis from the Housing Corporation as and when opportunities arise via the regular market engagement process.

Emerging Planning Policy

The Council's emerging Local Development Framework is looking to increase the number of planning options available to enable increased development of affordable housing.

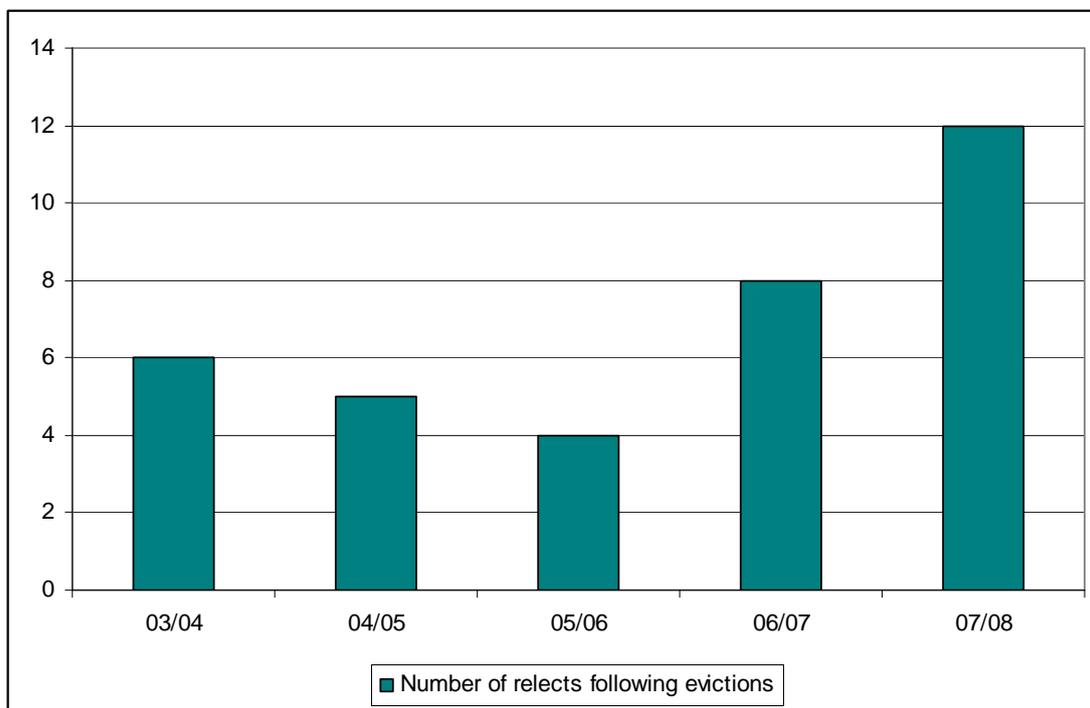
Options which are being considered include;

- Seek affordable housing on developments of five or more dwellings, with a minimum of 35% affordable housing;
- 70% of new affordable housing to be social rented and 30% intermediate housing units;

- Possibility of accepting commuted sums in lieu of on site provision in exceptional circumstances;
- A limited number of rural exception sites adjacent to specified rural settlements;
- The use of employment sites for 100% affordable housing where no longer suitable for continued employment use.

All of the above can potentially have an effect on the supply of affordable housing for rent and shared ownership in the coming years and have an impact on the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy.

Number of Relets following Evictions from RSLs



Source: CORE Returns

The number of relets following evictions has remained relatively low in recent years, although the recent trend is upwards.

Bucks Strategic Housing Market Assessment

The Buckinghamshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment was completed in July 2008 and contains a wealth of information on the South Bucks and wider County Housing Market Area.

Following on from earlier Housing Needs Studies, South Bucks was found to be an area which experiences high levels of housing need. The finished document will be available on the South Bucks District Council website and from the Housing Services Team, please see contact details on page 4.

South Bucks Citizens Advice Bureau

Feedback from our local Citizens Advice Bureau is that the top three categories of enquiries are benefits, debt and housing and have been since the Bureau opened in November 2006. The housing enquiries relate to social and private renting.

Queries raised include;

- Rent arrears (and housing benefit) issues;
- Housing transfers;
- Allocation;
- Housing disrepair particularly damp;
- Anti-social behavior;
- Threatened eviction;
- Rent increases;
- Homelessness and their rights in relation to possession;
- Other landlord and tenant issues such as rent deposits and how to end a tenancy early;
- Tied accommodation, service occupancy or service tenancy;
- Does loss of job mean loss of home?

It is estimated by the local CAB that only 1 out of every 100 clients would be actually or virtually homeless.

The Bureau has a number of clients from the Gypsy and Traveller community, and they raise a wide variety of issues but not often to do with housing and homelessness. They appear to have needs particularly in terms of disrepair, and access if disabled.

The Wider Economic Picture

In preparing this document, the effects of the credit crunch are beginning to emerge.

A discussion on the effects of the credit crunch are contained in the Summer 2008, Hometrack Publication, *'The Affordability of Private Housing in Great Britain'* has helped inform this Strategy

Some key findings from the study were as follows;

- 2007 was the peak year in the current housing market cycle. Post the credit crunch there is clear evidence that average property prices are falling back. The greatest falls are being seen in measures of market activity, in particular, levels of new mortgage advances;
- There is considerable uncertainty about just how far prices may fall in 2008 and beyond;
- An increase in mortgage rates will create issues for both private sector landlords and home owners in terms of the cost increases when seeking to refinance at the end of fixed mortgage deals;

- In the short term, it is the limited supply of affordable mortgage finance that is the key constraint on housing market affordability rather than the shortfall in the supply of new housing that has, until recently been the primary focus of Government Policy;

In addition to the effects on the housing market the numbers of new homes being built are beginning to fall as builders stop development on sites or postpone developments that are in the pipeline.

There may also be potential opportunities for local housing associations to acquire stock from local developers that cannot be disposed of on the open market, this of course has the potential to increase the social housing stock in the District.

Risks

In terms of future levels of homelessness, we will need to be mindful of the possible effects locally, namely

- An increase in repossessions and evictions leading to an increase in homeless presentations;
- The effect of planned developments in the District stalling or being postponed by developers involved;
- The potential for Housing Associations to acquire stock on the open market from developers.
- A constraint on the supply of private sector housing available to us as;

Some buy to let landlords exiting the market and evicting tenants;

Potential landlords cannot raise the finance to purchase properties;

Private rents may well rise as a result of a slow down in the general housing market as potential homeowners cannot purchase properties and need to rent instead. This could lead to a squeezing out of tenants on low incomes and/or housing benefit as higher rents become available to landlords.

- An increase in applications and acceptances will put a strain on staff resources, and may, with a limited stock of temporary accommodation available in the District, lead to greater use of Bed and Breakfast placements.

Options for dealing with a significant upturn in homelessness activity are discussed in the following section of the strategy and highlighted in the Action Plan.

Feedback from our Stakeholder Conference

We held a stakeholder conference in June 2008, to discuss the findings of our Homelessness Review and to seek feedback on emerging issues in the District; a list of attendees is available in the Appendices. Some of the key areas discussed on the day were;

- The lack of accommodation for single people was a problem in the District - it was suggested that L&Q could use some of its elderly designated

accommodation for younger applicants, providing it could be done in such a way as to preserve the existing elderly residents peace and security and also meet the younger applicants needs;

- It is also very difficult to find suitable affordable housing in the District for the single persons who are not vulnerable, particularly older male applicants;
- That it was still possible for a 16/17 year old to be placed in B&B if a hostel place was not available, a situation that was not felt to be appropriate;
- A strategy was currently being developed by Bucks County Council to provide “Extra Care” to the elderly, which would enable people to remain in their homes for longer. An action plan would enable the re-development of stock to provide homes suitable for life;
- METAS raised the difficulties that travellers experience when trying to navigate the housing system. Very often they do not have the evidence required to make a successful application for accommodation. It is also difficult for them to accept bricks and mortar type housing as this moves them away from their immediate family, community and lifestyle.

Benchmarking with Neighbouring Authorities

South Bucks are a partner in a local Homelessness Benchmarking club, which is administered quarterly by Aylesbury Vale District Council. Members are;

- Aylesbury Vale DC;
- Cherwell DC;
- Chiltern DC;
- South Beds DC;
- South Bucks DC;
- Vale of White Horse DC;
- Wycombe DC;
- Mid Sussex DC;
- Lincoln City Council.

As would be expected, South Bucks is a relatively small District and our overall activity numbers are lower in comparison, however in percentage terms we accept roughly the same amount of applications as our benchmark partners. We also perform favourably in terms of processing applications and homelessness prevention.

It is also interesting to note that parental eviction also appears to be the main driver of homelessness in these partner authorities.

Choice Based Lettings in Buckinghamshire - Bucks Home Choice

Bucks Home Choice is a service that enables people seeking social rented housing to exercise some choice in when and where they will be offered a tenancy. This is called Choice Based Lettings.

Choice Based Lettings does not increase the number of properties available for letting. Applicants must still show that they are in housing need, and the District Councils are required by law to give priority to certain applicants.

However, Choice Based Lettings is the best way to work with applicants, and enable them to have a choice about where they live and help them feel empowered in the allocation process.

Choice Based Lettings will be launched across Buckinghamshire in April 2009. This is a partnership project involving the four District Authorities in the County and local Housing Associations. As this project has progressed the four Districts have developed a Joint Allocation Policy.

After the launch of Choice Based lettings we will closely monitor the effect the new regime has on homeless applicants, with special regard to any effect on the level of homeless applications and how quickly families can move on from temporary accommodation to avoid silting up of the temporary accommodation stock.

Further information on this project is available on the website;

www.buckshomechoice.gov.uk

Strategic Priorities for Tackling Homelessness

Following the review of homelessness in the District and consultation with stakeholders, we have identified the following five areas as strategic priorities for tackling homelessness;

Preventing Homelessness and tackling the drivers of Homelessness in the District;

Enabling access to private sector rented housing stock by working with private landlords;

Work with Registered Social Landlords to increase the stock and improve access to social housing;

Improving support for vulnerable groups;

Provide excellent customer service to those seeking housing advice and assistance.

The following Action plan illustrates how we will prioritise these areas of work and will develop the following areas further.

Preventing Homelessness and tackling the drivers of Homelessness in the District

- Dealing with a potential upturn in Homelessness Activity by;
- Appraise a potential Private Leasing Scheme;
- Liaise with revenues and benefits re: potential Discretionary Housing Payment awards;
- Work towards reducing the level of parental evictions;
- Monitor impact of the launch of Choice Based Lettings on Homelessness activity in the District;
- Ensure we meet the Government Target to reduce number of families in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010
- Continue to monitor wider economic trends which may effect levels of homelessness in the District.
- Continue with local Benchmarking club.

Enabling access to private sector rented housing stock by working with private landlords

- Continue to offer rent deposit guarantees;
- Develop written information for local landlords;
- Help to facilitate good communication between Housing Benefit and Private Sector Landlords we work with;
- Publicise Council Services to landlords via our website and via a landlord forum.

Work with Registered Social Landlords to increase the stock and improve access to social housing

- Enable affordable development where possible;
- Ensure local landlords are included in implementation of Choice Based Lettings in Bucks;
- Continue to work with our Preferred Housing Association Development Partners;
- Hold regular Housing Forums with local Housing Associations.

Improving support for vulnerable groups

- Ensure access to local advocacy services for customers;
- Ensure continued liaison with local specialist support providers;
- Investigate ways to provide effective assistance for groups who fall outside 'priority need' categories;
- Continue to monitor client groups and identify any emerging trends among vulnerable groups;
- Ensure effective joint protocols with Social Services for care leavers and young people.

Provide excellent customer service to those seeking housing advice and assistance

- Ensure standard of temporary accommodation used meets required standards;
- Monitor customer feedback and get increasing levels of satisfaction year on year;
- Ensure that the Homelessness Service is available to deal with emergencies 24 hours a day;
- Ensure customers are provided with a variety of different methods to access the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service;
- provide interpretation services where necessary;
- Provide training to Council Staff where appropriate;
- Only use Bed and Breakfast Accommodation as a last resort and for no longer than six weeks if families or pregnant women placed in B&B;
- Keep leaflets, publications and website relevant and up to date.

Resources available to meet our strategic priorities

Homelessness Housing Advice and Housing Register Contract

The main area of expenditure for the Council is the contract with Paradigm Housing Group to provide the Homelessness, Housing Advice and Housing Register Service on our behalf. This contract costs in the region of £180,000 per annum and runs up to the end of 2010/11, with a potential to extend for two years. The contract is performance based, with elements of the contract sum payable if agreed targets are met.

There are four staff employed by Paradigm Housing Group to deliver these services. In addition, South Bucks District Housing Services employees will monitor and oversee the contract and administer our Private Sector Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

Central Government Homelessness Grant

In 2007/2008, we received £30,000 Homelessness Grant from Central Government which we use to help fund our Housing Advice Service.

Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme

Although the Rent Deposit Scheme does not involve a cash payment upfront, we monitor the level of exposure to the Council through live guarantees. As at 31 March 2008 the Council had a total of just over £120,000 guaranteed, covering 108 tenancies in the private sector.

Discretionary Housing Payments

Discretionary Housing Payments provide claimants with further housing financial assistance if the Local Authority considers that help with housing costs is needed. They can be paid if the claimant is in receipt of housing benefit and housing costs generally mean rent or council tax liability.

In 2007/2008 the Council awarded £20,869 on Discretionary Housing Payments, covering 41 awards.

South Bucks Staff and Training Budget

It is important that staff in the South Bucks Housing Team are up to date on the latest issues and initiatives in the field. There is a budget to enable attendance at conferences, seminars and training courses as appropriate.

Action Plan

The following Action Plan illustrates how we will deliver on our Strategic Homelessness Priorities over the lifetime of this Homelessness Strategy

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Preventing Homelessness and tackling the drivers of Homelessness in the District					
Appraise a potential Private Leasing Scheme	Discussions ongoing with Paradigm Housing Group to ascertain whether a leasing scheme is viable for the South Bucks District	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Local Private Landlords	2008/2009	Increased opportunities for using private sector stock to meet housing need.	Resources required will be identified as part of appraisal process
Work towards reducing the level of parental evictions	Look to implement preventative measures such as home visits on all parental eviction cases, increased use of family mediation services	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	Reduction in 2008/2009 and assess at year end	Reduction in parental evictions as a reason for homelessness.	Within Existing Resources
Continue to monitor wider economic trends which may effect levels of homelessness in the District	Keeping abreast of current news and advisory services	SBDC Housing Services	Ongoing	Appreciation of wider economic picture and ability to tailor services to meet any emerging needs.	Within Existing Resources
Liaise with revenues and benefits re: potential Discretionary Housing Payment awards	Discussions between Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits to get best use out of DHP.	SBDC, Housing and Revenue and Benefit Services	2008/2009 and assess at year end	Full use of DHP to help prevent homelessness	

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Monitor impact of the launch of Choice Based Lettings on Homelessness activity in the District	Choice Based Lettings Project Board will review scheme as a whole, SBDC Housing Services will also monitor impacts locally	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Bucks Home Choice Project Board	2009/2010	Ensure that the implementation of Choice Based Lettings does not conflict with delivery of Statutory Homelessness functions	Within Existing Resources
Ensure we meet the Government Target to reduce number of families in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010.	Reduce number of units of TA available to us by converting to General Need s stock. Ensure effective use and quick turnover of remaining stock of TA.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, LQ Housing Trust	December 2010	Government Target met.	Within Existing Resources
Continue with local Benchmarking club	Provide quarterly updates to AVDC	SBDC Housing Services and authorities in benchmarking club administered by AVDC	Quarterly	Maintain a wider knowledge of homelessness within partner authorities and gauge our performance/levels of activity against them	Within Existing Resources

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Enabling access to private sector rented housing stock by working with private landlords					
Continue to offer rent deposit guarantees	SBDC administer scheme using referrals from Paradigm Housing Group. Scheme publicised to local landlords via web and local publications	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Private Sector Landlords	Ongoing	Increased opportunities for using private sector stock to meet housing need.	Within Existing Resources
Develop written information for local landlords	Develop simple guidelines for being a landlord covering rights and responsibilities	SBDC Housing Services	2008/2009	Offering landlords basic advice on how to run and maintain tenancies can reduce homelessness and advice approaches.	Within Existing Resources
Help to facilitate good communication between Housing Benefit and Private Sector Landlords we work with	Facilitate local Private Sector landlord forums, signpost landlords to appropriate team.	SBDC, Housing and Revenue and Benefit Services	2008/2009	Landlords we work with can access good advice on housing benefit.	Within Existing Resources
Publicise Council Services to landlords via our website and landlord forum	Quarterly reviews of information held on the housing website, submit articles for South Bucks Report.	SBDC Housing Services	2008/2009	Increased opportunities for using private sector stock to meet housing need.	Within Existing Resources

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Work with Registered Social Landlords to increase the stock and improve access to social housing					
Enable affordable development where possible	Ensure Preferred Partners are aware of ongoing development opportunities; liaise with Legal and Planning Departments as necessary.	SBDC Housing Services and Development Control, local housing associations	Ongoing	Affordable Housing Developed in line with Local Planning Policy.	Within Existing Resources
Ensure local landlords are included in implementation of Choice Based Lettings in Bucks	Choice Based Lettings Project Board will ensure local landlords are involved through regular meetings and seminars ahead of the launch.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Bucks Home Choice Project Board	Lead up to launch in April 2009 and involve in monitoring thereafter	Local housing associations are clear on how the scheme works.	Within Existing Resources
Continue to work with our Preferred Housing Association Development Partners	Bi annual meeting of all preferred partners held, day to day discussions and site meeting as and when necessary.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Bromford Housing Group, Guinness Trust, LQ Housing Trust	Ongoing	Affordable Housing Developed in line with Local Planning Policy.	Within Existing Resources
Hold regular Housing Forums with local Housing Associations	Bi Annual Housing Forum held at the District Offices.	SBDC Housing Services and local housing associations and stakeholders	Bi Annual Forums to be held	Maintain communication with local housing associations and stakeholders and disseminate good practice between partners	Within Existing Resources

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Improving support for vulnerable groups					
Ensure access to local advocacy services for customers	Liaise with local advocacy services and ensure customers are signposted to them as appropriate.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group Shelter, Citizens Advice Bureau	Quarterly liaison communications with local advocacy services	Customers can access impartial third party advice and advocacy on housing issues.	Within Existing Resources, advocacy services dependant on third party funding
Ensure continued liaison with local specialist support providers	Liaise with local specialist providers and ensure customers are signposted to them as appropriate	SBDC Housing Services, Padstones, The Foyer, Women's Aid, Burlington Road Hostel, Life Hostel	Quarterly liaison communications with local specialist providers	Ensure our nomination rights to local schemes are taken up where possible, enable appropriate customers to access supported housing where necessary	Within Existing Resources, specialist providers also seek third party funding.
Investigate ways to provide effective assistance for groups who fall outside 'priority need' categories	Investigate and assess good practice elsewhere.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	2008/2009 and assess at year end	Clear identification of groups involved and appropriate help and assistance offered to them.	Within Existing Resources
Continue to monitor client groups and identify any emerging trends among vulnerable groups	Monitor housing applications quarterly to spot emerging trends and potential client groups	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Bucks County Council	2008/2009 and assess at year end	Appreciation of homelessness issues in South Bucks and services tailored to best meet the challenges.	Within Existing Resources
Ensure effective joint protocols with Social Services for care leavers and young people	Work Closely with County Council and District Partners to develop and monitor protocols	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, Bucks County Council, Padstones	2008/2009	Clear and effective procedures and protocols in place for young people and those leaving care	Within Existing Resources

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Provide excellent customer service to those seeking housing advice and assistance					
Ensure standard of temporary accommodation used meets required standards	Regular assessment visits carried out by SBDC Housing Services	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, LQ Housing Trust	Ongoing	All temporary accommodation we use is up to standard.	Within Existing Resources
Monitor customer feedback and get increasing levels of satisfaction year on year	All Paradigm Customers are asked to fill a feedback form in, results are compiled quarterly	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	Ongoing, satisfaction targets set at start of contract year	Increasing levels of customer satisfaction.	Within Existing Resources
Ensure that the Homelessness Service is available to deal with emergencies 24 hours a day	Paradigm provide an out of hours number for homelessness emergencies	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	Ongoing	Customers can get advice and assistance whenever they need it.	Within Existing Resources
Ensure customers are provided with a variety of different methods to access the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service	Ensure customers can contact Housing Services and Paradigm via telephones, the web and face to face, either at home, the Council Offices and at weekly surgery at LQ Housing Trust Offices in Slough	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group, LQ Housing Trust	Weekly surgeries at LQ Beacon Offices	Customers can access services at different locations and via different means.	Within Existing Resources
Provide interpretation services where necessary	Paradigm subscribe to Language Line Interpretation Services	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	As required	Interpretation services ensure that language is not a barrier to receiving excellent service.	Within Existing Resources

Task	How will we achieve this	Who needs to be involved	Timescale	Results expected	Resources available
Provide training to Council Staff.	Attend Conferences and Training Courses as and Conferences as appropriate	SBDC Housing Services	As required	Staff fully informed of latest developments and good practice in Homelessness.	Within Existing Resources
Only use Bed and Breakfast Accommodation as a last resort, and for no longer than six weeks if families or pregnant women placed in B&B.	Ensure effective use of our temporary accommodation stock and nomination rights to local housing association properties.	SBDC Housing Services, Paradigm Housing Group	As required	Minimal use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.	Within Existing Resources

Appendices

Appendix One: Attendees at Homelessness Stakeholder Conference

Appendix One

Attendees at the Tackling Homelessness Stakeholder Event held on 12 June 2008, at the South Bucks District Council Offices.

Jeremy Hutchings	London and Quadrant Housing Trust
Tina Stafford	Paradigm Housing Group
Sarita Basra	Paradigm Housing Group
Will Rysdale	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Ed Watkinson	Buckinghamshire County Council
Sue Stevens	Youth Offending Service
Carol Stutter	METAS
Chantal Dolphin	METAS
Emma Scarborough	Chiltern District Council
Sally Swanwick	Bucks County Council
Sean Hughes	South Bucks District Council
Margaret Howard	South Bucks District Council
Rachel Dillon	South Bucks District Council
Carmel Harrison	South Bucks District Council