West Midlands
Regional Homelessness Strategy
Refresh 2008

Regional Homelessness
Strategy Action Plan
Implementation Group

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This is a refresh of the first West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy 2005; the document reviews the impact of the Regional Homelessness Strategy and the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group. It reviews statistical and other information on homelessness and sets out the key messages and headlines that will be shaping the strategy and the work of the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group over the next 3 to 5 years.

The refresh has been carried out by mwb consultancy ltd on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group.

The refresh document is not intended to cover all the areas included in the first strategy which was a thorough review of a wide range of issues but it is intended to capture key changes and trends.

By focusing in this way the strategy and the group charged with implementing it can build on local strengths and continue to focus collective efforts on making the biggest or most important differences.

It is important to continue to acknowledge that just as the causes of homelessness are complex the ways of tackling and preventing homelessness are complex too. It is not just about specialist services, it is about a whole range of interventions and partnerships that the strategy and implementation group need to influence and support.

Context

In 2004 the Regional Housing Board, through the regional Voluntary and Community Sector Housing Network, commissioned the Centre for Urban & Regional Studies (CURS) at The University of Birmingham to develop a Regional Homelessness Strategy to help inform the Regional Housing Strategy 2005. This original homelessness strategy was a substantial document which reviewed the extent, reasons and patterns of homelessness across the region and made 8 recommendations for future work.

The purpose of the original strategy was to:

- Inform the Regional Housing Strategy
- Build on Local Authority Homelessness Strategies
- Incorporate the Government's homelessness targets
- Secure involvement of key regional stakeholders
- Initiate a process of change

One of the specific recommendations of the strategy was to set up a cross sectoral Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to steer the implementation of the strategies recommendations across the region.

The Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group (RHSIG) was established shortly after the publication of the strategy and has continued to work on the strategy since then.

The RHSIG has a number of roles of which a key one has been its reporting links back to the Regional Housing Board and its successor the Regional Housing Executive. Throughout the period of the strategy the RHSIG has kept the regional housing body up to date with successes, emerging issues and pressures on homelessness across the region.

The RHSIG is a cross-sectoral group with a good track record of engaging a wide range of partners across the sub-region. The original strategy and the RHSIG have acted as a template for other regions in England and it is seen as a highly effective and influential body both nationally and within the region.

Its current membership reflects that cross-sectoral focus and, we believe, its effectiveness, as of 2008 the RHSIG has active membership from the following organisations:

Local Authorities

Representing C1 HMA
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council – Gemma Jones

Representing C2 HMA
Coventry City Council – Julian Garside

Representing C3 HMA
Walsall Council – Andrea Potts/Julie Jones
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council – Joanne Forbes

(Central Area from summer 2008 one single HMA)

Representing North HMA
Stafford Borough Council – Mac McCoig

Representing South HMA
Worcester City Council – Nina Warrington

Representing West HMA
Herefordshire Council – Tara Roche

(other Local Authorities attend the RHSIG meetings regularly)

Other Stakeholder Organisations

Birmingham City Council Children's Services
Business in the Community
Communities and Local Government
Department of Health

Government Office of the West Midlands (Housing Director, Homelessness Lead)
Homeless Link
Housing Corporation
Job Centre Plus
Learning and Skills Council
National Housing Federation
National Offender Management Service – West Midlands Region
National Institute for Mental Health in England
Shelter
Shropshire Housing Officers Group
SITRA
St Basils (Chair)
West Midlands Strategic Partnership for Asylum & Refugee Support
West Mids Voluntary & Community Sector Housing Network
West Midlands Local Government Association
West Midlands Regional Assembly (Heath Policy Advisor, Strategic Housing Advisor)

This broad membership reflects a strategic response to what has been a rapidly changing scene in terms of homelessness at a national, regional and local level.

Since 2002 Local Authorities have been required to have a Homelessness Strategy and the focus of their work on homelessness has shifted dramatically from crisis response to prevention.

As a result a more coherent and holistic approach to homelessness has been developed which takes account of a persons support and social needs as well as their housing needs and the West Midlands RHSIG has been at the fore-front of promoting that shift in policy and practice.

SUMMARY

Summary Of Achievements

Since 2005 and the publication of the original strategy the RHSIG and the strategy itself have achieved a great deal and met the recommendations of the original strategy:

- Influenced housing investment through the Regional Housing Plan and investment in supported housing
- Set up a successful cross sectoral regional strategy implementation group that has created a forum for change and influence across the region
- Established sub-regional partnerships with SMART action plans that are now delivering results at a sub-regional level
- Created opportunities for testing out new approaches and sharing of best practice
- Supported the development of projects in two sub-regions linking worklessness and homelessness with the LSC City Partnership programme
- Influenced other regions in their development of Regional Homelessness Strategies and structures

The RHSIG has supported partnerships across the region's local authorities that have:

- Reduced the numbers of people making homeless applications and the number who are accepted as homeless under the legislation
- Made increasingly effective use of homelessness prevention initiatives
- Increased the flexible use of the private sector as a sustainable option for people at risk of homelessness
- Reduced the numbers of people in Temporary Accommodation
- Helped some of the hot spot areas identified in the first strategy to reduce the number of approaches and acceptances under the legislation

The RHSIG has provided leadership and is a robust and imaginative resource for implementing change and making a positive difference to homelessness.

Going forward the RHSIG has a role to play in encouraging further development in the following ways:

- promoting intelligence gathering and sharing at a local, sub-regional and regional level

- promoting and supporting joint working, sharing of good practice and innovation at a sub-regional and regional level

- influencing strategy and supporting the alignment of key policy strands at a regional level

Summary Of The Key Issues

Since the original Regional Homelessness Strategy was published there has been a long term decline in the numbers of people making application as homeless and being accepted as homeless under the legislation. Homelessness presentations have dropped from a high point of 25000 in 2005 to 17700 by 2007.

The main reasons for homelessness remain unchanged with the three big causes continuing to be:

- family and friends no longer willing to accommodate
- people fleeing domestic violence
- ending of assured short hold tenancies

Households from the BME communities are generally over represented in the figures for both approaches and acceptances under the legislation.

There are still some significant variations in the ratio of numbers of people making approaches as homeless to the number of acceptances as homeless across the region.

New pressures are arising and local agencies are beginning to see increased numbers of people coming forward for housing advice and homelessness support where debt (including mortgage debt) is the main issue.

We note in the emerging themes section a number of potential areas where a watching brief needs to held; including the numbers of people going through multiple prevention interventions and the needs of ex offenders.

The housing market continues to be in a state of flux and the current (2008) credit crunch is already having an impact on house building and new development which could have significant impacts for the foreseeable future.

Lack of affordable housing continues to be an issue across many areas of the region.

It appears as if movement within the public sector and RSL housing stock is slowing with the number of re-lets decreasing.

Overall the housing market could be characterised as being slow moving and the opportunities for people to access affordable housing are tightening.

MAIN FINDINGS

The Impact Of The Strategy And The RHSIG

The evidence suggests that following the publication of the Regional Homelessness Strategy that the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group (RHSIG) has had a key role in driving implementation and that as a result there has been substantial progress on many of the elements set out in the original strategy.

Successfully tackling homelessness is about the conjunction of housing, support, work and social cohesion and as such is a highly complex task. The RHSIG has had a key role in creating the opportunity for this complexity to be managed more effectively.

Our analysis suggests that a lot has been achieved in terms of creating new opportunities for joint working, for improving practice and creating practical collaboration.

As the environment changes and trends shift there is still significant scope for the strategy and the RHSIG to maximise the efforts of regional and sub-regional partnerships to have a positive impact on homelessness.

In terms of the overall **purpose and vision of the strategy** there is evidence that a difference has been made.

The purpose of the original strategy was to:

- **Inform the Regional Housing Strategy;** as we note above the regional strategy did have an influence of the investment plans flowing from the Regional Housing Strategy. The RHSIG has contributed to shaping investment thinking on supported housing in the region.

- **Build on Local Authority Homelessness Strategies;** through the sub-regional action plans and the role of the RHSIG as a forum for sharing innovation and policy briefings the local homelessness plans have been positively affected. Many of the local plans make direct reference to the regional strategy and to the relevant sub-regional action plans.

- **Incorporate the Government's homelessness targets;** as we note above the direction of travel against targets is on the whole positive and the RHSIG has had a key role to play in supporting regional analysis of trends and activity, it has supported the sub-regional action plans which feature new approaches and joint working focused on meeting these targets.

- **Secure involvement of key regional stakeholders;** the RHSIG has had an important role in bringing in new partners and the list above demonstrates the wide range of partners who are actively engaged in the regional work. A good example of this is the partnership with the Learning and Skills Council which is doing ground breaking work on linking homelessness and worklessness.

  Stakeholders regionally and nationally see the RHSIG as a model worth replicating in other parts of the country. On numerous occasions the chair and others from the RHSIG have been asked to talk about the West Midlands regional work in other regions.

- **Initiate a process of change;** the strategy and the RHSIG have kick-started a number of important changes such as testing out the offender management resettlement pathway format. The development of the sub-regional groups and action plans has encouraged innovation and sharing of good practice.

  Many stakeholders at the sub-regional level have commented about the very positive role the RHSIG plays in helping them to get improved results through sharing good practice, through sharing intelligence and through joint work.

  The RHSIG was an important partner in helping to secure investment from the Places for Change Programme for 8 schemes in the region.

There have been good levels of achievement against the **recommendations made** by CURS in the original strategy:

- **Incorporate recommendations on capital funding into the Regional Housing Strategy:** the hot spots and other information from the strategy were used to influence and direct housing investment in the 2005 Regional Housing Strategy and in subsequent refreshes. There have however been challenges for the Regional Housing Strategy in effectively translating investment intentions into finished projects which go beyond issues related to homelessness.

  The RHSIG have continued to be influential on housing investment for example in contributing intelligence to the process for the allocation of supported housing investments.

- **Establish a cross sector homelessness strategy implementation group at a Regional level:** the RHSIG was established in 2005 and has a very broad base of membership. It has been a successful cross-sector forum promoting strategic change and linkages. The membership (listed above) demonstrates the wide commitment support for its work by partner organisations. The RHSIG is regarded by many outside the region as a model of good practice in regional partnership work and its approach is being copied across the country.

- **Secure funding for coordination to support cross-sector homelessness strategy implementation group:** funding has been secured to support the group and to fund elements of development work. This includes funding for sub-regional action plans a regional web site and forum and for new intelligence gathering. It is worthy of note that much of the practical support for the RHSIG is given freely by partners and if costed would represent a significant investment.

- **Promote the Regional Homelessness Strategy and share good practice through websites, seminars, visits etc:** the RHSIG has been successful in promoting regional working and has held sub-regional events about the strategy, has developed a website and uses its regular meetings as a platform for sharing good practice, innovation and for disseminating briefings from regional and national bodies. There are specific examples of good practice being shared on a number of topics including work with RSLs, prevention and the use of the private rented sector.

  Of particular note is the way in which some national bodies and Government departments e.g. CLG ask to be invited to the RHSIG groups meetings to share briefings and to consult on major issues. For example in 2007 CLG and the National Homelessness Strategy Group asked the RHSIG to test out the applicability of using the National Offender Management Resettlement Pathways approach as a model for joint working and joint strategy. This work is still being considered at a national level and could be very influential.

- **Enable and support cross-sector partnerships to develop at a sub-regional level to agree relevant priorities and action plans and move towards joint planning and budget pooling:** all of the sub-regions have current results based action plans which they have developed with a mixture of local partners. For example in two sub-regions there is joint agency action on homelessness and worklessness which is ground breaking work. There are examples of authorities working together to share budgets on training, examples of joint work with RSLs and examples of shared cross sectoral work on prevention.

  There is still plenty of scope to push these joint developments further but there is a robust platform for future sub-regional work.

- **Ensure regional coverage of cross-sector partnerships:** as we note above each sub-region has an active partnership which is well rooted in local authority homelessness and housing functions. There are some early signs that other organisations and partners are beginning to take an interest and could become more active partners, this will however require some concerted and focused work from the RHSIG and other partners.

- **Agree priorities and establish SMART targets for sub-regions:** each sub-region has a results based action plan with targets for performance. The focus of the priorities and action plans has been on promoting learning and sharing good practice, on developing innovation projects and on sharing intelligence. To date actions are being pursued vigorously and there are good examples of priorities being put into practice e.g. the worklessness projects in Solihull and Walsall.

- **Improve evidence base by encouraging better record keeping and quality of statutory returns, developing further research and by monitoring the progress of the strategy:** since the original strategy progress has been made by Local Authorities on recording information in a more robust way there are however still some issues to be resolved in terms of consistency of recording across authorities.

  The RSHIG has actively kept a check on the progress of the strategy which has culminated in this document.

  More importantly the RHSIG has kept a ‘watching brief’ on the evidence generated by the statutory returns and used this to inform its discussions and direct its focus. For example in 2008 the P1E (Homelessness Returns from Local Authorities) have been used by the RHSIG to stimulate analysis of changing trends in performance.

Performance against national targets on homelessness

The original strategy suggested that the effectiveness of the strategy could in part be measured by each local authority’s performance against key government targets.

In the period since the original strategy the Government has refined and shifted some of its priorities for local authorities tackling homelessness.

The broad impact area remains focused on reducing the number of people who become homeless. Within that broad focus there are more specific targets on reducing rough sleeping, on the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation.

- **Reducing the numbers of people who become homeless (accepted by local authorities as owed the main homelessness duty):** across the country acceptances have been dropping consistently. The numbers of acceptances in the West Midlands has been dropping from its high in 2003/04 but at a slightly slower rate than other regions and there has been some recent (2007/08) regional fluctuation in the direction of travel which we discuss later.

- **Halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010 (base line 2004):** some local authority areas in the West Midlands have already achieved this target and overall the direction of travel is in the right direction with current figures suggesting a regional reduction of 40% on the 2004 figures having been achieved.

  This means that across the region the numbers in temporary accommodation have reduced from 2600 in December 2004 to 1500 by June 2008. At the current rate of progress the target will be met by 2010.

- **End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010:** many authorities in the West Midlands have achieved this target and at the end of quarter one 2008 there were 35 '16 and 17 year olds' in bed and breakfast across the region. There are some challenges to be faced in a small number of authorities but the target can be achieved.

- **Reducing rough sleeping:** calculating the numbers of rough sleepers is a challenge but taking account of that estimates suggest that numbers of rough sleepers are falling in line with the governments target across the region and the country. Three areas in the region carried out counts in 2008 all recording less than 10 people sleeping rough on the night of the count.

The picture in the West Midlands is that the direction of travel in the **long term** is in the right direction and our assessment is that the Regional Strategy and RHSIG has played a part in helping local authorities to maximise the impact they have on homelessness. The recent fluctuations need to be addressed and the RHSIG has a key role to play in helping to understand what the challenges are.

It is important to note that the regional strategy and the RHSIG roles in reducing homelessness is in influencing investment, creating new opportunities, sharing learning etc it is does not have a role in directly intervening in homelessness or performance managing local authorities.

Key Partnerships Developed As A Result Of The Strategy

Sub-regional work and action plans; as we note above a recommendation of the first Regional Homelessness Strategy was to establish sub-regional partnerships that mirrored the housing market areas and to develop action plans in each of the sub-regions that would help with implementation of the Regional Strategy. At the time of the first strategy the picture across the region was variable with some sub-regions already having embryonic sub-regional homelessness networks or working arrangements and others (in particular the Central Housing Market Areas) having to start from scratch in terms of sub-regional working.

The process of developing the sub-regional action plans was instrumental in creating new opportunities and impetus for sub-regional working on homelessness.

Action plans for each sub-region were developed and agreed in 2007 and these can be found at www.wmrhsig.org.uk . The principle of the SMART action plans and the overall implementation was to encourage joint working on issues or areas of concern that had greatest resonance for local stakeholders. This pragmatic approach has meant that the sub-regions are testing out all the key elements of the strategy recommendations and contributing learning to each others ongoing work.

Stakeholders across the sub-regions are very positive about the opportunities this action planning and joint working has created and in some cases it has been the catalyst for local authority areas that had no track record of joint working to begin the process of sharing intelligence, best practice and expertise.

There have been some very useful pieces of work to come out of this approach and stakeholders report that in all the sub-regions there is increased joint activity which is beginning to deliver some tangible differences.

Examples of sub-regional actions that are adding value:

In the North Staffordshire sub-region local authorities are sharing scarce training resources to ensure that staff in ‘home options’ and similar teams get access to the best quality advice and training possible.

In C1 sub-region local authorities Homelessness Leads provided a critical friend role for each other during the drafting of local Homelessness Strategies.

In C3 sub-region work is underway on developing shared approaches to the use of the private rented sector.

In C2 sub-region area officers from neighbouring authorities are for the first time sharing information on best practice etc.

In the West sub-region a template protocol for use with RSL partners has been developed and shared across the region.

In the South sub-region information on the new sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) scheme will soon be available for partners in the RHSIG to use in their own efforts at sub-regional CBL

The sub-regional structures have faced some challenges where the housing market areas have crossed over other boundaries such as Supporting People (SP) funding areas. Those areas with better alignment to other agencies or bodies such as SP are likely to be in a better position in the coming years to make effective links for more vulnerable customers.

Our assessment is that the work in the sub-regions is adding value to both the regional perspective and to local activity.

The RHSIG has an important role to play in continuing to support the sub-regions in pursuing their action plans and in tackling new challenges.

Regional Housing Executive and Housing Corporation; the Regional Strategy work was produced to help inform the Regional Housing Strategy 2005 and links to the work of the Regional Housing Executive. The Regional Implementation Group has continued to provide regular feedback to that group.

The first strategy led to the identification of homelessness 'hot spots' and this information was used as part of the intelligence set for the Regional Housing Strategy 2005.

The investment plans set out in that strategy and in subsequent plans have taken account of the hot spot data and there was an initial move to increase housing investment in some of these areas however it appears as if the impact of this was diminished by the challenges of getting investment turned into projects on site.

Stakeholders at a regional level suggest that the implementation group has been instrumental in keeping homelessness issues on the agenda of the Regional Housing Executive which in turn increases the potential for homelessness issues to be taken account of in future developments.

The partnership with the Housing Corporation has been an effective one in two other areas firstly supporting the emerging work on RSL Homelessness Action Plans and secondly in supporting the Move on Plans Protocol (MOPPs) work, both noted later in the document.

Over the next 12 months the shape of regional bodies (e.g. Housing, Economic etc) are going to change following the 'sub-national review' and the proposed structures and focus may mean that it will be challenging to ensure that homelessness and related issues are kept on the agenda. In particular it will need to stress the potential benefits of aligning work on homelessness and worklessness in the context of regional economic regeneration.

In the next 12 to 18 months the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group will need to work with Regional Governance Bodies to ensure that homelessness retains a suitable policy profile.

Our analysis is that the strategy and the RHSIG have had a positive impact and that the RHSIG has the capacity to drive change over the next period of development.

In particular we think it is well placed to promote positive outcomes in relationship to worklessness and homelessness and in promoting work on the new PSA 16[1] targets as well as continuing to act as a leader in good practice in tackling homelessness.

There have been challenges but these have been more closely linked to the difficulties facing many regional bodies and the Housing Corporation in encouraging and supporting their local delivery partners e.g. RSLs, Local Authorities in turning affordable housing targets into finished projects on the ground.

[1] PSA 16 is the Governments new set of targets for ensuring that vulnerable adults and young people are in settled accommodation and in education, training or work. The specific groups targeted are ex-offenders, care leavers, people using secondary tier mental health services and people with learning difficulties.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

2005 To 2008: Patterns Of Homelessness And Changes In Performance

Overview

Since 2005 there has been a reduction in the numbers of people making applications and being accepted as homeless under the legislation. This long term and overall reduction is in line with national reductions although running at a slightly slower rate.

In 2007/08 the West Midlands experienced an upturn in homeless acceptances of over 20% in comparison with a 10% drop in England. There appears to be no simple set of issues impacting and it is not clear what brought about this change of direction.

Later in 2007 the increase was reduced as acceptance began to fall however this increase has restarted in the 2nd quarter of 2008/09 when the West Midlands acceptances increased by 22% compared with a 2% drop across England.

So although the long term direction of travel is downwards these two quarters increases are causes for concern.

Some of the hot spots for homelessness identified in the original strategy have seen a positive change in the numbers of people making applications or being accepted as homeless.

There are some significant variations across the region in the levels of acceptances in relation to the number of homeless applications being made. The key drivers for homelessness have not changed since the original strategy and there has been no significant change in the nature of the customer groups approaching homelessness services.

BME communities are on the whole over represented in the numbers of people making applications and being accepted as homeless. This mirrors the national picture.

There are new pressures emerging in the shape of increased mortgage repossessions and debt levels that have yet to be fully understood in terms of their possible affect on homelessness figures.

Changes in regional patterns and causes of homelessness in more detail

Since 2005 when the first strategy was drafted homelessness applications and acceptances have fallen across the region. In 2003 there were over 25000 Homeless Presentations and by 2007 that figure had dropped to 17700.

This fall in applications has been mirrored by a fall in acceptances which has been in line with the national trend but at a slightly slower rate than the national average.

The effective use of prevention methods is credited with having a positive impact on these figures and many authorities across the region are reporting positive impacts from prevention work.

This fall in figures was consistent until the summer of 2007 when the region saw an increase of over 20% in homelessness acceptances. The RHSIG spent some time looking at the figures and analysing the possible causes of this change of direction.

No single cause or simple set of causes was identified but the analysis suggested that a series of interlinked (though still hard to identify) factors was at play, e.g. reduction in turnover in the social rented sector, challenges with accessing move on accommodation.

The analysis suggests that a state of meta-stability[2] may have been reached within services and within the housing market so that quite small changes in the environment would lead to blockages and changes in the overall system.

This upward trend in acceptances was reversed later in 2007 without any specific intervention in the system taking place, which may go some way to support the meta-stability theory.
In the second quarter of 2008 the data shows another increase in acceptances, a 22% increase set against a national decrease of 2%. This trend needs to be understood more fully and the RHSIG has a role to play in helping local authorities and sub-regions to make sense of this shift in the direction of travel.

If the meta-stability analysis is correct then the current upheaval in the housing market, e.g. dramatic slow down in new build, rise in mortgage repossessions must be a cause for concern as the homelessness – housing system[3] in the region is still likely to be in a meta-stable state.

The major **drivers of homelessness** have remained the same across the region, and indeed nationally. The data from national returns (P1E) and the work done for local homelessness strategies suggests that the three big drivers of homelessness are still:

- families and friends no longer willing to accommodate

[2] Meta-stability is a term used to describe a system or set of systems that are at a point of usage and throughput where the volume of activity is close to or at the point of exceeding the capacity. The system or process keeps functioning as long as no external factors slow or change, in fact quite small changes in the throughput in a meta-stable system can cause dramatic slow downs, e.g. motorway traffic jams that appear to have no specific cause.
[3] We could think of homelessness and housing as interdependent service systems that interact on each other as well as on other systems such as employment.

- domestic violence
- the ending of assured short hold tenancies

The types or **groups of people** who are being accepted as being in priority need have not changed dramatically since the first strategy.

Key groups of customers continue to be households with children; households were the woman is pregnant; households where there is a specific vulnerability e.g. domestic violence, mental health distress.

There is some contextual evidence from stakeholders and other data that suggests that in some areas vulnerable adults with a range of issues are finding it harder to get access to resources that might promote prevention.

What we can say with some certainty is that the bulk of people coming forward and receiving help come from some of the most vulnerable parts of the regions communities and are often people with the least resources in their community, social and family networks.

Variation across the region

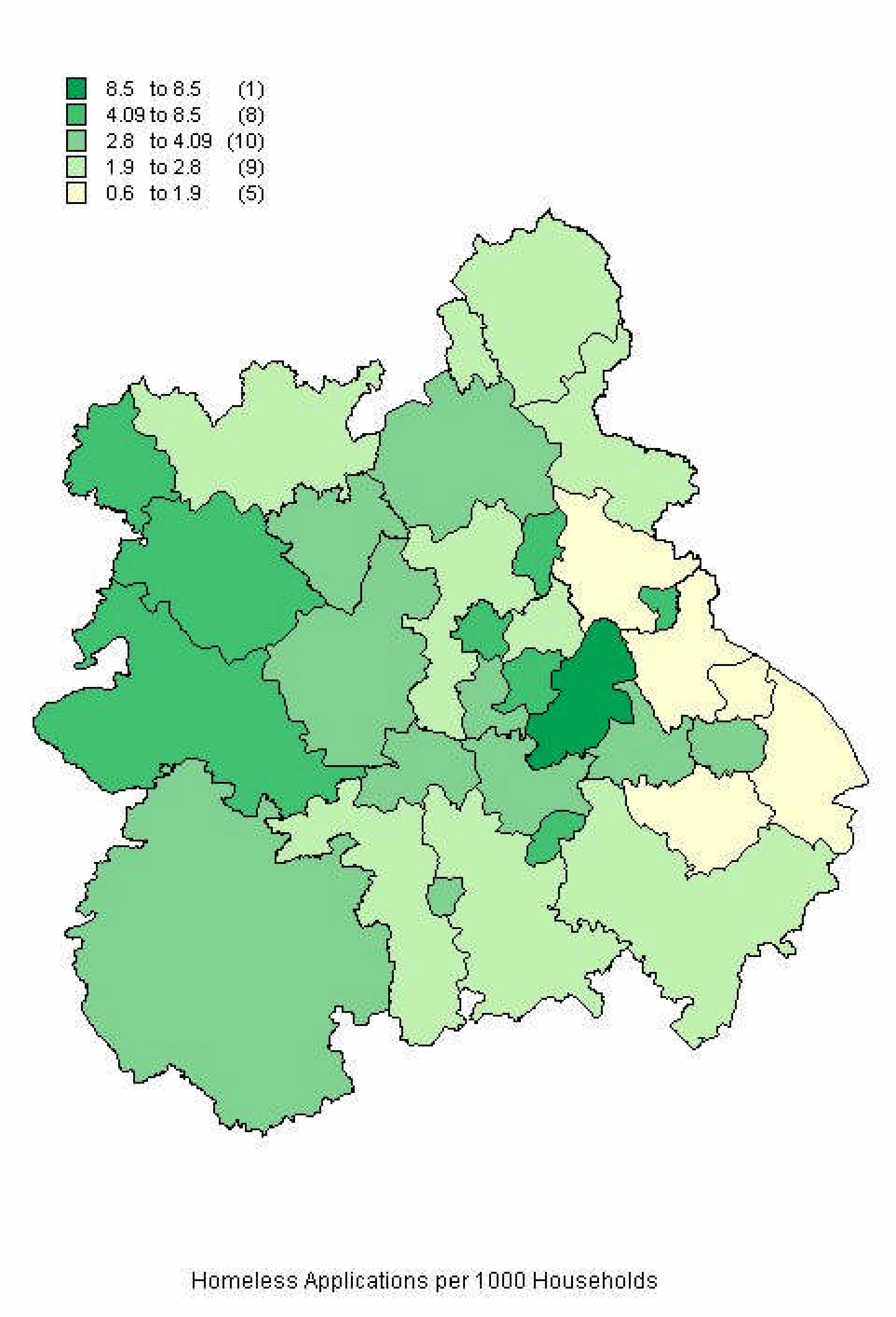
We should view variations across the region with care as variations in numbers and percentages can appear as a result of different recording methods as well as different practices, but where it is possible to identify significant variations it is useful to dig further to understand what can be learned from the variations in terms of promoting best practice.

The original strategy highlighted some hot spots for both applications and acceptances by weighting the data as a function[4] of local population. These 2004 hotspots included areas not normally associated with high levels of homelessness such as Malvern Hills, Wychavon and rural areas in Shropshire. The more urban areas also featured as hot spots and included areas such as Stoke on Trent, Worcester and Tamworth.

The same exercise carried out on the most recent complete data sets suggests that there are still hot spots outside the big urban areas that might be worth further investigation by the regional group if the local areas identified want to build on the work they will have already done for their homelessness strategies.

[4] Applications and acceptances as a percentage of each local authority's population

2007 (full year)

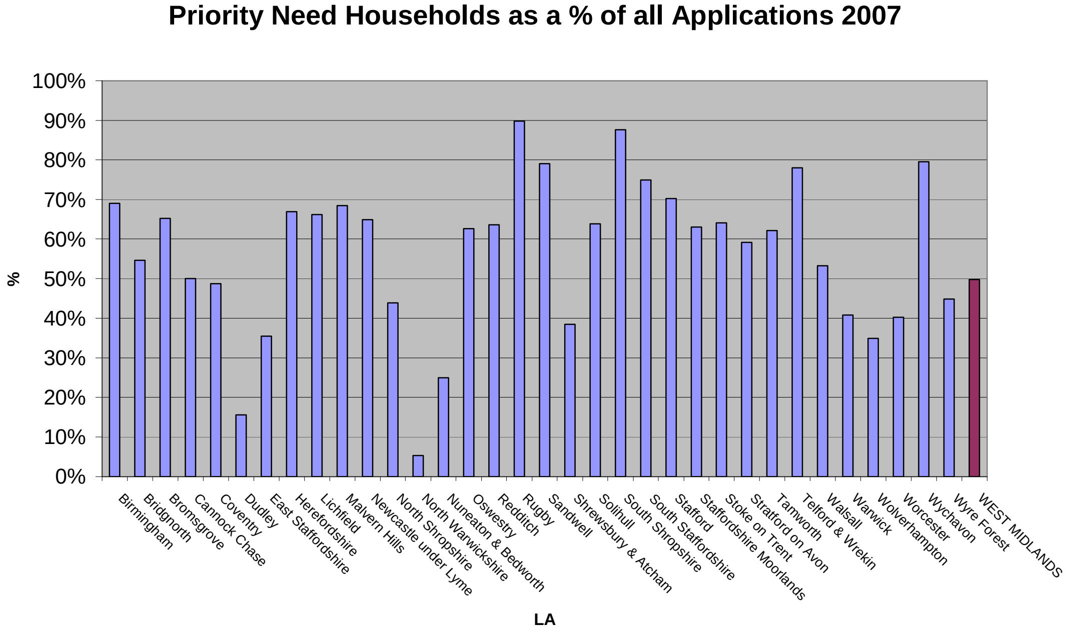


** Data missing for Lichfield, Coventry, Rugby, Stratford on Avon & Warwick* *Source: P1E*

The areas that appear as potential hot-spots for applications are; Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Oswestry, Redditch, Shrewsbury and Atcham, South Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Cannock Chase and Tamworth.

This means that 2004 'hot spots' of Malvern Hills, Worcester and Wychavon have gone some way to reduce the local pressures of applications as a percentage of the population. Investigation into the interventions used and environmental reasons for change may be beneficial.

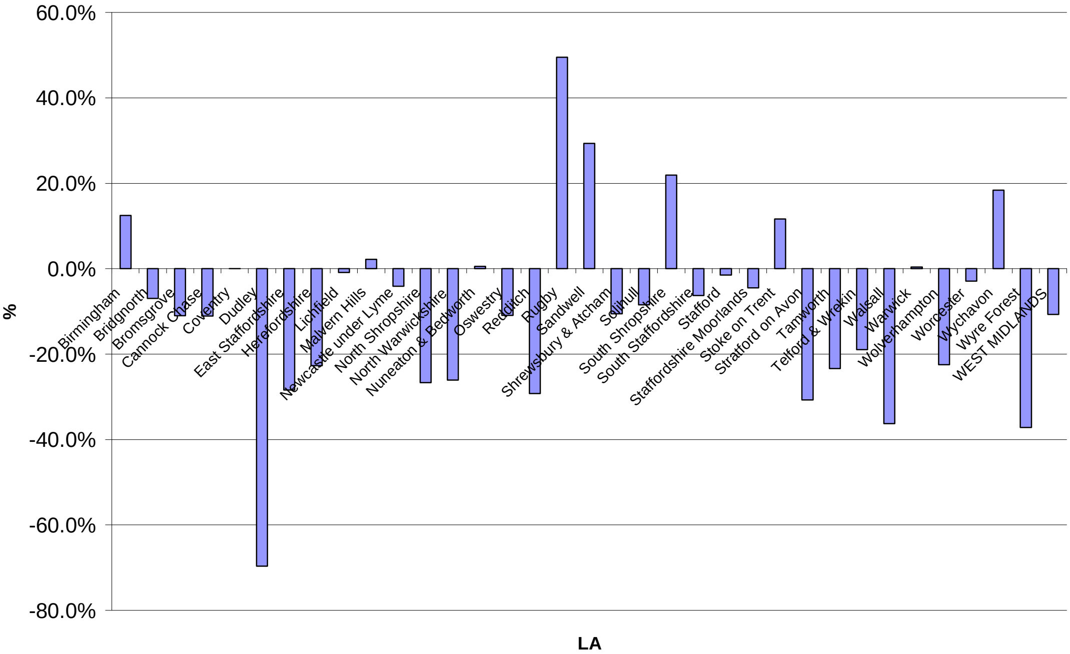
There is considerable variation across the region in terms of the percentage of applications that are then accepted as being in priority need. At one extreme the figures for Rugby suggesting that 90% of applications are regarded as being households in priority need whilst at the other North Warwickshire at less than 10% of applications being deemed to be in priority need.



Data incomplete for Coventry, Lichfield, Rugby, Stratford on Avon & Warwick *Source: P1E*

The graph below shows the percentage change in priority needs acceptances:

Percentage Change in Priority Need Acceptances 2002/2003 to 2007



Data incomplete for Coventry, Lichfield, Rugby, Stratford on Avon & Warwick *Source: P1E/HIP*

It is clear that some areas have made dramatic changes to their level of acceptances; Dudley showing the biggest change in acceptances with a reduction of over 60% whilst Rugby has increased its percentage of acceptances by over 40%.

Repeat homelessness

Repeat homelessness and repeat applications could be seen as a useful measure of secondary prevention of homelessness and the headline statistics suggest a drop from an average of 6% repeat homelessness in 2002/03 to 4% in 2006/07.

There are variations across the region and some gaps in the completion of P1E data which makes drawing firm conclusions challenging, however this variation maybe worth further analysis and investigation.

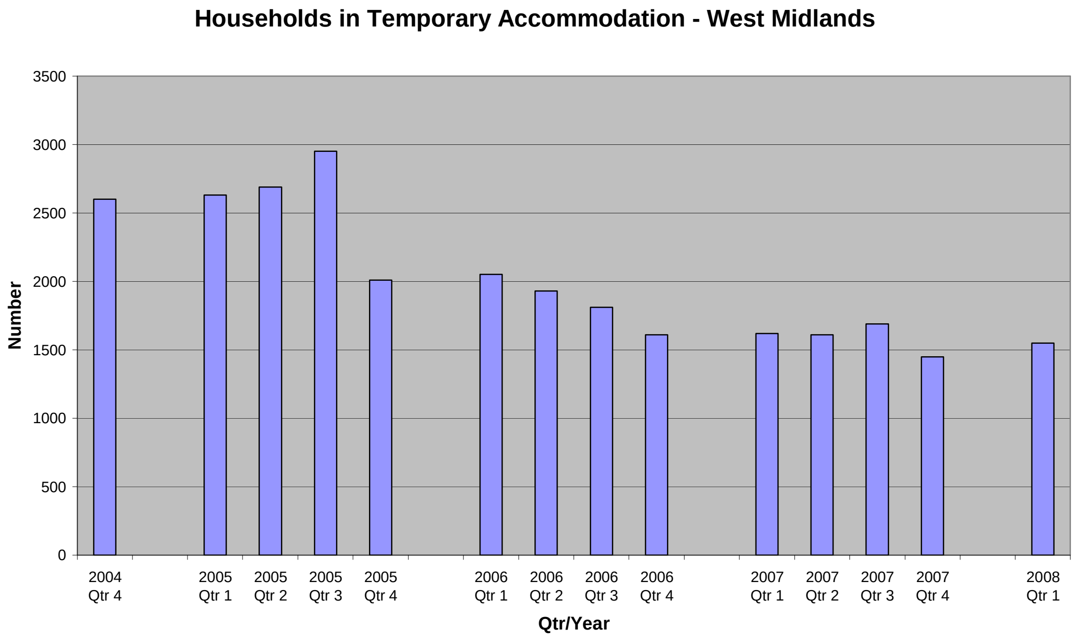
Temporary accommodation

Figures for the numbers using temporary accommodation suggest that across the region as a whole the targets for reduction are being met but there are still a small number of local authority areas where the numbers using temporary accommodation are above the target reduction rate.

For the whole of the West Midlands work by local authorities to reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation has achieved a reduction of 40% on the 2004 figures which suggests that the national target of a 50% reduction by 2010 is achievable.

The graph below shows the direction of travel for the whole region and it shows a slight rise in figures for Qtr 3 2007 which coincides with the rise in acceptances noted earlier.

CLG advisors are working with those authorities where temporary accommodation is regarded as an issue to reduce the numbers of people using such accommodation.



Source: HIP

Prevention statistics

The way in which prevention statistics are recorded and monitored is currently being changed to reflect the greater importance of prevention in the overall approach to tackling homelessness. The original Best Value indicator may not have been used consistently enough across the region for sensible comparisons to be made. The P1E statistical returns to CLG now include a section regarding homeless prevention. As the new data collection is established the RHSIG should use this data to inform its work across the region.

The contextual evidence that we mention in other parts of the document suggest that prevention is becoming an increasingly effective way of working, the RHSIG needs some solid and consistent statistical evidence to support this assertion.

PSA 16 hotspots

As part of developing targets of the PSA 16 agreement the Social Exclusion Unit has developed some baseline data identifying hot spots for some of the key indicators. The first indicator is the numbers in settled and suitable accommodation and the second is numbers in settled employment, education or training.

We have included some headline information to give a flavour of the key issues being faced across the region.

The table 1 below shows those areas identified **red and red amber hot spots** for offenders and those leaving care.

Table 1

Accommodation hot spot red: offenders	Employment hot spot red: offenders	Accommodation hot spot red: care leavers	Employment hot spot red: care leavers
Birmingham Coventry Solihull Wolverhampton	Coventry Stoke on Trent Walsall Wolverhampton	Birmingham Sandwell Worcestershire	Birmingham Coventry Dudley Stoke on Trent
Accommodation hot spot red/amber: offenders	Employment hot spot red/amber: offenders	Accommodation hot spot red/amber: care leavers	Employment hot spot red/amber: care leavers
Herefordshire Sandwell Shropshire Stoke on Trent Walsall	Birmingham	Coventry Dudley	Sandwell Staffordshire Worcestershire Wolverhampton

Data from Social Exclusion Task Force data 2007

More detailed information is available from the Social Exclusion Unit web site www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force.aspx

Comment on understanding variations

It might be in the interest of the region as a whole if the variations identified above were understood better and the learning shared in a systematic way in conjunction with the CLG advisors supporting the work in the region.

We feel that the position and status of the RHSIG means that it can take a measured approach to further study and use it as an opportunity for intelligence gathering and learning rather than as a performance management exercise.

Emerging themes in patterns and causes of homelessness

As part of the refresh of the strategy we asked local stakeholders to tell us what themes or issues the Regional Strategy needed to take account of that were beginning to emerge in their areas.

Some of these themes are rapidly turning into trends that can begin to be monitored and others are still ‘bubbling under’ and may turn out to be strategically less important in the medium to long term.

In this next section we highlight the issues raised consistently across the region, because these issues are emerging the data to support or refute their importance is very limited but we think these are areas worth watching in the next 12 to 18 months, particularly if the overall homelessness and housing system is as vulnerable to small market changes as it currently appears to be.

The themes noted below are not ranked in a specific order of importance but in an order that reflects the number of times each theme reoccurred across the region.

Increasing debt; almost all the stakeholders we spoke to in homelessness services reported increasing numbers of people approaching for help with often very complex debt crises when the debt problems have begun to impact on their housing security. As yet no firm figures are available but the contextual evidence suggests that debt, linked to mortgage and other arrears, is likely to bring more people into contact with homelessness services in the coming months and years.

Personal debt in the UK as a whole is at record levels and there appears to be an increased use of secured (second charge) loans where a person’s property is used as security for further borrowing. Nationally average household debt is £9475 (excluding mortgages) and the figure including mortgages is £59,375. [5]

If these figures hold good for the West Midlands, which is plausible, then it gives us some idea of the pressures facing households that will contribute to a number of people seeking help with debt as it begins to affect their housing.

In recent months fuel poverty has become an increasingly important issue as fuel prices have risen and the most vulnerable in local communities will be facing increasing pressure on already tight budgets. We suggest that some further work is done to establish links with groups and regional work on fuel poverty as part of influencing wider determinants of homelessness.

Across the region there are a number of areas where fuel poverty is potentially critical for overall household debt levels; for example areas of

[5] Credit Action September 2008

Birmingham and the surrounding Black Country as well as the rural areas of Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Mortgage repossessions; this is becoming a relatively well documented pressure in local housing markets and the numbers of repossessions has risen dramatically.

The figures used below on repossessions are taken from data supplied by the County Courts to the Ministry of Justice and in the West Midlands the figures for court actions on mortgage repossessions and landlord repossessions are as follows:

Data for 2008 Q2

	Mortgage repossession claims issued, increase 07 Q2 to 08 Q2	Landlord repossession actions increase 07 Q2 to 08 Q2
Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire	19%	9%
Black Country, Staffordshire & West Mercia	18%	7%

Data for 2008 Q2

	Mortgage repossession claims issued 2008 Q1 & Q2	Landlord repossession actions 2008 Q2
Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire	4218	1860
Black Country, Staffordshire & West Mercia	5112	1787

The Council of Mortgage Lenders data suggests that there has been a rise of over 40% of properties taken into possession (not the same as repossession claims which is a precursor of repossession) over the 12 months to July 2008.

A concern has been raised by some local stakeholders about the role being played by companies offering ‘mortgage rescue’ packages which in some cases appear to leave the home owner-tenant in a very vulnerable position once the initial 6 months lease period is over. The Governments very recent announcement (September 2008) on mortgage rescue may go some way to alleviate these issues but they are worthy of some attention in the coming months.

The combination of local stakeholder feedback and the emerging data suggests that problems with servicing housing debt is growing and that the numbers of people seeking help to avoid homelessness is likely to grow further in the coming months.

The Regional Implementation Group should keep a watching brief on these issues and in particular feedback evidence from local homelessness services to the strategic groups locally.

The current increased tightness in financial markets and the reduction in the numbers of new mortgages being arranged is likely to add extra pressure to the housing market flow and reduce overall movement in the market.

Prevention

Prevention of homelessness is having a positive impact (see later more extensive note in the policy section) and some of this impact is demonstrated by evidence of the reduction of numbers of people making applications and being accepted under the homelessness legislation.

All the local authority stakeholders that we heard from had examples of how prevention had helped to reduce homelessness and of which tools and methods worked best for them.

There is significant variation across the region in the packages of prevention on offer ranging from some areas with extensive rent deposit schemes and mediation through to those with emerging schemes that have yet to fully impact.

There is an important role for the RHSIG to help coordinate best practice and sharing of learning in this area.

A small number of local authority stakeholders are reporting very early signs that some customers are going through **'multiple preventions'** that may alleviate immediate and short term concerns but do not fundamentally tackle underlying factors in the person's homelessness.

A small number of stakeholders have reported some early signs that the 'older younger people' (people who have opted to stay at home until their mid to late 20's before moving on to more independent living) are beginning to access homelessness advice and housing options services seeking help.

Overcrowding

There has been an increasing focus on tackling overcrowding in the last 12 to 18 months and there are some concerns voiced by stakeholders about the potential impact on the numbers of people that will be identified as needing housing and homelessness advice and services as overcrowding is tackled.

To date the quality of data on overcrowding is very patchy and it is hard to break it down to any meaningful degree at a sub-regional level.

However Birmingham is one of the CLG pilot areas for tackling overcrowding (Tackling Overcrowding in England: an action plan) and as such could help to generate new intelligence that can be used across the region.

Key and emerging customer groups

We have already identified that the three biggest causes of homelessness reported by local authorities have not changed since the first strategy. We have also noted that there maybe early signs of some changes in the overall homelessness profile and in this section we want to note some specific issues relating to potentially key customer groups.

Offenders in custody and community

The resettlement of offenders continues to be a high priority for central government and for the National Offender Management Service Agency (NOMS). The Resettlement of Offenders Accommodation Pathway has yet to be fully implemented but does provide a useful framework for helping not just ex-offenders but other vulnerable groups. Recent data (2007/08)[6] from the Regional Offenders Managers Office suggests the following

- 15000 new receptions into the prison estate (adults) in the West Midlands
- 200 have come from Temporary Accommodation
- 2300 have No Fixed Abode
- 3900 require some action relating to their future housing.

There clearly remains some work to be done to hasten the use of the accommodation pathway and to monitor its impact on both re-offending and on repeat homelessness. The data cannot be broken down further to give us any indication of variation across the local authority areas in the region.

We do have initial reception data which indicates which local authority offenders have come from (limited to new receptions to the 4 local prisons – transfers from other prisons, returns from court and foreign nationals who have deportation orders are excluded and prisons that do not receive offenders from court are exempt from recording this data). For example, this tells us that 74% of prisoners with an initial housing reception[7] in the West Midlands local prisons in 07/08 were from West Midlands LA's (9789). Of those 74%, 21% (4054) were from the Birmingham area.

[6] data from West Midlands Regional Offenders Managers Team
[7] sentenced prisoners and those in remand in local prisons who have an assessment of their housing requirement undertaken within 4 days of reception

Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

The data suggests that the numbers of applications and acceptances for the Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Communities across the West Midlands are proportionately higher than for the indigenous white population (i.e. white British). There are some issues with the data across the region given that some areas still record a high proportion of 'Ethnic Origin Not Known' and that the categories used for the P1E are not as sensitive as the Census categories.

There is some variation across the region but it is clear that people from the African/Caribbean communities tend to be over represented in homelessness applications and acceptances.

Whilst for those from the Asian communities there appears to be a slightly different pattern emerging, where there are larger Asian communities, e.g. Birmingham, applications and acceptances appear to be either in line with or below the relative proportions for that community but in areas with smaller communities the reverse occurs with over representation.

This variation for Asian communities may be partly a reflection of the differences in income and work prospects which exists within the rather diverse categorisation of Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi.

Local stakeholders still voice concern that there is hidden homelessness in some of the communities and that elders in BME communities may be the most reluctant to come forward for help.

Clearly any over representation must be an issue for concern not just in terms of housing and homelessness but in terms of wider social cohesion and regeneration.

Young people

There has been a particular focus on the needs of young people who are at risk of or who have become homeless and much of the prevention agenda work has been focused on this group.

In the first regional strategy comment was made about the nature of the data set, with the data focus on young people aged 16 to 17 and 18 to 20 year olds who have been in care. The data focus is now a little broader and suggests that in the West Midlands 4% of acceptances are from young people (using the P1E categories) which is lower than the national average of 7%. (Data from 2007)

The percentage of young people being accepted as homeless (as a function of all acceptances which are dropping as a whole) has dropped slightly from 2004 when the original strategy was drafted but given the concern about data quality voiced at that time we can at best suggest that any reduction in the percentage of acceptances is in line with overall reductions.

The original strategy highlighted the issues of over representation in some of the rural or smaller urban areas of the region and this still remains an issue with the highest percentage figures for the region being in the Wyre Forest and Telford and Wrekin areas.
The figures for the numbers of young people in Bed & Breakfast and other forms of Temporary Accommodation reflects this pattern, although Birmingham does have high numbers of young people in temporary accommodation.

The Regional Strategy Implementation Group recently received some useful insight into the issues facing young parents and in particular teenage parents, further work needs to be done on understanding the scale and issues facing this group of young people and their children.

Migrants from the A8 and A2 countries

The impact on homelessness services and the housing market of migration of people to the UK from the A8 and A2 countries has been an area of concern for many stakeholders in the region.

Evidence from the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership suggests that the growth in migration into the region is patchy with some areas experiencing more rapid growth than others. So for example in the period 2003 to 2007 (using the NINo or National Insurance Number data) the following areas have faced the biggest changes are South Shropshire (7 fold increase) Herefordshire (6 fold increase) North Warwickshire and Tamworth (5 fold increase) and Wychavon, Redditch, Stratford on Avon and Wyre Forest (4 fold increase).

The impact of this change in population on housing is hard to establish through robust data but there is some evidence (again taken from the WMSMP) that; migrant workers have lower expectations on the quality of housing and living conditions and that some are being exploited by landlords. There are reportedly challenges for migrant workers when seeking housing advice such as a lack of information translated into languages, different cultural norms about seeking help and advice etc.

The main data collection source P1E has recently changed its format on recording applications for people from the A8 and A2 countries and as yet we do not have regional figures. The national figures suggest applications from these groups accounted for 1.1% of all homelessness applications across the country.

The long term impact on the housing market has yet to be fully assessed and patterns of migration and exit need to be better understood. The Regional Implementation Group could have a key role in capturing evidence from local homelessness services across the region and passing that intelligence on to other strategic bodies.

People with no recourse to public funds

Estimates of the numbers of unsuccessful asylum applicants within the region have been difficult to identify, estimates range between 5,000 and 10,000 in the Birmingham area.[8]

The regional destitution steering group undertook a 2 week survey in July 2007 of 4 advocacy agencies in Birmingham who work with refugees and asylum seekers, they identified 105 individual new cases during this period, almost 80% of whom had been destitute for over 3 months, and 60% of whom reported they had been destitute for over 12 months.

The Refugee Council provide a one stop shop service for asylum seekers which is under contract to UKBA. The service is based in Birmingham, although is open to other asylum seekers within the region to access for advice. They also provide an outreach service in Stoke-on-Trent once a week.

Management at the Birmingham office report that during the period 1st November 2007 to 30th April 2008 they saw 1132 individuals within the region who came for advice and assistance primarily resulting from destitution. This equated to around 3500 separate advice sessions. At present there is no mechanism for recording whether people are sleeping rough when they come to the agency for advice.

Of this number at least 34 have been identified as sleeping rough, it would be safe to assume that this is probably in Birmingham. They note that occasional referrals of homeless / destitute clients from other voluntary sector agencies in the region, and in some cases direct from Birmingham City Council. The numbers of such referrals are very low.

It is in both the interest of this group of very vulnerable customers and the regional and sub-regional partnerships that the RHSIG keep a watching brief on these figures through a link with the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership.

The RHSIG has an important role to play in ensuring that any intelligence emerging on these groups of customers are spread across the regional network.

Over all the data from statistical returns and from stakeholder feedback suggests that there is scope for understanding the variations across the region and using that intelligence to improve performance. It suggests that the groups of individuals identified by PSA 16 are highly relevant to the strategic work of the RHSIG and that the main causes of homelessness have not significantly changed across the region.

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[8] Destitution of asylum seekers in Birmingham – Richard Malfait & Nick Scott-Flynn 2005 commissioned by Restore of Birmingham Churches Together & the Church Urban Fund

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Housing Supply And Demand Pressures

Summary

The supply of affordable housing stock is a key factor in long term primary and secondary prevention of homelessness[9]. Current theory and practice on prevention of homelessness is based on the premise that sustaining accommodation through social support, links to work etc are key factors in reducing homelessness this can only be done if a person has somewhere to live. So the emerging pressures on the housing supply side (housing markets) are crucial challenges in maintaining the overall reduction in homelessness that has been achieved over the last 3 years.

Following the first Regional Homelessness Strategy the Housing Executive and Housing Corporation planned to make investments that took account of the hot spots for homelessness outside the big conurbations.

Delivering new build on the ground has been a challenge and not all of those planned investments came to fruition. The key challenges to turning investment plans into completed projects are well documented and include the availability of land, the fit with the Regional Spatial strategy and the availability of willing development partners.

The targets for new investment build in the region are being missed and current trends (summer 2008) suggest that there will be significant problems in getting projects completed in the short to medium term.

The RHSIG could have a role to play in supporting partnership building in local areas where that is a factor in slowing down developments of affordable housing.

An apparent tightening of the housing market and the reduction in the scale of social rented stock appears to be leading to a slow down in movement within the sector. It is likely that pressures on the open housing market, for example massive reduction in the numbers of new mortgages being arranged will only add pressure.

Data from the National Housing Federation and others suggest that social housing lettings have reduced in the West Midlands by more than 30% in the last five years.

[9] Primary prevention in this context means intervention so that a person or family does not become homeless in the first place; secondary prevention means that a person or family that has been homeless does not become homeless again.

There is some emerging contextual evidence that the success of Supporting People and linked work on sustaining tenancies is making a small contribution to reducing 'churn' in the social rented sector.

In the early part of the document we touch on the potential for the homelessness-housing system to be in a state of meta-stability, if that is the case then these shifting and increasing pressures are likely to have some deleterious affects.

More detailed analysis

As we acknowledge earlier preventing homelessness is about more than just having a house or flat to live in people often need support and intensive help if they are to sustain their accommodation.

However the time when a homeless person would be presented with a choice of keys to council accommodation is long gone and the supply of affordable housing options is set to be an increasingly important factor in the homelessness prevention equation.

In the original strategy figures on local need were matched against estimates of stock availability in the public sector, this went some way to provide evidence of unmet need and hot spots. However this is only a partial approach and the increased use of the private sector over the last 3 years means that a much more complex picture is emerging.

This next section pulls together some of the key issues on the supply side of that equation. We have not attempted to come to any specific local authority analysis but to set out the strategic issues that need to be taken account of at sub-regional and regional level.

The lack of local analysis is a function of two things, firstly not all the HMAs have signed off their work and a partial analysis would be unhelpful and secondly we feel it is the task of the regional group to support the sub-regional structures to come up with their own analysis which can take account of a wider range of intelligence and knowledge than this regional work ever could.

Housing Corporation targets and investment

The current Regional Housing Plan sets out targets for development across the region and comments on the plans made in the previous round of investments.

The investment plans for 2008/11 have been increased to a record level £467 million with a concomitantly higher target for completion of new affordable housing. The Housing Corporation has recently changed some of the investment process to encourage a smoother flow of investments into completion on the ground.

Targets for 2008/11 include delivering 7200 homes for rent and 3600 homes for low cost home ownership. Investment allocations agreed by summer of 2008 account for 2620 new rented properties and 1902 low cost home ownership properties (total of 4522 units) across 170 separate projects. Allocations for the same period focused on supported housing (excluding older people) are set to achieve 241 units for rent and 35 for low cost home ownership.

Data from the Housing Corporation Outturn Statements for the period (2005/06 to 2007/08) and supporting material suggests that current performance has seen an average of 2,600 affordable new builds completed each year, which suggests that there have been some significant challenges faced in reaching levels of new build that will keep pace with emerging need.

Across the whole region there is currently a shortfall on delivery against the targets set and new building is slowing across all sectors. In the current climate it would be inadvisable to suggest how big that gap may become.

The overall story for the West Midlands taken from a recent study completed by the Cambridge Centre of Housing and Planning suggests that across the whole of the West Midlands 9700 new social sector units need to come on stream to keep pace with projections for newly arising households.

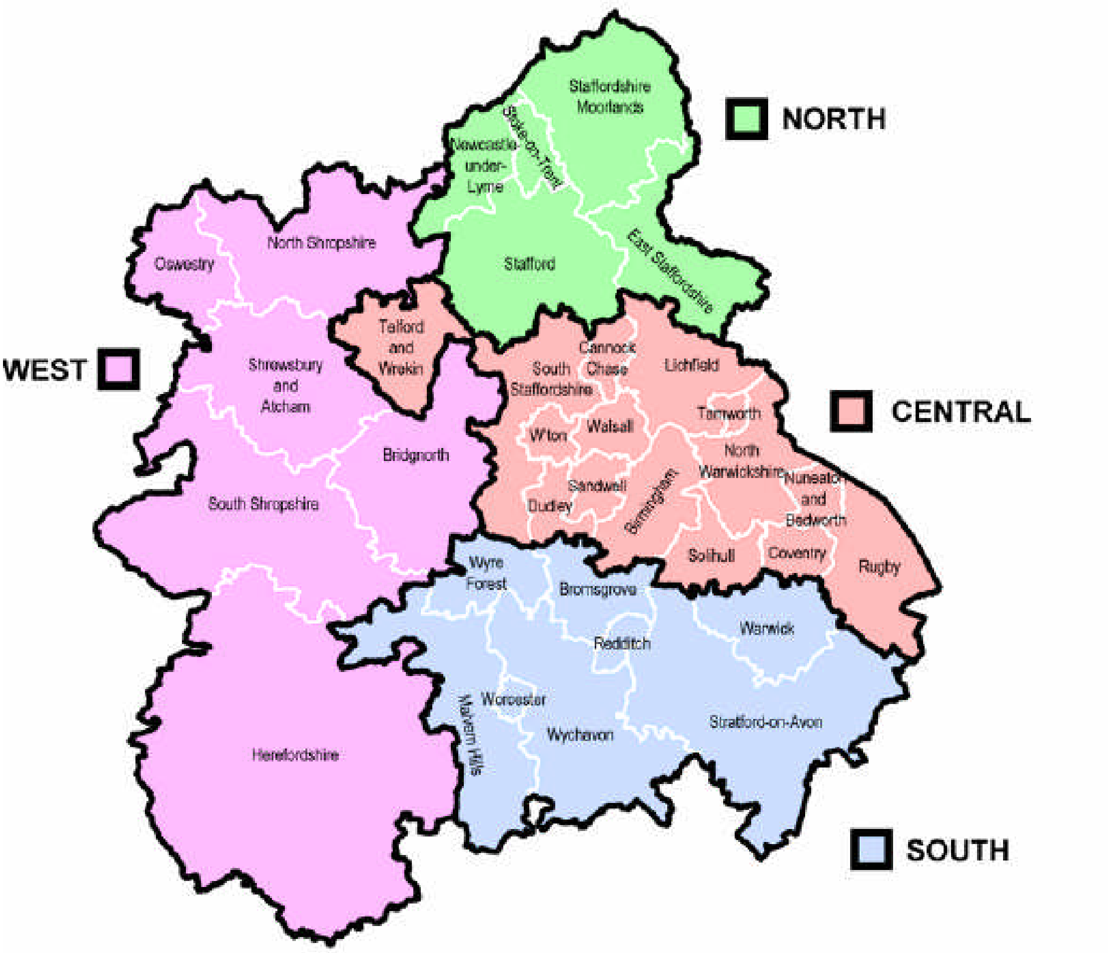
Local Housing Market Assessments

All the Housing Market Areas (which match the current sub-regional structures for the regional homelessness work) have or are about to finalise their updated assessments of the sub-regional housing market. These assessments are designed to highlight need, demand and changes in the local housing market across the whole spectrum of accommodation and tenure.

This report does not identify any particular hotspots and uses the HMAs as the basic building block for its assessment of need.

The RHSIG could support sub-regions to link across homelessness and planning service boundaries (this does already happen in some areas) to use their collective intelligence to identify smaller ‘hot spot’ areas for development which may in some ways help to promote the on the ground development partnerships required to turn ‘hot spot investment’ into completed units of accommodation.

The HMA areas are currently (summer 2008)



Central Area (from Summer 2008 one single HMA)

C1
Birmingham
Lichfield
Solihull
Tamworth

C2
Coventry
North Warwickshire
Nuneaton & Bedworth
Rugby

C3
Cannock Chase
Dudley
Sandwell
South Staffordshire
Telford & Wrekin
Walsall
Wolverhampton

For more detail on individual areas we recommend reading each HMA report but here are some headlines which we need to take account of.

Overarching messages from those Housing Market Assessments that are completed and agreed suggest the following:

- the numbers of households[10] in the region will continue to increase
- turnover and re-lets in social housing are slowing by as much as 30% over the last 5 years
- the need for intermediate rented accommodation has not diminished
- the ratio of income to house prices has been rising (at summer 2008)
- ratio of income to rents has stayed in line with inflation and below the equivalent ratio for house buying

Examples from some of the available HMA data

South HMA

Waiting time for social housing:

I bed flat an average of 4.4 years   2 bed flat an average of 3.9 years

Newly arising households unable to rent or buy at market prices = 2306 which equates to 39% of all newly arising households

C3 HMA

Lets to new tenants dropped by 19% since 2003

The biggest group of people getting new lets were those moving out of accommodation shared with family and friends they account for 37% of new lettings.

1000 properties (most in the social rented sector) have been demolished since 2005.

If the regional homelessness and housing systems are in a state of meta-stability then even quite subtle changes in the rate of re-lettings and a slow down of movement from social rented sector into the private sector could have quite profound impacts on homelessness figures.

[10] people who need accommodation, e.g. a family, couple or a single person can constitute a household

The HMA reports, not all of which are available in the public domain highlight the following issues. Note that each HMA has used slightly different measures and some have only taken a very partial view of movement in the social rented sector.

The RHSIG has a key role to play in supporting sub-regional work across homelessness and housing development boundaries (as already happens in some sub-regions) to ensure that local intelligence on homelessness informs investments.

Update on the Central Housing Market Area

As the strategy refresh was in the process of being drafted an agreement was reached between the three Central HMAs to reform into a single Central Housing Market Area.

House building

Since the late summer of 2007 there has been a dramatic decline in the numbers of new built projects both completed and started, and although many of these properties would have been for the private home ownership sector the reduction in development has at least two knock on effects for more vulnerable people in the housing market.

The impact of this reduction of new build projects may well be felt in a reduction of the number of Section 106 agreement[11] developments of affordable housing that are developed. Secondly a reduction in the numbers of new properties coming on the market could contribute to those households that might have moved into new development either staying put or moving into accommodation that might have been used by households moving ‘up’ the housing ladder.

Overall both contribute to a tightening of the housing market and reduced movement which is likely to affect the most vulnerable the hardest.

Letting in the social rented sector

The turnover of lettings in the social rented sector is reducing and is likely to come under greater pressure as access to home ownership in the private sector becomes harder.

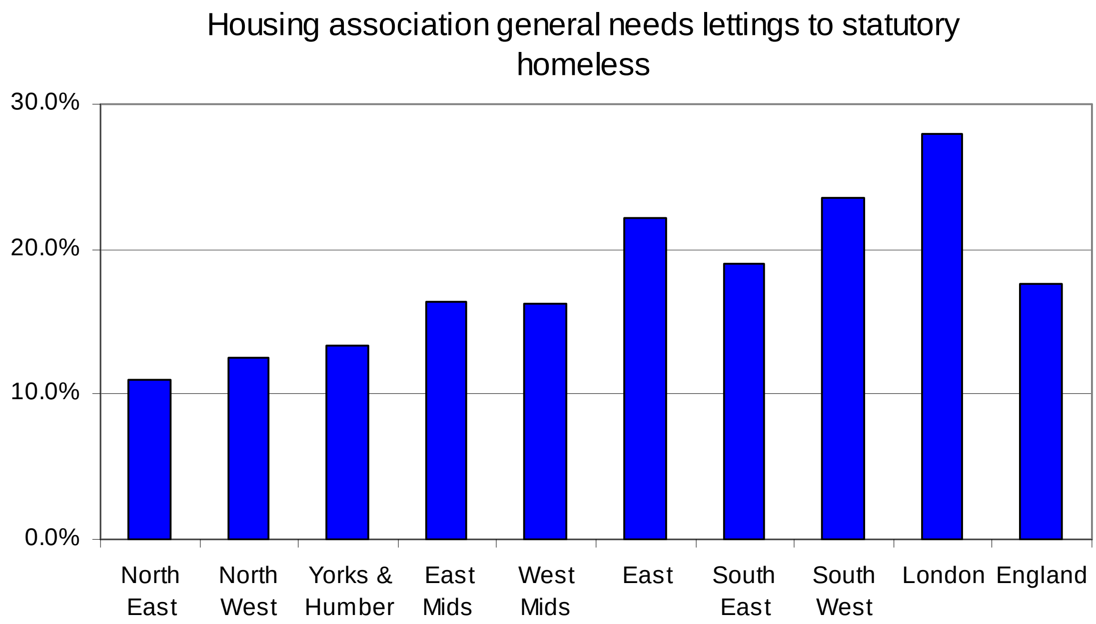
There is variation across the region but all areas are experiencing a reduction in stock size and a slow down in turnover.

[11] Section 106 refers to the locally negotiated requirements for private developers to include affordable housing on new build projects.

Figures suggest that the reduction in lettings is in the region of 30% over the last 5 years, although the picture is patchy and some of the data sources have yet to fully take account of the impact of Choice Based Lettings.

Lettings to homeless households

The CORE data includes figures on the homelessness status of new tenants, identifying whether they were statutory homeless, other homeless or not homeless. The table below shows that again associations in the West Midlands perform just below the national average on the proportion of general needs lettings to statutory homeless households. The figure for the West Midlands during 2007/08 was 16.2%, increased slightly from 16.0% in 2006/07.



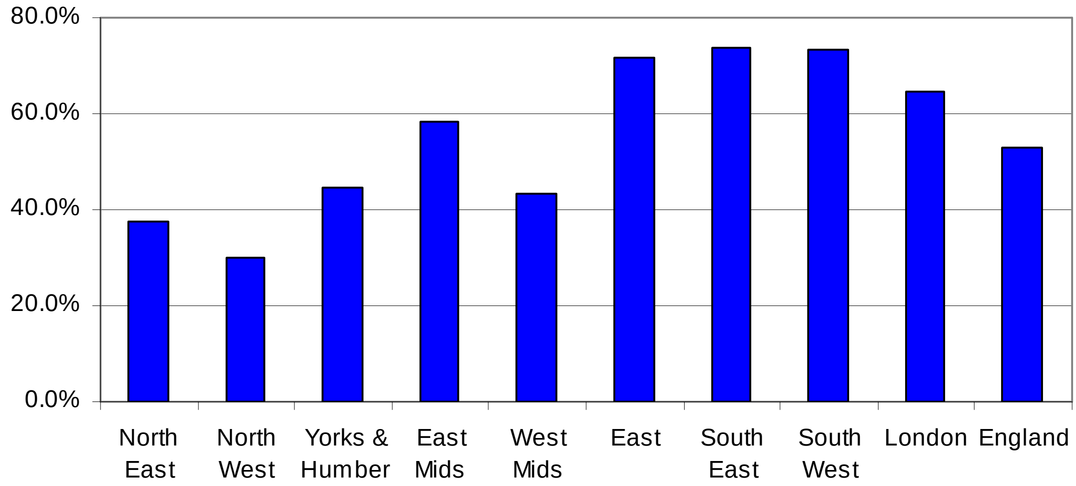
Housing Corporation CORE Data

Nominations to RSLs

The West Midlands region performs below the national average in terms of the proportion of housing association general needs lettings through local authority nominations. During 2007/08 43.5% of lettings were through nominations, increased from 40.9% during 2006/07.

It is not clear what accounts for this difference in nominations and lettings.

Housing association general needs lettings via nominations



Housing Corporation CORE Data

Affordability

Against the backdrop of a tightening housing market stakeholders and the HMA reports highlighted increasing issues of affordability in the housing market. This is a particular issue for those people making the transition from benefits into work and needs to be considered as part of the strategy for closer alignment of strategies for tackling homelessness and worklessness.

Stakeholders are reporting that people approaching homelessness services or those moving through supported accommodation to more independent accommodation are finding it increasingly hard to fund rents at intermediate levels.

Home ownership and private sector renting

Using data from the recently completed HMA reports we can highlight some key issues relating earnings to the lower quartile of house prices (home ownership) this ratio gives us some flavour of the challenges facing people trying to buy a house as a way of providing themselves with settled accommodation.

Figures in most cases predate the recent drop in house prices and there is some variation in the date that data has been collected across the HMAs.

The HMA reports have not all been agreed (September 2008) so some data is missing and there are some variations in the way in which figures have been calculated but there is still some value in the comparisons.

The ratio represents the relationship between average earnings and local house prices e.g. 7.52 for Wyre Forest represents the price of a lower cost house as a function of mean earnings.

A ratio above 5.5 would be regarded as challenging for families or individuals earning at or just below the average wage for the region.

	Lowest ratio	Highest	Hot spots
South HMA	7.52 (Wyre Forest)	10.25 (Malvern Hills)	Malvern Hills Stratford on Avon Wychavon Bromsgrove
North HMA	4.5 Stoke on Trent	7.37 (Staffordshire Moorlands)	Staffordshire Moorlands Stafford
West HMA	Still to be finalised		
C1 HMA	Still to be finalised		
C2 HMA	4.62 Nuneaton & Bedworth	5.36 North Warwickshire	
C3 HMA	4	10 + South Staffordshire	
West Mids	6.78		
England	7.12		

Private sector rents 2 bed accommodations (2006)

	Lowest rent (per month)	Highest rent (per month)
South HMA	£504 Wychavon	£595 Warwick
North HMA	£343 Stoke on Trent	£427 Stafford
West HMA	Still to be finalised	
C1 HMA	Still to be finalised	
C2 HMA	£419 Nuneaton & Bedworth	£479 Rugby
C3 HMA	£450	£550
West Mids	£445 (ave)	
England	£531 (ave)	

The private rented market amounts to an estimated 11% of accommodation nationally and estimates in the region vary between 6% and 9%. National figures suggest that the private rented sector accounts for nearly half of household[12] moves in any one year. Since the first regional homelessness strategy the use of the private sector as a prevention option (both primary and secondary) has increased so its importance is heightened.

[12] data source: Can't Supply: Can't Buy ; Hometrack 2008

The private rent to income ratio across the region varies but as a working figure we estimate that it is currently (summer 2008) in the region of 20 - 22%, the national average is 24.5%.

What is apparent, even given the variation across the region is that access to affordable sustainable housing remains tight and that for those on low incomes access to the social rented sector housing is still one of the main routes to sustainable accommodation.

It is possible that the current changes in access to home ownership will create rises in the cost of renting in the private sector, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest this, if this begins to happen then increasing numbers of people who may have rented in the private sector could join the numbers of people looking for accommodation at intermediate rent levels and in the social housing sector. The potential impact is to put increasing strain on public sector and RSL accommodation.

One possible role for the Strategy Implementation Group will be to keep a watching brief for indications that these pressures are having an impact and to keep regional and sub-regional housing market strategists up to date with those impacts.

Other pressures in the market

Buy to let market; over the last three years the use of the private sector as a sustainable solution to homelessness has increased significantly so that now renting in the private sector is an important part of any local authorities prevention tool kit.

The buy-to-let market is currently under considerable pressure as a result of the credit crunch and although much of the data is speculative there are signs that some landlords are pulling out of the market and trying to sell properties, though there is also some evidence that as house prices fall further that landlords may remain in the market and attempt to sell later in the cycle.

Over the coming 12 to 18 months some of these supply side issues may resolve themselves but as we note earlier it is unlikely that the overall pressure on the housing market will reduce so that increasingly we might expect to see the more vulnerable customers having to compete in the areas of the housing market with groups of people who may have previously accessed housing in different sectors.

Impact of sustaining tenancies (reduction in repeat homelessness); some stakeholders are suggesting that successful support to help people sustain tenancies and reduce repeat homelessness for the most vulnerable groups is having a small but potentially important impact on the availability of move on accommodation and they argue that improved sustainment of tenancies is one contributory factor in a perceived reduction in the availability of tenancies in the social rented sector. Stakeholders are not arguing for a reduction in tenancy support but highlight the continuing pressure for move on accommodation in the general housing needs stock.

Move on accommodation; we have already noted the importance of move on accommodation for people who have been through homelessness services and require support. Studies carried out in 2004 suggest that as many as 45% of people living in hostels are ready to move on. These figures and other data promoted the development of the Move on Plan Protocols (MOPPs) programme which has been piloted across the country, including a phase two pilot in Herefordshire.

In 2007 an evaluation was carried out which suggested that some increase in move on accommodation had been generated but at very low levels, at best a 7% increase, the evaluation suggests that this was partly a factor of the very new nature of the MOPPs work.

There is a role for the RHSIG in supporting the further development of the MOPP process across the region in order to maximise the use of limited opportunities for move on and ensure that the most vulnerable are included effectively.

Choice Based Lettings

The development of Choice Based Lettings across the region has already seen some learning being shared about managing the access to CBL for the most vulnerable customers. As CBL is fully implemented, including some sub-regional schemes there will need to be further work done to assess the impact on vulnerable groups, including sharing learning about banding, diversity etc so that the most vulnerable potential tenants receive the most focused help.

Sharing the learning from the South HMA scheme features as one of the results in their SMART action plan.

Overcrowding

We note earlier that current figures on over crowding are hard to disaggregate to the level that would be useful for local or sub-regional planning. The CLG pilots need to be watched closely and in particular the work in the Birmingham pilot could be useful.

It is possible that an increased focus on overcrowding will lead to an increase in the numbers of households that are regarded as ‘homeless at home’ which would increase pressure on current services.

It is possible that the current definition of overcrowding and relevant standard could be changed to a higher standard which has the potential to increase the numbers of households categorised as overcrowded.

Local Housing Allowance; the administration and rules applying to support with housing costs, what was Housing Benefit, have recently changed and as yet there is no conclusive evidence of the impact of this on homelessness.

There is some contextual evidence that the greater flexibility in rent levels may be having a positive impact whilst there is mixed evidence about the way in which landlords are responding to the changes that mean potentially vulnerable customers have direct responsibility of paying their rent to landlords rather than it being done by Housing Benefit departments.

The RHSIG has a role to play in understanding the implications of Housing Allowance on local market changes and to ensure that best practice is shared across the region.

Rural homelessness

A large geographical part of the region is rural or semi-rural and although rural communities share the same drivers for homelessness as urban communities there are some specific areas that the RHSIG may wish to focus on in the medium to long term. For example the impact of the credit crunch on already vulnerable rural poor, changes in access to services such as Post Offices. It may be sufficient for the RHSIG to encourage rural authorities to share this information and learning as a sub-set of the wider work of the RHSIG.

Demand side conclusions

It is clear from the data available to us and from stakeholder comments that there is growing concern about the ability of people at risk of homelessness or those already homeless to access and sustain affordable accommodation.

Current regional housing strategy already identifies an under performance on new build projects which can only increase pressures on some of the most vulnerable groups in the community.

It would be foolish in the current financial situation to make predictions across the region about the potential, shortfall (or otherwise) in capacity for accommodation, it is however apparent that there will continue to be severe pressure on existing affordable stock.

There is no simple solution to the pressing issues on affordability and capacity in the market place. There is indeed some disagreement about the nature of effective responses with some stakeholders and evidence suggesting a rise in the numbers of single person households requiring increased provision of single bed units whilst other stakeholders equally cogently demonstrating that the focus should be on bigger sized housing units.

The RHSIG has a key role to play in helping sub-regional homelessness groups to link with sub-regional housing and planning groups to ensure that the needs of potentially and actually homeless people are considered effectively.

In particular to ensure that there is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach to new projects in the sub regions, for example an increase in single person’s accommodation where that is not needed.

THE PARTNERSHIP AND POLICY ISSUES

In this section we look at some of the broader partnership and policy issues and links that have emerged recently that future work needs to take account of. These form part of the wider context in which the RHSIG has to operate and form some of the key areas of action for the coming years.

The Regional Strategy Implementation Group has created some highly effective partnerships or **links beyond the region** and the group is viewed by stakeholders as a useful and potentially influential network for disseminating developments, initiatives and for reality checking the direction of travel.

As we note earlier the regional group has been tasked with investigating or working on development issues for CLG such as the work done on the Offender Resettlement Pathways as an approach to a broader strategic matrix.

Similar groups from other regions have sought out advice and information from the West Midlands RHSIG to help them formulate their own practice and development. The RHSIG has been at the forefront of promoting sub-regional and regional work on homelessness.
The regular meetings of the regional group are well attended by people representing a wide range of bodies and interests from across the region and this attracts representatives from central government and other national bodies who want to influence practice at a sub-regional and local level.

The RHSIG can build on this so that the regional group can maximise its impact on the regional and national agenda with the sole aim of improving outcomes for potentially homeless people in the West Midlands.

Housing Corporation and Housing and Communities Agency

The RHSIG has played its part in helping the Housing Corporation to discharge some of its key duties by helping to influence the investment of grant allocations for supported housing schemes and by focusing investment in the ‘hot spots’ noted in the first strategy.

We have already noted that there have been some challenges in turning investment intentions into completed housing units on the ground which reflects the wider challenges of development against the back drop of the Regional Spatial Strategy and local housing market pressures.

The Housing Corporation is joining forces with English Partnerships to form the new Housing and Communities Agency (HCA) it is as yet not clear how or where the links on homelessness will emerge in the new structure but it is important that the RHSIG group creates a link to the HCA in order to build on the work already achieved and to investigate how sub-regional partnerships can be used to support future housing developments.

The RHSIG has a role to play in supporting the work of the HCA as it begins to function, how this could be done needs to be investigated further.

Sub national review

The recently completed review of regional government and development structures is recommending substantial changes to the way in which regional government and development are carried out.

The key change for the RHSIG is the potential amalgamation of the work of the Regional Housing Executive into a broader economic development framework with a potential for some risk that homelessness drops down the agenda as a result of the complexity of the issues being addressed.

This review and the implementation of its recommendations could have major implications for the way in which homelessness issues are connected at a regional level.

The current chair of the RHSIG is a member of the Regional Housing Executive and this could be an important connection to try and maintain.

There is a role for the RHSIG in keeping what ever new regional structures emerge up to date on current trends, practice and implications of regional plans on homelessness.

Local Area Agreements

Since the initial strategy the policy context for local authorities and other stakeholders has changed and one fundamental shift has been the development of the Local Area Agreements and the concomitant funding arrangements.

Local Authorities now have much greater flexibility to focus their monitoring and reporting efforts on a tighter set of indicators than was previously the case.

Although the reduction in indicators being reported to central government does not mean that all work on an area or issue stops if it is not being reported on it may mean that it is harder to attract investment for activity and harder to get that area of activity on to partnership agendas.

Across the West Midlands there are 14 LAAs (LAAs are set at unitary or County Council level), out of those 14 agreements only one LAA has taken Achieving Independent Living as an indicator and 4 have chosen a target of the number of households in temporary accommodation.

All the LAAs have at least one of the following; the target for number of affordable housing units or a target for net additional homes. 8 of the agreements have both targets.

The challenge in the next two to three years for the regional homelessness group will be to help the local authorities, and sub regions where they reflect county boundaries, to keep homelessness sufficiently high on local agendas and to make the link to the work of the LAAs.

Supporting people

The link to Supporting People (SP) services and teams across the region has been an important one in helping local authorities to make an impact on homelessness and to help ensure that effective links are made between accommodation and support.

In the early period of the Regional Homelessness Strategy implementation links were made to the Regional Supporting People Group and some joint work was undertaken to develop shared outcomes. More latterly this link has been less effective and the flow of information between the two groups has been affected.

At a sub-regional and local level there is a mixed picture of shared working with some good examples of joint approaches being taken towards move on and reducing repeat homelessness.

Some of the SP services across the region are in a state of flux with some areas embarking on major tendering exercises and some promoting changes in the way floating support and accommodation based services are linked.

These changes could potentially have a major impact on the way in which services are structured and delivered for homeless people. As yet there is no evidence to suggest that there are any negative effects but we suggest that links to the regional SP group need to be resuscitated in order to ensure greater collaboration.

The new Local Area Agreement structures and funding arrangements means that SP ring fenced funding will increasingly become part of the general resource available in a locality which could mean reductions in available investment for support.

To help put this in context in 2006/07 SP investment across the region in services specifically targeted at homeless people was over £22 million and accounted for 14% of SP investment in that year.

Our assessment is that it is crucial to maintain linkages between support provision and housing provision in a way that promotes not just secondary prevention but also primary prevention.

There is a role for the RHSIG to promote joint work with the regional SP group and to support sub-regional actions with SP teams.

The RHSIG has a role to play in collating intelligence about the impact of changes in SP funding on homelessness.

RSL Homelessness Action Plans

The Housing Corporation is recommending that all RSLs have both a Homelessness Champion and a Homelessness Prevention Action Plan, work on this has progressed well with the majority of RSLs now having a Homelessness Champion and 60% of RSLs having a Homelessness Action Plan. Joint working with the sub-regions is at an early stage but there are examples from around the region of partnerships beginning to form, for example the work being done in Herefordshire on a joint RSL protocol for prevention and with the Birmingham Social Housing Partnership.

There is an opportunity for the RHSIG to build on the work of RSLs and these emerging partnerships to promote new partnerships at a sub-regional level to support and promote the role of RSLs in prevention.

The partnership and policy context for the RHSIG has changed since the original strategy and will continue to change over the coming years. For example worklessness now has a much higher priority than it did 3 years ago.

The emergence of the HCA, the introduction of the LAAs and the emerging regional structures suggests a time of some uncertainty and the RHSIG can offer a stable forum for intelligence gathering, reflection and action.

Policy Developments

Prevention

Prevention of homelessness has become an increasingly important feature of the work being done at both a local and regional level since the last strategy in 2005 and is worthy of a specific note in this section of the report.

The development of Housing Options and a range of prevention tools have contributed to the reduction in the numbers of households being accepted as homeless and in priority need over the last 4 years.

Feedback from stakeholders across the region, in particular from those directly involved in service delivery, suggests that potential customers are still coming forward for help very late in the process of housing crisis which makes prevention harder to achieve.

There is still significant variation in the use and performance of prevention tools across the region; so for example some areas have well developed Rent Deposit or Bond schemes whilst others are only now developing these, in the areas with schemes there is wide variation in the numbers of households helped.

The use of mediation, in particular family mediation aimed at helping young people to remain at home and make planned moves, is patchy across the region with some areas reporting very positive results and others reporting less satisfactory outcomes.

The same patchy implementation is noted for Sanctuary Schemes, neighbour mediation, debt advice etc.

The hard data quality is very variable on the success of the various approaches used but stakeholder feedback suggests that the key variables for most if not all of the schemes used for prevention are:

- clarity in service commissioning
- clarity in service design
- the quality of the provider
- the links between services

There is already a platform for sharing good practice through the Regional Champions programme, through the work of the CLG Homelessness Advisors and via some of the sub-regional action plans. This could be added to by the Regional Implementation Group if it enhances its role in sharing good practice and learning on the back of the sub-regional action plans etc.

The Step Project - Birmingham's Family Intervention Project.

The Birmingham Step Project is a joint homeless prevention and parenting initiative, which works intensively with families at risk of losing their tenancies as a result of their anti-social behaviour. A partnership between Shelter and Birmingham City Council, the project is one of over 50 Family Intervention Projects across the country, helping families often identified as a "lost cause" to sustain their tenancy, become positive members of their communities and prevent the descent into homelessness. The project works directly with families, with the help of other agencies, in an empowerment model of support that identifies the causes of anti-social behaviour and work towards maintaining changes. This may include specialist support such as help with parenting, one to one or family group work, advocacy on behalf of the service users, housing related support, support for children and young people and co-ordination of the agreed package with partner agencies.

We have already noted that there is scope for some further work to help us understand what is working well in prevention and perhaps developing a West Midlands template for high quality prevention.

Linked to the above is the development of the **Enhanced Housing Options** pilots, although no authorities in the West Midlands feature in the 12 Trailblazers which have started work on linking worklessness and homelessness and piloting approaches to earlier prevention, by the end of 2008 there will be an announcement about which authorities have been awarded pilot status in the second round starting in 2009.

The learning from the Trailblazers and any West Midlands schemes will be crucial in helping to drive forward both improved prevention and making the link between worklessness and homelessness.

The Regional Implementation Group has a role to play in supporting the local authorities in the region by helping to facilitate access to intelligence and expertise across the area.

Linking worklessness to housing and PSA 16

Within the last 12 months there has been a significant change in policy direction with the announcement of the new PSA 16 target on secure accommodation and work for vulnerable adults and the explicit linkage of worklessness and homelessness for joined up activity.

This linkage can be seen in the wider context of helping people and households at risk of homelessness to sustain accommodation as part of a more holistic approach which involves addressing income, social networks, health issues etc as being essential to long term prevention (this links to the approach underpinning the Offender Resettlement work noted above).
In two of the sub-regional action plans there are projects that are testing out possible approaches to tackling worklessness and homelessness through a greater alignment of process and intelligence sharing across sector boundaries.

In Solihull and Walsall the Learning and Skills Council is working closely with local homelessness agencies to provide joined up approaches to targeting and supporting some very vulnerable customers.

Using the vehicle of the West Midlands City Strategy Pathfinder which is a broadly based approach to linking resources and integrating processes across eight local authorities, Job Centre Plus and the LSC work is underway to target some of the most disadvantaged communities in the centre of the West Midlands.

In the two areas noted earlier staff from the homelessness services have joined local management groups to help provide expertise on targeting and sustaining involvement with those people that are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Example on innovation in practice:

Through City Strategy Walsall Council is piloting a 'fast track' engagement process with homeless households living in temporary accommodation. The pilot aims to address the multiple barriers faced by homeless households that prevent them gaining and maintaining sustainable employment. An analysis of homeless data carried out demonstrated a need to target homeless households with 90% plus of temporary accommodation residents not in employment and reliant on benefits

Households moving into temporary accommodation are now referred to Steps to Work as part of their induction process. Steps to Work provide the services of an outreach support worker who assists homeless households with training and support interventions via a personalised Employment & Skills action plan.

Weekly surgeries are in place at Rivers House - the Authority's homeless project for over 25's and soon to be rolled out to Sandwell House – a supported housing project for young people; the Homeless & Housing advice manager now attends Walsall's worklessness steering group and work is ongoing to include homelessness targets within the Neighbourhood Employment & Skills Plans – intended to drive partnership action to improve employment and skills in Walsall's most disadvantaged wards.

Meetings have now been set up between homeless resettlement managers and City Strategy managers to help understand how referrals will work. It has been identified that typically, homeless clients do not engage with employment and skills opportunities and it is crucial that those in supported accommodation are engaged within the first week of being housed. Those that actively engage with the project will also be supported and helped to be fast-tracked through the housing market. Outreach workers will hand-hold clients through the whole process.

Beyond these pilot projects there are numerous examples of local work being done to tackle worklessness and homelessness in a joined up way.

There are three crucial roles for the RHSIG to play in relation to these emerging policy issues:

- supporting the activity in the sub-regions and facilitating sharing of learning across the region
- supporting the alignment of policy and practice based on the learning from the activity across the region (and the county as a whole)
- ensuring that regional homelessness intelligence is available to the new regional bodies in a format and style that helps them to make connections between broader economic development and tackling homelessness

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis suggests that the Regional Strategy and the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group have made significant contributions to helping local areas in reducing homelessness, supporting prevention work and influencing other stakeholders.

The RHSIG has fully met the intentions set out in the first strategy and has made a contribution to helping local authorities achieve or work towards homelessness reduction targets.

It has done this by influencing other strategy work such as the investment plans of the Housing Corporation and CLG, by influencing policy and by creating opportunities for sharing practice, sharing innovation and for creating new links e.g. the link to the LSC, sub-regional action plans.

What has worked well and how can it be taken forward?

Stakeholders from the local areas report that they have benefited from the access to each others expertise and that the group's role in providing up to date briefings and access to advisors and staff from national bodies and Government departments such as CLG or the Housing Corporation has been very positive.

There is an opportunity in the light of this refresh to review the membership of the RHSIG to ensure that all relevant partners are suitably represented, for example the Regional SP Group.

Influencing upwards and across to other strategic groups is always a challenge but there is evidence that the RHSIG has been able to keep the profile for homelessness high enough for it to influence thinking and direction. In particular supported housing allocation and some of the investment decisions made in 2005 by the Regional Housing Strategy.

The group does not have a statutory function or any statutory monitoring regime for the work it does or promotes but we think this has been an advantage in that it has encouraged joint working and innovation with a clear focus on making a difference for people who are potentially or actually homeless. The groups function is in intelligence sharing, enabling innovation and in promoting strategic change; it is not a performance management body.

The RHSIG carries out the bulk of its work with very few resources relying on the goodwill and efforts of partners to provide support and energy to keep the work moving forward. We have suggested a range of tasks for the group which could be of huge benefit for the region and our assessment is that this delivery on these tasks would be enhanced by some investment in infrastructure and support to the group.

Some areas for further work

The refresh of the strategy has highlighted the potential for meta-stability in the homelessness-housing system across the region and this needs to be understood better.

Firstly to check out if regional systems are as sensitive to small changes as we think they might be and secondly to share that understanding with other strategic groups so that collectively strategic groups can begin to assess the impact to their decisions on investment etc.

Established BME communities are over represented and the RHSIG can help to promote a better understanding of this phenomenon and to begin to understand the potential impact of new migrant communities on homelessness.

The variations across the region in some key indicators such as acceptances need to be understood better so that best practice can be shared and so that local pressures can be put into a regional context for regional strategic groups.

We believe that the approach taken by the RHSIG group has been a positive one promoting joint work and thinking through a non-statutory approach that values the sub-regional activists energy and commitment.

We think this sub-regional platform could go further by developing a programme of focused investment in intelligence gathering (which is different to just collecting data) and by targeted support on joint ventures such as the LSC projects already underway.

The RHSIG needs to explore with the Housing Corporation (and emerging HCA) and others how the regional implementation group can work with partners at a sub-regional / HMA level to help turn housing investment plans into completed projects.

The potential for sub-regional linkage, already made in some sub-regions, of homelessness and housing development could be pushed further so that local and sub-regional solutions to affordability and capacity reflect local intelligence. This is particularly relevant in the light of the development of sub-regional CBL schemes.

A key (and slightly obvious) conclusion is that investment in housing will need to continue to focus **on affordable housing options** and that in each sub-region the HMA partners and the sub-regional homelessness groups should be encouraged to share intelligence on needs so that the right balance of accommodation is planned.

The recent upheaval in the housing market will potentially create medium term changes in the nature of the people coming forward to seek help and increase pressure on local homelessness services the RHSIG needs to keep a watching brief on this and share any intelligence they generate with regional and local strategic partners. This could include making links with CLG on the emerging mortgage rescue packages being developed for 2009.

To date the RHSIG has been a successful forum for promoting change and for stimulating sub-regional activity. It has had an influence upwards and into other regional work but given the current changes in regional structures and in the emergence of the HCA this is a good time for the RHSIG to reflect on its future role.

We have identified three areas of activity below which suggest an increasing focus on supporting sub-regional activity as well as some targeted influencing of new and emerging structures.

We would suggest that successful influencing is partly based on the credibility a group can generate form the success it has at a practical level and as such the sub-regional support and intelligence gathering could be crucial.

The Way Forward For The Next 3 To 5 Years

The refresh of the strategy suggests that the **key areas** for the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group to focus on over the next 3 to 5 years are:

- understanding the nature of the interrelationship between housing market and homelessness in particular how changes in the housing market impact on some key groups of customers (meta stability)
- understanding the causes of variations in outcomes e.g. acceptances across the region and promoting the sharing of learning from that exercise
- understanding how established BME communities and new migrant communities are affected by homelessness
- helping to focus work on the PSA 16 customer groups
- building on current innovation and further aligning work on homelessness and worklessness
- supporting local and sub-regional intelligence gathering, innovative activity and sharing of best practice
- ensuring that the homelessness is understood by key players in the new regional structures
- explore how the RHSIG can offer useful support so that housing investment plans and partnerships can deliver affordable housing at a sub-regional level

Our suggestion is that the key activities for the RHSIG are:

- promoting intelligence gathering and sharing at a local, sub-regional and regional level
- promoting and supporting joint working, sharing of good practice and innovation at a sub-regional and regional level
- influencing strategy and supporting the alignment of key policy strands at a regional level

Promoting intelligence gathering

The RHSIG and partners could invest time investigating the potential meta-stability issues in the regional homelessness-housing system and we have identified some areas where we need to gather more information and data to inform local, sub-regional and regional action, with that in mind we suggest that the RHSIG focus some effort and expertise to work alongside CLG and others to learn more about the following issues we have identified in the strategy refresh:

the impact of debt and mortgage issues

- understanding the variations in local practice on acceptances, prevention and use of resources
- sharing the learning from the Enhanced Housing Options Pilots in the region
- developing profiles of emerging customer groups
- linking with the West Midlands Migration Partnership to better understand migration impacts on homelessness
- understanding the prevalence and impact on BME communities of homelessness
- understanding and testing out ways of managing 'chain let processes' to maximise the use of existing stock
- understanding and then either refuting or supporting the meta-stability hypothesis for the regional homelessness-housing system

Promoting and supporting joint working

The Regional Strategy Implementation Group can play a key role in stimulating and supporting joint activity and could begin to play a role in supporting sub-regions to jointly commission work on some key areas. We recommend that the RHSIG work with the sub-regions and some of the regional partnerships to create opportunities of joint work or joint commissioning in the following areas:

- review current sub-regions in the light of the new Central HMA and the LAA structures
- investigate the opportunities for supporting sub-regional link up (as happens in some areas) on HMA and homelessness planning
- engaging with NOMS and other partners at a regional level to promote sub-regional activity
- make links to the Regional SP group
- review the membership of the current RHSIG in the light of future needs

- working with the sub-regions to identify potential joint areas of work or commissioning on the following groups or areas: BME communities, offenders, PSA 16 groups and prevention

- working with the sub-regions to promote the role of RSL Homelessness Champions and Homelessness Action Planning

- working with the sub-regions to promote the use of the MOPPs programme

Influencing strategy and aligning policy areas

The Regional Strategy Implementation Group can play a key role in influencing other strategic bodies through sharing intelligence and examples of good practice (solutions to the problems the intelligence identifies) and in helping to create practical links between policy area such as worklessness and homelessness and the following areas:

- the development of the next Regional Housing Strategy

- the investment flowing from that Regional Housing Strategy

- worklessness and homelessness alignment on the back of the LSC joint work

- sharing intelligence on emerging patterns of homelessness

- sharing innovation and good practice on key issues identified via the LAAs, new regional structures

- supporting Housing Corporation and latterly HCA investment by helping link up homelessness partnerships with development partnerships in the sub-regions

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Outcomes The RHSIG Can Aspire To Achieve Over The Next 3 Years

As part of this strategy refresh the RHSIG are setting some high level outcomes we want to achieve. These outcomes will contribute to a wider set of Impacts for the whole of the West Midlands in particular to areas such as economic growth and regeneration, social cohesion and most importantly housing.

Outcomes for the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group 2008 to 2011

Outcome 1

We have supported Local Authorities and their partners in a continued reduction in the numbers of people becoming homeless across the region

Results to help us deliver this include:

- developing regional and sub-regional intelligence about trends and themes in homelessness in the West Midlands
- promoting the sharing of good practice and innovation in **prevention** and tackling homelessness across the region
- supporting the sub-regional homelessness groups to deliver their action plans
- supporting local sub-regional groups and local authorities in making the link between homelessness and worklessness
- supporting sub-regional homelessness groups to link to their Housing Market developments

Outcome 2

We have influenced key regional and sub-regional partnerships so that they are taking account of homelessness and can see how it relates to their core business.

Results to help us deliver this include:

- influenced the investment of strategic housing and development bodies
- sharing regional and sub-regional intelligence about trends and themes in homelessness in the West Midlands
- sharing the outcomes of good practice and innovation with key partnerships

- identifying the potential impact of homelessness on key strategic outcomes e.g. LAA targets

- supporting the alignment of homelessness and worklessness agendas

- supporting sub-regional groups in developing partnerships to deliver affordable housing

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