



# **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

**JULY 2003**

**Kennet District Council**  
**Homelessness Strategy**

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**KENNET DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2003**

**1.0 Foreword**

Kennet District Council is committed to the prevention of homelessness, wherever possible. Where it is unavoidable, we want to ensure that people have access to suitable accommodation and support services that will help ease the experience of homelessness and prevent them becoming homeless again.

Kennet's Homelessness Strategy has been delivered following wide consultation with service users and local agencies within the statutory, voluntary and private sector. It draws on evidence collected through the Kennet Review, carried out between October 2002 and April 2003. The review detailed current and projected levels of homelessness in the district, an analysis of the most common causes and a comprehensive audit of current supply and gaps in service. The review and strategy process has benefited Kennet with a better understanding of the nature and extent of homelessness in the District, and has helped identify gaps in accommodation and support provision. It has also given us the opportunity to develop a more strategic approach to tackling homelessness locally, through close working relationships with agencies across the spectrum, that we want to continue to build on, as the strategy develops.

The strategy details how Kennet will deliver locally appropriate services to **all** homeless people in the future, including those owed a duty of advice and assistance. It is for 3 years and will be reviewed bi-annually by the 'Kennet Homelessness Strategy Monitoring Group'.

**2.0 Legal Framework**

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced new duties on local authorities to carry out a comprehensive review of homelessness in their area and to develop a strategy on how they intended to prevent homelessness, to accommodate homeless households and to provide support to homeless people in the future

This Strategy shares the Government's overall homelessness objectives, to:

- strengthen help to people who are homeless
- develop more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness
- encourage new responses to tackling homelessness
- reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast for families with children
- sustain two thirds reduction in rough sleeping
- ensure the opportunity of a decent home for all

How a homeless application will be dealt with in Kennet is partly determined by the Council's duties under the Housing Act 1996, Part VII as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Through this legislation all homeless households have the right to apply to the council for advice and assistance. The Council must determine whether a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness, in priority need, intentionally homeless and whether they have a local connection to the district. The result of these investigations will then determine what duties the Council owes, the maximum duty being to provide temporary accommodation until a permanent home can be found.

### 3.0 Corporate Objectives

Kennet District Council's Corporate Strategy (2000 – 2004) sets as a key objective:

*"Through its resources and influence, Kennet District Council will enable the provision of services and facilities which will support the continuation and growth of viable and sustainable communities in the District enjoying an acceptable quality of life in a healthy and pleasant environment."*

#### Priorities

The Council has identified five "cross-cutting themes" which currently guide its approach to service provision. The themes are:

- Social Inclusion
- Community Safety
- Sustaining our Rural Communities
- Community Health
- Sustainable Development

### 4.0 Kennet's Vision of Services to Homeless People

*"To ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home"*

#### Objectives

During the next three years, the following objectives will drive the Council's approach to service provision for homeless households:

- To ensure services are in place to prevent homelessness occurring, wherever possible.
- To take specific action, in partnership with other agencies, to tackle the main causes of homelessness in Kennet.
- To ensure that everyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the district receives a personal plan that provides appropriate, detailed advice about their housing options.
- To provide all homeless people with a fast route to a permanent home.
- To ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available to all homeless households that have dependent children or are vulnerable.
- To ensure that adequate support is available to all homeless people, to help them through the experience of homelessness and to prevent homelessness occurring again, in the future.
- To provide an excellent homeless service with a high rate of customer satisfaction.
- To ensure that services are accessible to all homeless people, including those of black or minority ethnic background, the disabled and those living in remote rural areas.
- To ensure homeless assessments are made in a consistent, prompt, accurate and fair manner.
- To ensure that homelessness is addressed in all relevant local plans and strategies.
- To build on existing partnership arrangements to deliver locally appropriate, effective services.
- To build on current knowledge, gained through the Homelessness Review, of the nature and extent of homelessness in Kennet.
- To continually monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy through a multi agency Homelessness Strategy Forum.

## 5.0 Working in Partnership

The Council supports the Government's view that the solutions to homelessness are not just about 'bricks and mortar' supply. Many homeless people are extremely vulnerable and have complex needs. For example, Kennet experiences a high rate of homelessness and importantly, recurring homelessness, as a result of relationship breakdown. For vulnerable people to be able to maintain and keep both their short and long-term accommodation, many will need high quality, appropriate support that tackles those factors that could put them at risk of losing their home. For example, many young people have had no previous experience of how to apply for benefits, how to manage their limited budget and how to abide by rules without supervision. Many are vulnerable to the effects of peer pressure and will fail to keep their home without support in all of these areas.

We recognise the importance of a multi-agency approach to address the needs of homeless people. In line with central government's guidance, the Council has worked closely with Wiltshire County Council Social Services Departments, who as members of the 'Kennet Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group', are tasked jointly with many of the key actions detailed in the Strategy's Action Plan. There has also been close co-operation with other stakeholder agencies within the statutory, voluntary and private sector.

Membership of the Kennet Homelessness Strategy Group, the body responsible for devising this Strategy, includes the following organisations:

- Kennet District Council
- Wiltshire County Council (WCC) – Children and Families Team
- 'homes@kennet'
- Kennet Citizens Advice Bureau
- Kennet Action for Single Homeless (KASH)

The Council wants to build on this multi agency approach and joint working model to deliver action that will reduce and prevent homelessness in the District.

## 6.0 Links with Other Strategies

The Homelessness Strategy will form a significant part of the overall Housing Strategy and is linked closely to a number of other existing strategies operating across the District. The development of the Supporting People Programme, which aims to ensure high quality and strategically planned housing related support services for vulnerable people is of particular importance if we are to ensure that homelessness is preventable and that homeless people receive the support they need.

- Housing Strategy Update 2002/3
- Supporting People Strategy
- Community Care Plan
- Social Inclusion Best Value Review
- Community Safety Strategy
- Kennet District Council – Community Area Plans
- Health Improvement Plan
- Children Services Plan
- Wiltshire Drug and Alcohol Annual Action Plan 2003/4
- Wiltshire Youth Offending Team – Youth Justice Plan 2002/5

Examples of how outcomes of the Homelessness Strategy can benefit the delivery of other strategies include:

- Preventing youth homelessness is an integral part of helping Children and Families Services ensure the continuity of care and protection of vulnerable young people's welfare.
- Ensuring homeless people have access to health care services will help Health Authorities ensure they are delivering services to the whole of their community.
- Providing safe accommodation for people at risk of violence will assist in the delivery of the Community Safety Strategy.

## **7.0 Consultation during development of the Strategy**

Considerable consultation with stakeholder organisations and service users was undertaken to inform the Homelessness Review and to develop this Strategy. Consultation methods used included:

- Three Stakeholder Review Groups which met to consider the specific needs of homeless families with children; single people and rough sleepers; young people.
- A stakeholder questionnaire, sent to voluntary and statutory organisations working with homeless and potentially homeless people, to gather more detailed knowledge of the main causes and levels of homelessness in the district.
- A user questionnaire completed with single homeless people by local partner organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

## **7.1 Ongoing Consultation**

### Stakeholders

The Council aims to extend the membership of the Kennet Homelessness Strategy Monitoring Group (see 5.0 – Working in Partnership) to include representatives from the following:

- Kennet and North Wiltshire Primary Care Trust (Kennet and North Wilts PCT)
- WCC After Care Team
- Alabare
- Connexions
- Youth Offending Team
- Wiltshire Supporting People Team

The function of the Strategy Monitoring Group will be to:

- monitor the implementation of the strategy
- review its effectiveness in meeting the needs of homeless people
- ensure that homelessness is reflected in all relevant local plans and strategies
- share good practice and changes within their own organisations that will effect homeless people
- continue to gather data on the nature and extent of local homelessness
- influence the development of services received by homeless people

The group will meet every 6 months over the 3-year life span of the strategy.

## 7.2 Users

The Council aims to ensure the provision of high quality services that genuinely meet the needs of those homeless or potentially homeless people that receive them. To ensure that services continue to develop effectively and that we continue to improve our understanding of the causes of and solutions to homelessness in the District, feedback from customers is essential. We therefore intend to consult customers in the following ways:

- We will introduce a revised customer satisfaction survey of users of 'homes@kennet' Housing Options and Homelessness Service
- In partnership with staff at KASH's Drop In Centre, we will continue to gather intelligence about the causes and extent of single homelessness and rough sleeping, using the 'Single Homeless Questionnaire' and personal interviews

## 8.0 Kennet Homelessness Review

A comprehensive review of homelessness in the Kennet District was undertaken between October 02 – April 03, the full results of which are published in "*Kennet District Council – Homelessness Review*", which is available through the District Council Offices in Devizes.

Below is a summary of the Review findings.

### 8.1 Background

Kennet is mainly rural and agricultural in character and is subject to considerable planning restrictions on new development, making it difficult to meet the demands for housing and employment in the area. Approximately half of the population live in the five main market towns within the district, the remainder living in an extensive network of scattered villages.

House prices and private rent levels are high, making it very difficult for households on low incomes to afford their own home through the private sector. The Index of Multiple Deprivation, used to highlight and target social exclusion, shows that 4 wards in Kennet are among the top 50% of deprived wards in England. The Index concentrating specifically on homeless households and overcrowding indicates that 9 wards appear in the top 50% of deprived wards in England.

During 2002/03, Kennet District Council received 293 homeless applications. In 59% of these cases the Council accepted a duty to provide accommodation because the household was unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The majority of households had either dependent children or a member who was pregnant. 14% of households were vulnerable because a member had a mental health problem. Others were vulnerable due to age, physical disability, violence and domestic violence or homelessness as a result of an emergency.

## 8.2 Extent of homelessness

The following information has been taken from data gathered by the Council for monitoring homelessness and the statutory returns to the ODPM, giving a picture of homelessness over the last 3 years.

### Number of homeless applications to Kennet District Council

	1/4/00 - 31/3/01	1/4/01 - 31/3/02	1/4/02 - 31/3/03
Homeless approaches	344	349	293
No where LA accepted a duty to Accommodate	164	191	174
Intentionally homeless	7	12	7
Not homeless	99	74	71
Non priority need	74	72	40
% of homeless applications accepted	<b>47%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>59%</b>

The number of homeless approaches has seen a fairly sharp decline in 2002 – 2003 although the ratio of homeless acceptances to total number of applications has increased. This reduction in homeless applications may be partly attributable to the introduction of a choice based approach to lettings and the prioritisation of applications by waiting time. However, this is difficult to prove with only the benefit of one year's experience. The increased ratio of homelessness acceptances is as a result of the new priority need categories, introduced by the new Priority Need Order for England.

## 8.3 Causes of homelessness

Reason for homelessness	1/4/00 – 31/3/01	1/4/01 – 31/3/02	1/4/02 – 31/3/03
Asked to leave by parents	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>
Asked to leave by friends/family	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>
Non violent relationship breakdown	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>26</b>
Violent relationship breakdown	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>
AST/tied accommodation ended	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>34</b>
Other loss of private rented or tied accommodation		<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>
Loss of private rented accommodation Because of rent arrears	1	2	2
Rent arrears on RSL or council let	24	0	3
Eviction from RSL or council let for Nuisance	0	0	3
Mortgage arrears	3	7	5
Discharge from institution - Hospital - Prison - Armed forces - Care	0	0	0
Harassment/violence			2
Other	16	12	0

The most common causes of homelessness over the past 3 years has been being asked to leave by parents, family and friends; violent and non violent relationship breakdown; loss of private rented or tied accommodation.

## 8.4 Needs Assessment

As a result of its review of homelessness the Council has identified the following needs that will be addressed through this Strategy:

- More affordable housing opportunities, particularly for single people.
- More self contained, temporary accommodation options for all groups of homeless people.
- A supported housing scheme with 24 hour supervision for young people.
- Wider publicity and enhanced take up of advice and support services available for young people, linked to education, training and employment opportunities.
- More local emergency, direct access accommodation provision for single homeless people.
- Wider range of temporary and supported housing options for people with mental health problems.
- More suitable temporary accommodation arrangements, including respite care and for more permanent housing options for people with learning disabilities.
- Identify and record properties that have been adapted or are suitable for disabled adaptation, together with better use of new development opportunities, to meet the needs of disabled people.
- Introduce common recording systems among relevant agencies to ensure that the estimate of needs is accurate.
- Increase understanding of the causes of homelessness by extending data collection to record information about all vulnerable groups presenting as homeless, particularly care leavers, ex offenders, former armed forces personnel, people with multiple needs and drug and alcohol problems.
- Publicise advice and information services across the District and ensure that they are accessible to the whole community.
- More homeless prevention work for young people by extending the Schools Education Programme, referrals to mediation services and enhanced links between housing agencies and children's, young people's and education services.
- More prevention of homelessness as a result of domestic violence through closer links between housing agencies, the Domestic Violence Intervention Partnership (DVIP), the Police and other statutory and voluntary agencies.
- More prevention of homelessness due to relationship breakdown by enabling access to mediation services and more flexible housing register policies.
- Reduce the incidence of homelessness from private rented sector through early intervention and registration to the Kennet Housing Register.

- Tackle the risk of homelessness due to arrears by introducing formal referral arrangements between landlords and housing advice agencies.
- Need for more joint working with other stakeholder agencies to prevent homelessness and to provide co-ordinated effective support to homeless people and to review and formalise existing working arrangements

## 8.5 Mapping of Services

The following information is a summary of services that are currently available to homeless people in the District:

### TEMPORARY AND SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

Scheme Name	Type of Accommodation	Facilities	Client Group	Landlord
Bricksteed Avenue, Devizes	Temporary Shared Housing (TSH)	5 rooms, central location, close to all services. Shared facilities Fully furnished	All households owed duty of accommodation by Kennet DC	Sarsen Housing Association
Hillsborough House, Devizes	As above	4 rooms, central location, close to all services. Shared facilities Fully furnished	As above	As above
Hallgate House, Pewsey	As above	3 rooms, central location, close to all services. Shared facilities Fully furnished	As above	As above
St Margaret's Mead, Marlborough	As above	6 units, central location, close to all services. Shared facilities Fully furnished	As above	As above
Johnson Way, Ludgershall	As above	6 units, central location, close to all services. Shared facilities Fully furnished	As above	As above

Melksham House, Tidworth	Medium term temporary accommodation – let on minimum 6 month AST	8 self contained flats, unfurnished	Any household owed duty of accommodation by Kennet DC	Sarsen Housing Association
Kingfisher Housing Association Purchase and Repair Scheme	Medium term temporary accommodation – let on minimum 6 month AST	2 x 3 bed houses self contained, unfurnished	Any household owed duty of accommodation by Kennet DC	Kingfisher Housing Association
Sarsen Housing Association Leasing Scheme	Medium term temporary accommodation – let on minimum 6 month AST	Target of 15 x 1/2/3 bed houses per year	Any household owed duty of accommodation by Kennet DC	Sarsen Housing Association
Kennet Safe Houses	Safe House for women and their children fleeing domestic violence	2 x 3 bed houses Shared facilities Furnished	Women and their children at risk of domestic violence	Sarsen Housing Association
Northgate Street, Devizes	Supported accommodation	2 x 3 bed houses, (one male / one female). Shared facilities, furnished	16 – 25 year old single homeless men and women	Kennet Action for Single Homeless (KASH)
Tottenham House, Savernake, nr Marlborough	Supported accommodation	40 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Unemployed young people aged 18 – 30	Amber Foundation
Colston Road, Devizes	Supported accommodation	4 units, self contained, furnished	Young people aged 18 – 25	Sarsen Housing Association
Eden House, Tidworth	Supported accommodation	5 units, shared facilities, furnished	Young people aged 16 – 25	Alabare Christian Care Centre
Swindon Foyer, Swindon	Supported accommodation	24 hour support	Young people aged 16 – 25	Jephson Housing Association
Supported Lodgings Wiltshire County Council	Supported lodgings	15 placements across Wiltshire	Young Care Leavers	Wiltshire County Council (WCC)
Springers House, Devizes	Supported Accommodation	8 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults with mental health problems	Shaftesbury Housing Association

*Long Street, Devizes	Supported Accommodation	5 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults with mental health problems	Action for a Better Life (ABLE)
*Victoria Road, Devizes	Supported Accommodation	6 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Male adults with mental health problems	Bristol Churches
WCC Adult Placement Scheme		24 placements across Wiltshire	Adults with mental health problems	WCC
<u>Pipeline Scheme</u>  Angel Yard, Marlborough	<i>Supported Accommodation</i>	<i>3 units</i>	<i>Adults with mental health problems</i>	<i>Raglan Housing Association/ to be managed by MACA</i>
Ruth House, Devizes	Supported Accommodation	4 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction	Sarsen Housing Association, managed by KASH
Queensway, Marlborough	Supported Accommodation	4 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults with severe learning disabilities	Sarsen Housing Association, managed by New Era
Rabley Wood View, Marlborough	Supported Accommodation	4 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults with severe learning disabilities	James Butcher Housing Association managed by New Era
Colston Road, Devizes	Supported Accommodation	6 bedspaces, shared facilities, furnished	Adults with moderate learning disabilities	Sarsen Housing Association managed by CARE

\* These schemes provide medium to long term supported accommodation to residents and vacancies are rare

## ADVICE SERVICES

<b>Client Group</b>	<b>Name of Service</b>	<b>Advice Provided</b>
All age and client groups	Citizens Advice Bureau	Housing advice, housing and welfare Benefits, landlord/tenant rights Illegal eviction, money advice & debt counselling, negotiation with lenders and landlords, court representation, referral to specialist support services
	'homes@kennet'	Homelessness prevention Housing options advice Referral to specialist support services
	Kennet Action for Single Homeless (KASH) – Options Drop In Centre	Homelessness prevention Housing options advice Referral to specialist support services
Families with children	SPLITZ – Parenting Alone Service	Referral to specialist advice services Pipeline : dedicated outreach worker for Kennet
Victims of domestic violence	Domestic Violence Intervention Partnership (DVIP)	Holistic advice and advocacy service throughout process of finding safety. Referral to specialist legal advice
Single People	KASH – Options Drop Inc Centre	See above
Drug and alcohol problems	Drug Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) Wiltshire County Council (WCC)	Weekly advice surgery at KASH, Devizes
Young People & Care Leavers	After Care Team, WCC	Homelessness prevention Housing options
	Education, Children & Libraries – Kennet Children & Families Team	Homelessness prevention Housing options Welfare and housing benefits
	KASH – Options Drop In Centre	Homelessness prevention Housing options Referral to specialist support agencies
	Connexions	Co-ordinated support and signposting to other agencies through personal adviser to help with homelessness, housing issues, benefits and long term career objectives
Young Offenders	Youth Offending Team Bail Accommodation	Homeless prevention Housing options Access to welfare and housing benefits Referral to specialist support services
Frail elderly/disabled persons	Kennet Care and Repair	Access to disabled facilities grants to enable disabled person to stay at home
	Age Concern	Access to welfare benefits, housing options and signposting service

## SUPPORT SERVICES

All age and client groups	Sarsen Housing Association Floating and Community Support Services	General low level support to households in temporary and permanent accommodation. Assistance to prevent homelessness
	Sarsen Temporary Shared Housing Support Worker	General low level support to homeless households in temporary shared houses
Domestic Violence	DVIP	Emotional and practical support to victims at any stage
	Sarsen Safe House Support Worker	Practical support to victims. Assist with access to other essential services e.g. education, health, housing. Low level resettlement support
Single People – all ages	KASH – Options Drop In Centre	Practical support in form of hot meals showers, washing and drying facilities. Access to other support services.
Care Leavers to age 21, Relevant students	After Care Team, WCC	Leaving care worker assigned to each care leaver and individual Pathways Plan provided. Financial assistance if qualifies.
Young people	Education, Children and Libraries service	Access to family support and Mediation.
	RELATEEN	Family mediation service
	Amber Foundation Outreach Service	Resettlement support to former residents.
People with mental health Problems	MACA	Intensive support to people with mental health problems living independently in the community
	Mental Health and Housing Co-ordinator	Assist with appropriate move-on from Hospital or interim accommodation to Permanent.
People with drug and alcohol problems	DAAT – WCC	Clinically supportive service to people who are homeless or living independently in community
	Drug and Homelessness Initiative (DHI)	General support service to people with drug and alcohol problems in temporary and permanent accommodation
	Bath Alcohol Drugs Advisory Service (BADAS)	general support and advice service
Offenders	Stonham Housing Association	Provides intensive floating support for community or prison resettlement.
	DHI – Prison Resettlement Service	Prison resettlement service for offenders with drug problems
Dual diagnosis	DHI	Will provide support to clients who have diagnosed mental health problems and are alcohol/drug dependent
	MACA	Will provide support to clients who have diagnosed mental health problems and are alcohol/drug dependent

## PRACTICAL SUPPORT SERVICES

All ages and groups	Kennet Furniture Recycling	Furniture scheme to assist homeless and low income households
	KDC Housing Benefit	Housing and Council Tax benefit for all households on low income. Pre tenancy determinations
	KDC Housing Services	Rent deposit guarantee scheme to help homeless and low income households access private rented accommodation
	DWP Benefits Agency	Social Fund payments for low income households to help obtain furniture and essential white goods
	Voluntary Action Kennet	Umbrella organisation assisting low income households to access practical support and assistance
Domestic Violence	Police Domestic Violence Unit	Advice and help on taking criminal action against the perpetrator. Provision of personal and home security measures and referral to other accommodation and support agencies

### 9.0 IMPROVING PREVENTION & SUPPORT

'Getting the right help at the right time can sometimes prevent homelessness completely or ensure that someone's experience of homelessness is less costly, both in human and financial terms" - *'More than a Roof – A Report into tackling homelessness"* ODPM 2001

As already discussed, the reasons why people become homeless are varied and complex and prevention is not simply about increasing housing supply but also about providing services that tackle the root causes.

#### **What we are currently doing**

##### Kennet District Council

Kennet has experienced a significant decrease in the level of homelessness during 2002/03. We are hopeful this is partly attributable to the introduction of a new choice based approach to lettings, which is enabling people to find permanent affordable rehousing earlier. The scheme allows people the opportunity to bid for vacancies themselves, rather than wait for a direct allocation and numbers of people who are at risk of homelessness are resolving their own need in this way.

The introduction of a new homelessness appointment system has also led to faster processing of homeless applications, with the total number of assessments being completed within 28 days being improved from 90% in the year 2001/2 to 100% in the year 2002/3.

### Kennet Citizens Advice Bureau – Housing Advice Service

Since April 2003, Kennet District Council has funded the Kennet Citizens Advice Bureau (Kennet CAB) to provide a dedicated housing advice service. A key aim of the new service is to prevent homelessness through early intervention and by providing advice about any factor that could cause someone's homelessness, for example, debt advice, landlord/tenant rights, negotiating with mortgage lenders. The Housing Advisor's work will include advocacy with private and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), lenders and debtors and court representation, when required.

### 'homes@kennet' – Housing Options Advisers

Since June 2003, 'homes@kennet' has provided two dedicated Housing Options Advisers. The Advisers' main duties will be to explore the housing options available to every household. A key objective of the new service is to prevent homelessness through early intervention and information about housing options.

For information about other advice and information services please see the supply mapping information, provided above in 7.5 *Mapping Services*.

### **Objectives over the next 3 years**

The objectives that will determine how these services develop during the life of this strategy are listed below:

- We will take action to address the main causes of homelessness in the district: Loss of private rented accommodation; relationship breakdown; request to leave by family/friends.
- We will reduce the incidence of recurring homelessness.
- We will ensure services are in place, that will enable early identification of people at risk of homelessness.
- High quality accurate, detailed information and advice across the whole range of relevant areas, will be available to every household at risk of homelessness. Housing options advice will be tailored to the individual needs of the household, to help them either remain in their own home or to move to alternative accommodation, as quickly as possible.
- Vulnerable households will have access to an advocacy service, when required.
- Support will be available to vulnerable people to help them address the issues that might threaten their tenancy and help them to remain in their current home.

### **We will achieve this by**

- Actively promoting the Kennet Housing Register to private sector tenants by inviting them to join it, in a letter sent with Housing Benefit correspondence.
- Promoting and supporting applications for Discretionary Housing Benefit payments from private sector tenants whose current accommodation is unaffordable.
- Continually developing links with private sector landlords through the Kennet Landlords' Forum.

- Working with Domestic Violence Intervention Partnership and the Police to provide women at risk of domestic violence safe, independent advice, support and home and personal security measures should they wish to remain in their own home.
- Reviewing lettings and transfer practices for tenants who are at risk of domestic violence who have rent arrears with Kennet Housing Partnership (KHP).
- Supporting the Kennet Domestic Violence Forum (Kennet DV Forum) in their strategy to increase domestic violence awareness across the community and within agencies.
- With KHP Partners, investigating feasibility of giving higher priority on the housing register to applicants who are at risk of homelessness because their relationship has irretrievably broken down.
- Referring young people and their families to mediation services available through WCC, Children and Families Teams.
- Developing closer working relationships and working protocols with statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure early identification of those people at risk of homelessness and to provide co-ordinated, effective support to homeless people.
- Publicising existing advice, information and support services further by extending leaflet drops to include GPs surgeries, information points and libraries throughout the district
- Featuring a Housing Advice page on the Kennet website, with links to other advice and information services, for example, Connexions and HOMES.
- Working jointly with other stakeholders, for example, Connexions and Education, Children and Libraries Service, WCC to extend the Schools Homelessness Prevention Education Programme, to include more schools and older age groups than currently provided.
- In partnership with Kennet CAB and KASH, developing our Housing Options Outreach Service to cover other areas of the district.
- Working in partnership with Connexions and KASH, to encourage higher take up of existing advice and support services that are available to young people.
- Appointing a Mental Health and Housing Co-ordinator, based at the 'homes@kennet' office, who will liaise with local Health Service Providers and other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide a more streamlined, responsive lettings and resettlement service to customers with mental health problems. Key aims of the new role will be to ensure customers avoid homelessness, on discharge from hospital, by moving straight into permanent accommodation and to ensure appropriate resettlement support is in place, once rehoused.
- Working in partnership with other Kennet DV Forum members to develop support for child victims of domestic violence.
- Working with CAB and Kennet Housing Association partners to formalise referral arrangements for tenants in arrears.

- Improving housing advice to prisoners by supporting Kennet CAB in their contract with the prison service, to provide a monthly housing advice surgery at HMP Erlestoke
- Ensuring that all vulnerable homeless people are automatically referred to the appropriate support services, including those with drug and alcohol problems, survivors of domestic violence and teenage parents, while they are in temporary accommodation and to help them with resettlement, in their permanent home.
- Through the Supporting People Monitoring and Review Programme, we will ensure that full needs assessments are completed for all residents in temporary accommodation.
- Introducing the revised protocol developed with WCC Children and Families Teams and the Youth Offending Team, around the rehousing of vulnerable young people and new joint assessment procedure.

## **10.0 INCREASING TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND ALTERNATIVES TO BED & BREAKFAST**

Kennet District Council has already achieved the Government's target of reducing the use of bed and breakfast to emergencies only. During 2002/3 only 2 single person households were accommodated in bed and breakfast for no longer than 12 weeks. One household, where a member was pregnant was accommodated in bed and breakfast, at the beginning of that year.

Kennet supports the view that bed and breakfast is inappropriate temporary accommodation, particularly for families with children and this strategy aims to increase the range of temporary accommodation options and to restrict the use of bed and breakfast to an absolute minimum.

### **What we are currently doing**

#### Temporary Shared Housing

Between 2000/01, Kennet District Council with Sarsen Housing Association developed three further schemes of temporary shared housing for homeless households, extending provision to cover 4 of the 5 market towns across the District. This brings the number of available rooms to 24, in total. Wherever possible, Kennet endeavours to help homeless households stay close to their existing support networks and the increase in provision was also designed to meet this aim.

#### Purchase and Repair Scheme

During 2002, Kennet worked in partnership with Kingfisher Housing Association to increase the range of temporary accommodation options, by developing the purchase and repair of two 3bed houses for homeless people in Tidworth. The properties are let on a minimum 6 month Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) basis and provide a self-contained alternative to temporary shared housing.

#### Sarsen Housing Association Leasing Scheme

Using ODPM funding, Kennet is currently working in partnership with Sarsen Housing Association to develop a private sector leasing scheme. The scheme aims to provide fifteen 1/2/3 bed houses across the District, as temporary accommodation for homeless people. Again, the aim of the

scheme is to increase the amount of temporary accommodation across the District and provide self-contained alternatives to temporary shared housing.

#### Kennet Safe Houses

Kennet experiences a high level of homelessness caused by domestic violence. During 2002, we worked in partnership with Sarsen Housing Association to develop 2 schemes of dedicated safe accommodation, for women at risk of domestic violence.

#### Ruth House - Devizes

In July 2003, Ruth House was opened, providing supported accommodation to adults in recovery from drug and alcohol problems. The scheme was developed through partnership between Kennet District Council, Sarsen Housing Association and Kennet Action for Single Homeless (KASH) with joint funding from the District Council, Housing Corporation and the Youth Offending Team. To be eligible for the scheme, residents must be engaged in a recovery programme supervised by the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and have a recognised housing need.

#### Angel Yard - MACA, Marlborough

In partnership with the District Council, Raglan Housing Association is currently developing the above scheme as move-on accommodation for adults in recovery from severe mental health problems.

Further details of these and other accommodation provision is given in *7.0 Mapping Supply*. Full details are available in the *'Kennet Homelessness Review'*.

#### **Objectives over the next three years**

The objectives that will determine how these services develop during the life of this strategy are listed below:

- We will provide a range of temporary accommodation options for homeless households, across the District and increase the supply of self-contained units.
- We will continue to ensure that B&B is used only in emergencies and that length of stay remains at less than 28 days.
- We will ensure that all temporary accommodation is of a high standard and suitable to the needs of those who live in them.
- We will continue to ensure that the average length of stay remains at no more than 12 weeks.
- We will continue to ensure that homeless households have only one temporary accommodation placement before moving on to more settled accommodation, either in supported housing schemes or an RSL tenancy, depending on their needs.
- We will continue in our endeavour to place homeless households close to their existing networks of support.
- We will work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies to ensure that homeless households have access to health services, schools, training, employment and other support services.

## **We will achieve this by**

- Continuing to develop the Private Sector Leasing Scheme, in partnership with Sarsen Housing Association, to achieve the target of fifteen 1/2/3 bed self contained units per year.
- Developing Welcome Packs for all residents in temporary accommodation, providing information about how to access local GPs, Health Visitors, Schools, Transport to Schools, local children's services, for example, nurseries and playgroups and other local support services.
- Working in partnership with Health Visitors to provide monthly surgeries at the Kennet Safe Houses and to improve referral/access arrangements for all residents in temporary accommodation.
- Investigating the feasibility of developing an accommodation scheme with 24-hour support for young single homeless people, in Devizes.
- Investigating the feasibility of developing emergency bed provision for single homeless people with existing accommodation providers.
- Work with our Supporting People Partners to review the lack of supported accommodation in the District, available to people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, drug and alcohol problems or multiple needs.
- Continually monitoring the effect of the priority card threshold on the number of relets to homeless households and length of stay in temporary accommodation.

## **11.0 ACCESS TO PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION**

Kennet District Council is an LSVT authority and has no housing stock of its own. It therefore works in close partnership with 17 local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to meet housing need in the District.

### **Kennet Housing Partnership**

Established in April 1997, the Kennet Housing Register is intended to be the single register of housing need for all the Kennet district. The Register is open to anyone who wants to apply and is the primary access route into social housing in Kennet. The demand for housing exceeds supply and the register exists to enable all households who are in need of rehousing to be included on one waiting list and to maximise their opportunities for rehousing. The Register also acts as an index of the level and nature of housing need locally.

The Kennet Housing Register is managed for the partners by Kennet District Council under the name of 'homes@kennet'.

### **Choice Based Lettings Scheme**

In April 2001, Kennet District Council and its partners won government funding to pilot a choice based approach to housing lettings in the area. The scheme has now been adopted on a permanent basis.

The aims of the 'homes@kennet' lettings service are:

- to offer realistic, informed choice for all applicants while continuing to meet housing need and homelessness.
- to offer a service that is fair, transparent and easy to understand.
- to achieve sustainable communities and minimise refusals by allowing people to choose where they will live.
- to include vulnerable customers in the lettings process and ensure that they have choices.

#### How the scheme operates

All vacancies with any of the partner associations are first advertised through the local newspaper, partnership offices, local information points, public libraries and the 'homes@kennet' website. If someone lives out of district or is unable to access any of the above sources the advert is posted to their home or a contact address.

Where more than one application is received for a particular property, priority will be normally be based on the length of time the applicant has held a tenancy or length of time waiting on the register. However, homeless customers and those with an urgent need to move, are awarded a 'priority card'. Except in circumstances where the property is exceptionally high demand i.e. receives more than 20 bids, the card gives the customer priority over other applications for a vacancy.

#### Meeting the needs of homeless households

**Homeless households who Kennet District Council has a legal duty to accommodate** are provided with a priority card for a 3 month period. During this time they can bid for as many suitably sized properties as they wish.

If the applicant has not found accommodation at the end of the 3 months, they are offered the next suitable property that becomes available. 'homes@kennet' make every effort to ensure that the property is in the area of the customer's choosing. However, this cannot always be guaranteed.

**Non priority homeless customers** are awarded a 6 month priority card to help them find suitable accommodation. If the customer has not found a home by the end of this period the card will be renewed for a further 6 months.

**Intentionally homeless customers** whose behaviour has not been such as to make them unsuitable to be a tenant, under the terms of the Homelessness Act 2002, are offered also offered a 6 month priority card that is renewable on review.

Kennet District Council assesses every case on its merits. Although there is no statutory duty to provide accommodation to intentionally homeless households for longer than a reasonable period, the council will consider whether to exercise its discretion to provide accommodation for a longer period depending on the household's circumstances.

#### Homeless households with former rent arrears

The District Council and its housing association partners have agreed the following policy regarding homeless households with former tenant debts.

Homeless customers owed a duty of accommodation by Kennet District Council who have rent arrears or other debts to a former landlord are offered temporary accommodation. They are issued with a 3 month priority card with their S184 decision letter. However, they are ineligible to bid for

advertised vacancies and therefore unable to use their card, until the debt is repaid in full or until they have consistently maintained a satisfactory agreement to repay their debt for at least 3 – 4 months.

If after 3-4 months of maintaining the repayment agreement, the debt is still outstanding, 'homes@kennet' will review the homeless household's case to assess whether they should become eligible at that stage for one reasonable offer of accommodation.

As part of the assessment, consideration will be given to the household's personal circumstances, the level of the debt, the applicant's history of arrears and any other factors that in 'homes@kennet's' opinion may be relevant.

### **What we are doing currently**

#### Proportion of lettings to homeless households

During 2001/2 the proportion of overall lettings made to homeless households owed a duty of accommodation by the district council, was approximately 19 %. This proportion increased in 2002/3 to 23%.

#### Average time to rehouse homeless households

During 2002/03, the average time for homeless households owed a duty of accommodation by the District Council, to find permanent accommodation was 107 days, compared to 554 days for other housing register customers.

### **Objectives over the next 3 years**

The objectives that will determine how these services develop during the life of this strategy are listed below:

- We will ensure that all homeless households, including those of a black or minority ethnic background, the disabled and those living in remote rural areas, continue to exercise choice and have access to all social housing opportunities.
- We will continue to meet the target set in the overall Housing Strategy of enabling the development of 1,575 units of affordable accommodation by 2011.
- We will ensure that the proportion of overall lettings to homeless households and average time to rehouse homeless customers is maintained.

### **We will achieve this by**

- Developing the 'homes@kennet' Housing Options Outreach Service.
- Reviewing lettings policy around the rehousing of non priority need and intentionally homeless customers who have former tenant debts.
- Continuing to implement the Kennet Housing Strategy.
- Continually monitoring the effect of and adjusting the priority card threshold to ensure homeless customers are rehoused at current levels.
- Establishing a database recording those properties within the overall KHP stock have been adapted or are suitable for adaptation for disabled people.

- Use new development opportunities to meet the needs of disabled people on the housing register.

## **12.0 ACCESS TO THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR**

As another housing option, Kennet District Council operate a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme (RDGS) to assist homeless households and those on a low income to find and secure rented accommodation in the private sector.

During 2002/03 16 properties have been let to households that have been homeless or in housing need through the scheme.

### Landlords Forum

Kennet District Council has been running a successful Private Lettings Agents and Landlords Forum for a number of years. The forum is held annually and is open to landlords, property owners and lettings agents. Objectives of the forum include improving links to the private rented sector, sharing good practice and raising awareness of recent legislation and issues affecting private sector renting.

### **Objectives over the next 3 years**

- To work with private sector landlords to maximise the supply of affordable private rented housing, available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

### **How we will achieve this**

- Launching a campaign to promoting the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to local lettings agencies.
- Continuing to develop the Private Sector Leasing Scheme.
- Continuing to achieve our target of bringing 40 empty homes back into use per year.
- Opposing the introduction of proposed Housing Benefit sanctions for anti-social behaviour, locally.

## **13.0 RESOURCING THE STRATEGY**

### ODPM – Homelessness Act Funding

Kennet District Council was awarded ODPM funding of £15, 000 for 2002/03 and a further £15,000 for 2003/04 to develop its private sector leasing scheme in partnership with Sarsen Housing Association. The aim of the scheme is to eliminate the use of Bed and Breakfast for homeless people.

The Council also received a further £24,000 from the Homelessness Directorate in 2003 to help it meet the new responsibilities introduced by the Homelessness Act 2002. This money has been used to commission a dedicated independent housing advice service through the CAB.

### Kennet District Council Resources

For the year 2003/04, the District Council has budgeted £179,000 for the cost of the Homelessness Service, £137,000 for the cost of the Housing Register and Housing Advice Service and a further £3,000 for the cost of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

### Supporting People

All revenue funding for the support element of supported accommodation and support services is now managed through the Supporting People Regime. Revenue funding for future projects will also be dependent on this source of funding. The size of the pot for Wiltshire is approximately £6.25 million for 2003/04.

## **14.0 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

- The Kennet Homelessness Strategy is for 3 years to July 2006.
- Progress on the Action Plan will be reviewed on a 6 monthly basis from September 2003, by the Kennet Homeless Strategy Implementation Group, described in *6.0 - Working in Partnership*.
- An annual audit of homelessness in the District will be undertaken on an annual basis.
- Members of the group will ensure that the Homelessness Strategy is reflected in all relevant local plans and strategies and used to influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.