

***West Midlands Regional
Homelessness Strategy
Refresh 2008
Executive Summary***



Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the executive summary of the West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy Refresh 2008. The full document can be found by using the following web link www.wmrhsig.org.uk or from enquiries@mwbcconsultancy.co.uk

The original Regional Homelessness Strategy was published in 2005 and since that time there has been a considerable amount of energy and commitment invested in implementing the strategy and in reducing homelessness across the West Midlands.

The refresh document highlights the **achievements** of the last three years and discusses the **pressures emerging** across the region and makes suggestions about the **way forward** for the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group in the coming two to three years.

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

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.

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 the cross sectoral '**West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group**' (RHSIG) to steer the implementation of the strategy in the region.

The West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group has been successful in 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.

The **RHSIG's** current membership reflects that cross-sectoral focus with strong representation from Local Authorities, a wide representation from the third sector, from commissioners and providers of training and employment and from the broader regional partnerships on offenders, health etc.

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The Achievements

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

- Influenced housing investment through the Regional Housing Plan and investment in supported housing
- Set up and sustained 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 the sub-regions linking worklessness and homelessness with the LSC City Partnership programme

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.

In two sub regions exciting work is underway linking training, work and housing opportunities for very vulnerable groups.

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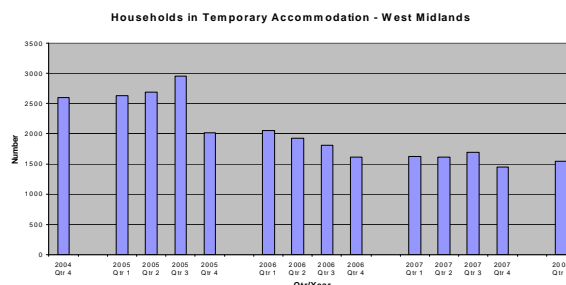
The Achievements

The RHSIG has supported partnerships across the region's local authorities that have contributed to meeting national targets on Homelessness.

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 is being investigated further.

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 government's 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.

In the West Midlands the **long term** direction of travel on tackling homelessness 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.

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Key Messages and Issues

People Becoming or at Risk of Homelessness

In the West Midlands homelessness presentations have dropped from a high point of 25,000 in 2005 to 17,700 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 as homeless under the legislation.

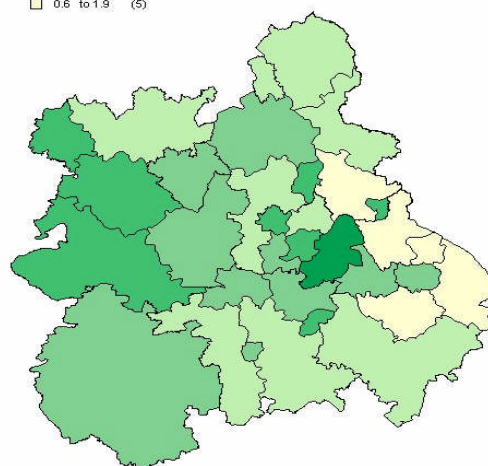
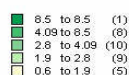
New pressures are arising and local agencies are beginning to see increased numbers of people coming forward for housing advice and homelessness support where debt (including mortgage debt) is the main issue.

There are emerging themes which need to be monitored including the numbers of people going through multiple prevention interventions and the needs of ex offenders.

Potential Hotspots For Homelessness

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.

2007 (full year)



Homeless Applications per 1000 Households

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

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Housing market issues

The 2005 West Midlands Regional Homelessness Strategy identified 'hot spots' for homelessness and included areas outside the big conurbations as potential stress areas. The Housing Executive and Housing Corporation planned to make investments that took account of these hot spots for homelessness.

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.

Best practice in homelessness prevention starts from the premise that reducing homelessness is built on sustaining a person's accommodation through social support, links to work, access to health care etc but this can only be done if a person has somewhere suitable to live.

So the supply of affordable housing stock continues to be a key factor in long term primary and secondary prevention of homelessness (*see reference on primary prevention*). Lack of affordable housing continues to be an issue across many areas of the region.

The housing market is in a state of flux and the current (2008) credit crunch is having an impact on house building and other new developments which will have significant impacts for the foreseeable future.

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.

An apparent tightening of the general needs housing market and the reduction in the scale of social rented stock appears to be leading to a slow down in movement within the social rented sector.

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.

There is early evidence that the 'buy to let' market is under pressure which is likely to have a knock on effect on potential homelessness as landlords seek to sell 'buy to let' properties.

There are early signs of increased pressure in the private rented sector as people who would have purchased houses stay in private rented accommodation and add

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pressure to a section of the market that is increasingly used by vulnerable households.

Overall the housing market in 2008 could be characterised as being slow moving and the opportunities for people to access affordable housing in both the social rented sector and the private rented sector are tightening.

The emerging pressures on the housing supply side and housing markets in general will be crucial challenges to agencies working to maintain the overall reduction in homelessness that they have achieved over the last 3 years.

The next 2 to 3 years are going to be very challenging for people at risk of homelessness and for those working with and supporting individuals and families threatened with homelessness.

The RHSIG will have an important role in helping local agencies and regional bodies to maximise their impact.

The RHSIG will have an important role in helping local development partnerships to maximise their links to the homelessness agenda.

Important partnerships for the coming 3 to 5 years

New partnerships and bodies are coming into being in the next 12 months that will have a major impact on housing and homelessness. At a national level the new Housing and Communities Agency and the Tenants Services Authority will be very important to the RHSIG. At a regional level the emerging regional structures will set some of the context for creating a difference.

Specifically the RHSIG has a potentially influential role to play in linking with:

- The emerging 'Housing and Communities Agency' and 'Tenants Services Agency'
- PSA 16 working groups at a local and regional level (*see reference on PSA 16*)
- Supporting People at a regional level
- RSLs in supporting their new role in homelessness prevention and move on.
- LSC in promoting the link between sustainable accommodation and work
- Emerging regional housing and economic partnership

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Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that the Regional Strategy and the Regional Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group have both made significant contributions to helping local partnerships.

This help has enabled local partnerships and sub regions to reduce homelessness, support prevention work and influence stakeholders.

The RHSIG has done this by:

- influencing strategy such as the investment plans of the Housing Corporation and CLG
- influencing housing policy nationally, regionally and sub-regionally
- creating opportunities for sharing practice, sharing innovation and for creating new links e.g. the link to the LSC, sub-regional action plans.



The RHSIG has provided robust leadership and created space for local agencies and sub regions to work together.

References

1. *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.*
2. *PSA 16 focuses on vulnerable adults and ensuring they have sustainable accommo-*

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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:

- explore how the RHSIG can offer useful support so that housing investment plans and partnerships can deliver affordable housing at a sub-regional level
- 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
- 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 homelessness is understood by key players in the new regional structures

The key activities for the RHSIG are going to be:

- 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

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Details of how to contact:

**West Midlands Regional Homelessness
Strategy Implementation Group**

www.wmrhsig.org.uk

mwb consultancy ltd

www.mwbconsultancy.co.uk

4 St James Terrace
Buxton
Derbyshire
SK17 6HS

Tel: 01298 26323