Homelessness Strategy for Merton 2008 – 2013

merton

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Glossary of Terms

BEM   Black and Ethnic Minority

CAB   Citizens Advice Bureau

CBL   Choice Based Lettings

CLG   Communities and Local Government

CMHT   Community Mental Health Team

DFG   Disabled Facilities Grant

EMIF   Ethnic Minority Innovation Fund

HRA   Housing Revenue Account

KLOE   Key Line of Enquiry

LAA   Local Area Agreement

LBM   London Borough of Merton

MASH   Merton Action for Single Homelessness

MerHAG   Merton Housing Association Group

RSL   Registered Social Landlord

TAFSO   Temporary Accommodation Floating Support Officer

YMCA   Young Men's Christian Association

Foreword

Homelessness can affect anyone at anytime for many reasons and having a decent home to live in is a basic human requirement. Being able to have a home contributes to the social, health, environmental and economic well-being of the community.

One of the main aims of our strategy is to address the complex problems of homelessness and recognise that at its core, we are dealing with people and their families. Thus this strategy is built upon putting people first.

This is Merton's second homelessness strategy and it sets out what needs to be done to tackle homelessness in Merton over the next five years.

Homelessness remains a serious issue for Merton and there are still challenges to be met. These are addressed in the strategy. The strategy has been developed with the input of local people and community representatives and through wide ranging consultation.

If you would like to make any comments or become involved in strategy development in future years please contact:

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The strategy can also be viewed on the council's website, **www.merton.gov.uk**

This document can be summarised in different versions such as large print, an easy to understand format, Braille or audio. For further information please contact Angela Chu.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to compile a homelessness strategy at least once every five years.

Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 was fit for purpose and in conjunction with partner agencies we were successful in achieving a high percentage of actions set out in that strategy. Over the period our main achievements were:

- A reduction in the number of formal homelessness applications

- A reduction in the use of temporary accommodation

- The development of several homelessness prevention initiatives

This strategy defines our strategic approach for 2008-2013 and is based on a comprehensive review of homelessness services. It will replace the Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 and will reflect government targets to:

- Reduce homelessness

- Halve the numbers in temporary accommodation

- Avoid the use of temporary accommodation for families and 16 and 17 year olds

- Find housing solutions to prevent homelessness

The strategy also fits into a framework of other key local strategies such as Merton's Housing Strategy and Merton's Community Plan.

Profile of Homelessness

1249 people approached the Housing Advice and Options Service for advice and assistance on homelessness in 2007/08.

The council's preventative approach resulted in 138 homelessness applications with 95 acceptances.

The main reasons for homelessness involved family or friends no longer able to accommodate, the ending of a private sector assured short hold tenancy and domestic violence. This is in line with the national profile.

Future levels of homelessness are very difficult to predict due to the many factors involved. However, continued efforts and resources for preventative activities should mean that levels of homelessness remain stable.

Existing Housing and Support

1. The council has one of the lowest housing stocks in London and the demand for a social rented tenancy greatly exceeds the supply.

2. The number of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation has declined.

3. The council has achieved and maintained the Government's target for having no families or pregnant women in bed and breakfast.

4. The Kingston and Wimbledon Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), located in Wimbledon, provides supported housing for single people, particularly 16 and 17 year olds.

5. More supported housing for 16 and 17 year olds is required.

6. Supporting People currently assists the homelessness prevention agenda and is responsible for the funding of most of the housing related support for homeless households.

7. More move on opportunities are needed to help people move out of supported

housing when they are ready and able for independent living; therefore freeing up places for others.

8. A Temporary Accommodation Strategy is in place.

9. We are addressing the needs of non-priority households through casework, advice on housing options and referrals to partner organisations.

Youth Homelessness

This strategy will address the issues facing young people and seek best practice solutions to reduce the incidence of homelessness among this client group. This is in line with the Government's agenda to improve the lives of children and young people.

Homelessness Prevention Activities

Various projects are in place to assist moves into the private rented sector for homeless households, such as the rent deposit scheme. We also provide the sanctuary scheme and spend to save scheme to prevent homelessness.

A mediation service is being funded to help young people to return or remain in the family home.

There is a need to further develop ongoing service user involvement in homelessness services.

Partnership Working and Consultation

Various consultation activities were undertaken to help develop this strategy, including a Homelessness Forum, a customer engagement workshop, a customer questionnaire and a questionnaire sent to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the locality.

There is a need for further partnership working in Merton to tackle homelessness.

Resources

In 2007/08, a grant of £120,000 was provided from Central Government to fund homelessness prevention projects.

Approximately £1.5 million of Supporting People funding from Government for the period 2008/09 will be used to provide housing related support for homeless households in Merton.

£4.6 million has been allocated by the Housing Corporation to Housing Associations operating in Merton for 2008. This money is for the provision of affordable housing. We will continue to bid for funding for the development of affordable homes.

Key Strategic Aims

Over the lifetime of this strategy, Merton will focus upon six strategic aims that are incorporated into an action plan:

1. Early intervention and prevention activities

2. To meet housing need by providing appropriate support to homeless households and increasing the supply of appropriate housing solutions

3. The provision of good quality accommodation for homeless households

4. Address youth homelessness

5. Continue to develop consultation and strengthen partnerships

6. Ensure resources effectively address the issue of homelessness in Merton

Action Plan and Monitoring

A detailed plan of the activities which will help deliver the key strategic aims are presented in chapter ten. The actions will highlight the priority areas present throughout the strategy. Each priority area has a reference number which is linked to

the action plan.

The action plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and a full review of the strategy will take place annually. Ongoing monitoring and accountability for the strategy will rest with the Homelessness Strategy Group (see appendix one for terms of reference).

Conclusion

This strategy sets out our plans over the next five years with our main focus being the preventative approach.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with partner agencies and service users. We intend to continue involving a wide range of partners to ensure the success of the strategy.

Chapter One

Introduction and Strategic Context

National Policy

In 2002, Government placed a new duty on all local authorities to develop a homelessness strategy every five years. Merton published its first strategy in July 2003 in accordance with Government requirements. This strategy is a replacement and defines the strategic approach for the period 2008-2013.

Although there is a legal requirement to review the strategy every five years, Merton will undertake a full review of this strategy annually in line with good practice. This is to ensure that the strategy focuses on the current needs of people experiencing homelessness in Merton.

Homelessness remains high on the Government's agenda, as it is seen as the most extreme manifestation of housing shortage. The Government has outlined the following aims in its homelessness policy:

- Halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation by 2010

- End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by 2010 for 16 and 17 year olds, except in an emergency

- End the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, except in an emergency, and then only for up to six weeks

- Reduce and prevent homelessness

- Prevent repeated homelessness

- Reduce rough sleeping by two-thirds

Therefore Government requires local authorities to adopt a proactive, customer-focus, problem-solving and preventative ethos.

Central to the Government's agenda is prevention. The Communities and Local Government (CLG) has identified three stages of intervention which, if adhered to, can prevent homelessness:

1. Early intervention – risks identified and support offered before the threat of homelessness becomes imminent

2. Pre-crisis intervention – such as mediation, advice, negotiation with landlords/excluders

3. Recurring homelessness – preventing repeated occurrences of homelessness

Councils have a duty to ensure that homeless households in priority need and unintentionally homeless are accommodated. Within these responsibilities, homelessness is when a person or household has no accommodation to occupy, they have been asked to leave their accommodation, or if it has become unsafe or unreasonable for them to remain or return to that property.

Previously, local authorities had a more re-active approach to dealing with homelessness. However, the Government is encouraging local authorities to shift from this traditional culture of responding in a crisis, to a more robust preventative approach. Merton has embraced this approach over the 2003-2008 period and will continue to do so over the coming period.

Consideration must also be given to the 2007 Housing Green Paper *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*. This paper is concerned, in the main, with the supply of housing, which impacts on the way we are able to deal with homelessness. The paper recommends local authorities:

- Invest in further innovative solutions to tackle empty homes

- Work with RSLs to improve the supply of social housing

- Play a stronger role in addressing housing needs by making better use of existing stock, for example addressing underoccupation

The green paper also refers to overcrowding and worklessness, these are also issues that will be tackled in this strategy.

Throughout the strategy we will ensure that priorities are linked to national objectives.

Sub-Regional Working

The council is committed to working across the sub-region and is part of the South West London Partnership. This group meets and consults with each other regularly and wherever it is beneficial to do so.

The Government is encouraging local authorities to work across their region to ensure working practices are effective. There are many opportunities for working with other local authorities across the sub region.

Merton's Progress

Merton Council is located in the South East of England on the outskirts of the Greater London area bordering Croydon, Sutton, Kingston-Upon Thames, Lambeth and Wandsworth. According to the 2001 Census, the population was 197,700, of which 18.2% are aged 16 years or less and 14% are over pensionable age. The Fordham Housing Needs Survey 2005 showed that 80.1% of Merton's households are white, with 8.3% Asian and Asian British, 7.1% Black and Black British and 4.5% in mixed and other ethnic groups. Unemployment in Merton is slightly higher than the national figure; for 2006/07 the

Office for National Statistics reported that unemployment in Merton is 6.1% compared to 5.5% across England.

Since the Government's announcement that homeless households in temporary accommodation are to be halved by 2010, Merton has had to review the way the homelessness service is delivered.

The 2003-2008 strategy contained aims and objectives to achieve the Governments targets and embrace the preventative agenda. As a result we have:

- Achieved a reduction in homelessness approaches and acceptances

- The lowest number in temporary accommodation among our other outer-London and sub-regional counterparts

- Ensured that information is made widely available – new web designed and fully implemented by November 2005

- Improved information and advice to young people – black and ethnic minority (BEM) video project completed

- Provided a housing advice surgery within the local probation office – monthly surgeries in place

- Met the target of 60% for the administration of new housing benefit claims – target exceeded at 87%

- Improved the quality of temporary accommodation by converting 20 units at Hall Place into self-contained units, with five more units under construction

- Ended the use of bed and breakfast for households with dependent children - no families in bed and breakfast since March 2004

- Increased choice in allocations – Choice Based Lettings (CBL) successfully implemented in April 2006

- Developed sheltered accommodation for African-Caribbean elders – BEM sheltered scheme completed in 2005/06

- Improved information and advice to

young people – single homelessness surgeries held weekly

- Improved communication and awareness with community and faith groups – Engagement Strategy for Hard to Reach Groups launched

- Reviewed the condition and use of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) sites – re-provision of HRA property in collaboration with Pathway Housing to create ten bed spaces for supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds

Delivering a homelessness service is a dynamic process, hence there are ongoing initiatives being considered to ensure the quality of the service continues to improve.

Links with Key Strategies and Plans

Merton's Homelessness Strategy continues to have its base underpinned within the Housing Strategy, and is linked to other key local strategies and plans as outlined below. For further information about these strategies please visit our website at **www.merton.gov.uk**.

Merton's Business Plan 2007-2010

This sets out the vision of the council, which is to put residents, taxpayers, service users and visitors of Merton, first, providing the services they need at the prices we can afford. This is encapsulated in our 'Putting You First' branding. Our aim is to be 'Fitter, Faster and Focused.'

Merton's Community Plan 2006-2015

The Merton Partnership is made up of organisations that either provide services or play a part in the public life in Merton. The Community Plan sets out how it intends to improve the quality of life for everyone in Merton. The key themes within this plan are:

- Sustainable communities

- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities
- Older people
- Children and young people

These themes have been incorporated in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

Merton's Local Area Agreement 2008-2011

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a three-year agreement between Government and the local authority. Merton's LAA focuses on improving the quality of life for Merton residents and 'Bridging the Gap' between the more deprived east and the more affluent west of the borough.

Merton's Housing Strategy 2008-2011

The Housing Strategy is the umbrella under which all housing issues sit. A new Housing Strategy has been published and this homelessness strategy is summarised as part of it.

Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010

This strategy outlines the priorities for the provision of housing related support. The aim of the strategy is to enable vulnerable people to maximise their independence, thereby building safe and fulfilled lives through supported housing circumstances that meets their needs.

Temporary Accommodation Strategy

The Temporary Accommodation Strategy sets out our objectives for the provision of temporary accommodation. We aim to provide a standard of temporary accommodation that meets the needs of every customer. The strategy sets out objectives for reducing the use of temporary accommodation and improving standards, support and procurement.

Audit Commission Inspection

In 2006 the Audit Commission undertook an inspection of Merton's homelessness and temporary accommodation service. It was assessed as 'fair' with promising prospects. The inspection highlighted a number of good performing areas of work:

- Access to services

- Sensitivity to vulnerable customers

- Speed of homelessness casework

- The standard of housing advice and monitoring

Areas of weakness were also identified:

- Lack of preventative outreach work among ethnic minority communities

- Inconsistent diversity monitoring

- Poor quality temporary accommodation and no temporary accommodation strategy in place

- No resettlement support for residents leaving temporary accommodation

- Benchmarking and service improvement

- Undeveloped approach to value for money

Since 2006 progress has been made in these areas, such as the implementation of a Temporary Accommodation Strategy and an Engagement Strategy for Hard to Reach Groups. The Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 will ensure that further improvements are made to address the recommendations of the Audit Commission.

Priority areas:

- Improve the collection of diversity data to ensure the information we hold about BEM households is accurate (ref 1.31)

- Further develop outreach opportunities with BEM communities (ref 1.30)

- Ensure households leaving temporary accommodation receive the support they need to maintain a permanent tenancy (ref 2.21)

- Work with partners in the sub-region to consider benchmarking opportunities (ref 5.8)

- Consider feasibility of introducing mystery shopping for housing needs services (ref 5.9)

- Ensure key housing needs processes provide value for money (ref 6.2, 6.3)

Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs)

The Audit Commission assesses services using their KLOE framework. We are keen to ensure that our services are continually audited against these KLOEs in order to identify areas for improvement. In 2008 we reviewed our progress against the Homelessness and Housing Advice KLOE.

Areas where we have rated ourselves as good or excellent include:

- Our ability to provide information in a range of languages and formats

- The provision of an effective plan to meet the 2010 temporary accommodation target

- Communication with homeless households placed in temporary accommodation

- The operation of our homelessness prevention fund

We have rated ourselves fair in 40% of the areas identified in the KLOE and poor in 5.7% of the areas.

The development of our Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 and action plan reflect the results of the KLOE audit and we will ensure that the results of future audits are addressed in the annual review process for the strategy.

Priority areas:

- Undertake a value for money review of partnerships (ref 6.1)

- Ensure our homelessness applications procedure reflects legislation, codes of practice and good practice (ref 1.8)
- Review the housing needs service standards (ref 1.2)
- Achieve Customer Service Excellence Accreditation (ref 1.1)
- Review progress against the KLOE on an annual basis (ref 6.4)

Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

This document provides an insight into homelessness in Merton and how we plan to address the vast range of issues affecting homeless households or households threatened with homelessness.

We begin by reviewing our Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 and outlining our performance against the action plan for the period. This is detailed in chapter two.

Chapter three sets out homelessness trends in Merton and how this affects our priorities for the 2008-2013 period.

Chapter four refers to affordable housing options and how this works to reduce homelessness and the demand on temporary accommodation. This chapter also looks at the support needs of homeless customers and how we can address these needs in order to reduce incidences of homelessness.

Chapter five on preventing homelessness looks at current service provision and how we can continue to develop early intervention and advice services.

Chapter six is dedicated to the specific issue of youth homelessness. It sets out national and local policy recommendations and what we need to do to tackle this issue.

Chapter seven is about partnership working and consultation on homelessness. It refers to the Homelessness Strategy Group and Forum and how these have helped us to develop this strategy. This chapter also details the results of the various consultation exercises that have informed this strategy.

Chapter eight on resources and challenges looks at how funding is being delivered to meet homelessness needs and the possible future sources of funding required. It also sets out the issues that might impact on the use of resources and delivery of services.

Based on a review of trends, policy and consultation chapter nine sets out our strategic aims for the 2008-2013 period.

Chapter ten contains the action plan that will help us deliver the priorities for action identified throughout this strategy.

Chapter Two

2003-2008 Performance Summary

Strategic Aims

The Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 was based on the long-term vision that Merton residents should have a range of housing options available to them that suit their individual needs. There were four overarching aims:

1. To reduce the incidence of homelessness through prevention

2. To maximise housing, support options and choice for homeless households

3. To develop an effective, evidence based inter-agency strategy that minimises homelessness in the longer term

4. To meet the diverse needs of all people who are homeless or at the risk of becoming homeless

Review Process

During 2007/08 a review of the 2003-2008 Homelessness Strategy was undertaken to measure its success. This was essential to evaluate performance against the action plan and to confirm actions that needed to be carried forward into this new strategy.

The review consisted of interviews with partners and information sharing through the Homelessness Strategy Group and Forum.

Findings

The 2003-2008 Homelessness Strategy Action Plan contained 15 objectives, 136 actions and 222 targets.

Over the period 35 targets became unachievable, due to changes in legislation and national and local priorities. These targets were removed from the action plan following agreement with the Homelessness Strategy Group, leaving 187 feasible targets.

Performance was measured against targets as opposed to actions or objectives given that multiple targets were often associated with each. This allowed for clearer and more precise evaluation.

The evidence and outcomes appertaining to each target were verified by the Homelessness Strategy Group.

Overall, 71% of the targets set were met with another 8% still in progress; a commendable achievement. A further 12% were partly met and 8% unmet. A full breakdown of performance against the action plan is set out in figure 1 (page 16).

With the changes we have implemented for this new strategy, we are confident that we will improve on our performance over the coming period.

Figure 1. Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 – Performance against targets

		Number of Targets					
	Objective	Met	Partly Met	Unmet	On-going	**Total**	% Met
1.1	Advice and information widely available	15	1	2	3	**21**	71%
1.2	Identify people at risk of homelessness and target assistance	7	1	2	6	**16**	44%
1.3	Preventing people becoming homelessness due to family breakdown	4	2	1	0	**7**	57%
1.4	Ensuring people leaving institutional care do not become homeless	5	0	0	0	**5**	100%
1.5	Prevent people becoming homeless from the private sector	3	2	2	0	**7**	43%
1.6	Social Landlords work to prevent homelessness	2	5	2	0	**9**	22%
1.7	Ensure that Housing Benefit does not contribute to homelessness	7	2	0	0	**9**	77%
2.1	Enable people in housing crisis to access accommodation	9	1	1	0	**11**	81%
2.2	Minimise the length of time households stay in temporary accommodation	5	0	0	0	**5**	100%
2.3	Enable access to affordable and appropriate housing	19	3	1	5	**28**	68%
2.4	Ensure the availability of housing support to people moving on or to help tenancy sustainment	6	0	1	0	**7**	86%
3.1	Ensure services work together to met the needs of people at risk of homelessness	17	2	1	0	**20**	85%
3.2	Ensure the needs of homeless people are integral to strategy development	0	1	1	0	**2**	0%
3.3a	To promote social cohesion through access to health services	6	0	0	1	**7**	86%
3.3b	To promote social cohesion through access to education	7	1	0	0	**8**	87%
3.3c	To promote social cohesion through access to training and employment	8	0	0	0	**8**	100%
3.4	To improve our evidence base	13	2	1	1	**17**	76%
	Total number of targets	**133**	**23**	**15**	**16**	**187**	**71%**

Key Achievements

The strategy review identified areas where excellent progress was made:

- Promoting social inclusion through equal access to health, training and education

- Ensuring that existing services are working together effectively to meet the needs of people who are, or at risk of becoming, homeless

- Ensuring that housing support is available to assist people to move on to more appropriate, or to sustain existing, accommodation

- Minimising the length of time households stay in temporary accommodation

- Ensuring that people leaving institutional care do not become homeless

- Ensuring advice and information is available

- Having no families in bed and breakfast accommodation

We also identified areas where progress was slow or problematic:

- Identifying people at risk of homelessness and targeting assistance

- Preventing people from becoming homeless from the private sector

- Ensuring the housing management practices of RSLs work to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness

- Ensuring the needs of homeless people are integral to the development of the strategy

These areas have informed our priorities for action and are incorporated into the new strategy.

For a full review of the 2003-2008 Homelessness Strategy Action Plan please contact Angela Chu on 0208 545 3619 or **angela.chu@merton.gov.uk** .

Chapter Three

Homelessness Trends in Merton

Overview of Homelessness Activity

Homelessness is used to describe a wide range of circumstances where people do not have a settled home. In legislation, homelessness can be defined, for the purpose of determining entitlement to help, as someone living in insecure accommodation and who has satisfied the criteria of being vulnerable and therefore in priority need.

Merton has continued to see a decline in homelessness acceptances and is effectively working towards the target of achieving a 50% reduction in the numbers in temporary accommodation by 2010. The baseline figure for the target was taken from the numbers in temporary accommodation at the end of December 2004; at that time we had 174 households in temporary accommodation. By the 31st March 2008, this figure had reduced to 105.

Our housing advice and options service provides advice and assistance as appropriate to households in priority need and single non-priority cases. The service enables many people to avoid the crisis of becoming homeless. As a result only a small percentage of those seeking advice make a homeless application. In 2007/08 there were 95 homelessness acceptances out of a possible 1249 that sought advice and assistance.

The current preventative activities are therefore crucial to maintaining the low numbers of people actually making a homeless approach.

Homelessness Decisions

In 2007/08 1249 households approached the authority for advice and assistance with homelessness. We were able to prevent 1111 of these households from becoming homeless and making a formal application for assistance. Many of these preventions were facilitated through allocations under our CBL scheme and the private rented sector. In 2007/08 446 homes were let through CBL and 106 in the private rented sector.

There were 138 formal homelessness applications in 2007/08. Figure 2 (page 19) breaks down the decisions made in respect of these applications and trends since 2003/04. It shows that there has been a continuous reduction in applications and acceptances between 2003 and 2008. Figure 3 (page 19) demonstrates the reduction in homelessness acceptances in the 2003 to 2008 period, which reflects the investigative and preventative work carried out by the Housing Advice and Options Team.

Among the sub-regional boroughs we have the lowest number of homelessness acceptances. This is demonstrated in figure 4 (page 20).

Repeat Homelessness

For statistical purposes repeat homelessness occurs when a priority need household is accepted as homeless and they had also been accepted as homeless by the authority in the last two years. Repeat homelessness is not a major issue in Merton. During 2007/08 there were no incidences of repeat homelessness.

During the 2003-2008 period we worked in partnership with the London Housing Unit to research repeat homelessness in the borough. Due to the historically low levels of repeat homelessness the sample size used for the research was small and therefore no significant factors could be

Figure 2. Homelessness applications and decisions 2003-2008

Decision	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Homeless applications accepted	204	261	215	107	95
Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally homeless	9	16	12	7	8
Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	109	252	86	4	8
Eligible but not homeless	540	115	27	35	26
Ineligible	0	0	0	0	1
Total	**862**	**644**	**340**	**153**	**138**

Figure 3. Homelessness acceptances 2003-2008
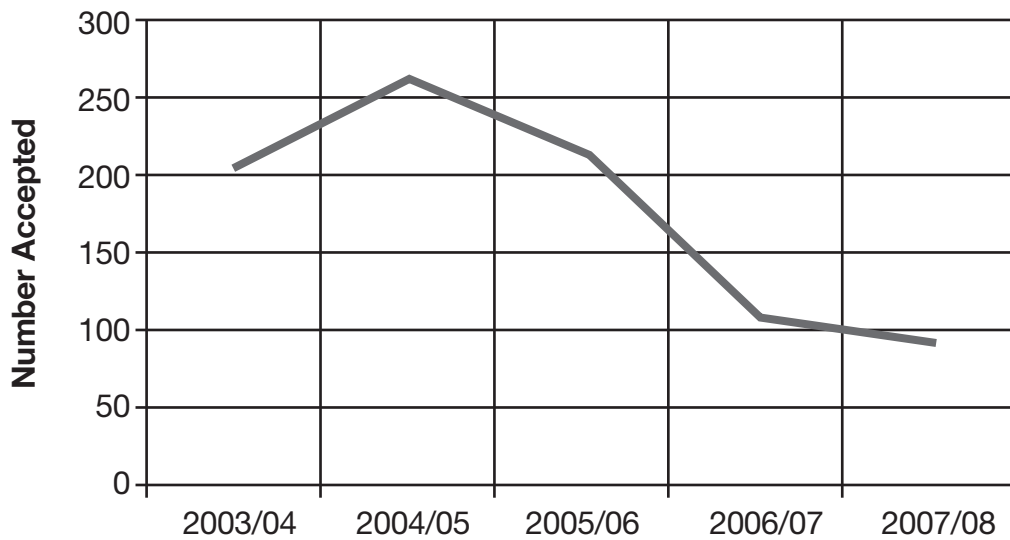
Figure 4. Sub-regional homelessness acceptances 2006/07
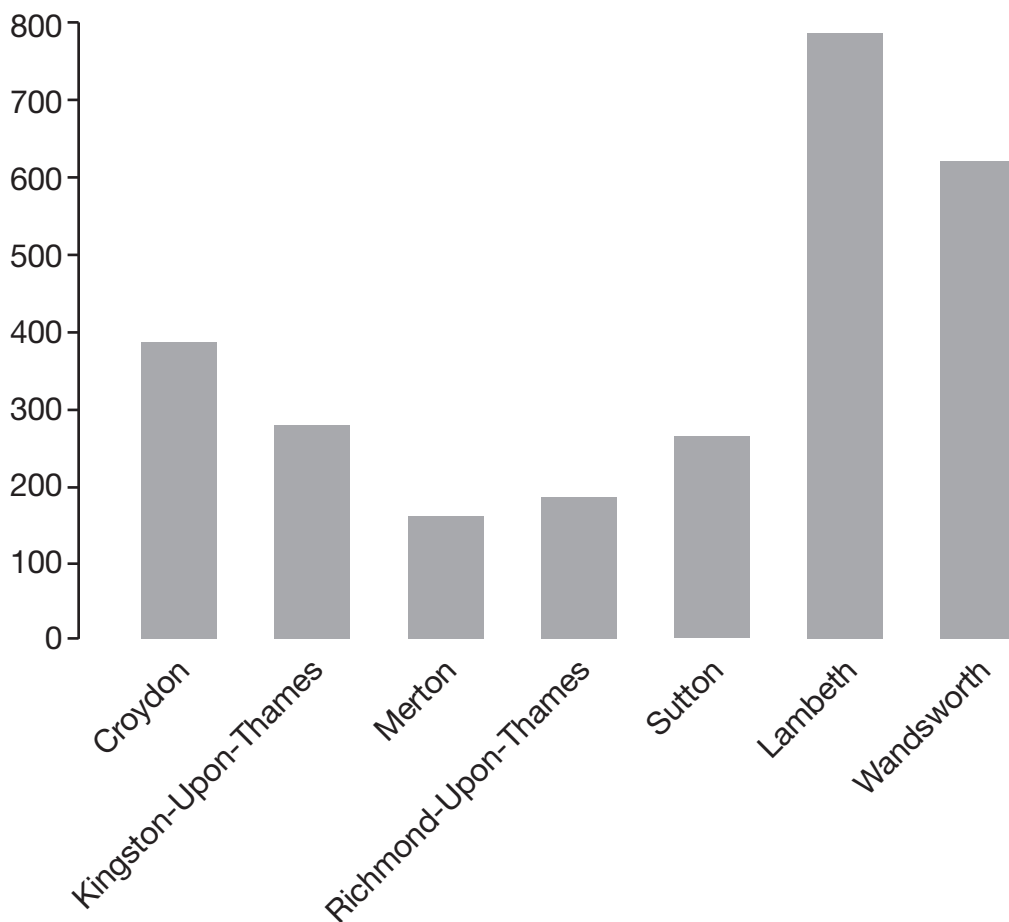
Profile of Homelessness

The vast majority of homelessness approaches are from households with dependent children, 16 and 17 year olds, people with mental health problems and households with pregnant women. This remains fairly constant each year although we have seen a reduction in the number of 16 to 17 year olds making applications. This is largely as a result of our tailored housing advice service for this age group. In 2007/08 there were 39 applications from 16 and 17 years olds. This has declined from a peak of 62 applications in 2003/04.

Figure 5 (page 23) sets out homelessness acceptances in 2007/08 by priority need group. The trend reflects the profile of

households who approach the service for advice and assistance.

Figure 6 (page 24) confirms the main reasons for homelessness among all statutory homeless households in 2007/08. The figures are indicative of trends in the period 2003-2008. The most frequent causes of homelessness are parental evictions, friends or relatives no longer willing to provide accommodation, termination of assured shorthold tenancies and domestic violence.

Priority areas:

• Ensure homelessness prevention data is accurately recorded, analysed and used to inform service development (ref 1.9, 1.10)

- Review prevention procedures in order to reduce all the main causes of homelessness (ref 1.27)

- Continue to prioritise the needs of households in insecure accommodation through home visits and the promotion of housing options and CBL (ref 1.6)

- Proactive liaison with private sector landlords to maximise housing solutions (ref 2.13, 2.14, 2.15)

- Reduce homeless as a result of domestic violence by publishing a domestic violence resource pack for victims (ref 1.21), researching issues with the sanctury scheme (ref 1.22) and launching an options guide for staff (ref 1.23)

- Reduce homelessness as a result of parental/relative evictions through an evaluation of our pilot mediation scheme (ref 1.25) and ensure that 100% of new cases are referred onto mediation (ref 1.26)

- Reduce homelessness as a result of termination of assured shorthold tenancy by achieving a 10% annual reduction in homelessness acceptances in this category from a baseline of 12 (ref. 1.24)

- Prevent homelessness among people leaving prison or who are on remand (ref 1.18)

- Ensure asylum seekers have access to suitable accommodation and housing advice (ref 1.20)

Ethnicity

Within the last 15 years, Merton has seen a significant rise in the number of people from BEM backgrounds living in the borough. The Fordham Housing Research Survey 2005 found that the BEM population now accounts for 19.9% of total residents in the borough. The three main BEM groups in Merton are Asian, African Caribbean and Chinese.

42% of housing register applications in Merton are from BEM households. This shows that they are more likely than their white counterparts to require housing assistance.

Homelessness is also a prevalent issue among BEM households. They are over-represented in the numbers who approach the authority for assistance with homelessness, particularly households from African or Caribbean backgrounds. Figure 7 (page 25) compares the percentage of households accepted as homeless against the ethnic breakdown of the local population.

In 2005 the Office of the Deputy Primeminister published *Tackling Homelessness amongst Ethnic Minority Households*. This publication aims to help local authorities develop inclusive services for their populations. Our 2008-2013 strategy embraces the recommendations set out in this publication, the following priority areas are identified.

Priority areas:

- Reduce the level of homelessness among BEM households (ref 1.32)

- Implement the departmental Equalities Impact Schedule (ref 1.29)

- Undertake an equalities impact assessment to determine the impact of the 2008-2013 Homelessness Strategy (ref 1.28)

- Identify the specific needs of BEM households in order to tackle homelessness (ref 1.33)

- Improve communication with BEM community groups about housing and homelessness (ref 1.34)

- Ensure the supply of new build properties meets the diverse needs of all homeless customers (ref 2.9)

To date we have achieved the following, in order to address housing and homelessness

issues among our BEM population:

- Secured £42,855 in funding from the Ethnic Minority Innovation Fund (EMIF) to reduce and prevent homelessness among BEM groups
- 81% of actions in our Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy have been completed and a new action plan for 2008-2011 implemented
- Established regular meetings with BEM and faith groups to provide information on housing options

The EMIF resources we secured have been used to develop a multi-media project. This project is focussed on educating young people about housing and homelessness issues and has engaged young people in the research and development of four videos.

We also work with RSLs who operate specifically to provide housing for BEM groups.

Priority areas:

- Ensure the supply of new build properties meets the needs of BEM households (ref 2.8)
- Provide training to RSLs on housing options and homelessness prevention, targeting BEM RSLs (ref 1.12)

Rough Sleepers

The numbers sleeping rough on Merton's streets are minimal compared to other inner and outer London boroughs. The last review found there was only one person actually sleeping rough.

The Government has highlighted rough sleeping as one of its major concerns and has outlined six key principles, which are:

- Tackle the root causes of rough sleeping
- Pursue approaches which help people off the streets and reject those which sustain a street lifestyle
- Focus on those most in need
- Never give up on the most vulnerable
- Rough sleepers to become active members of the community
- Be realistic about what can be offered to those who are capable of helping themselves.

Priority area:

- To update our information on rough sleepers through a hotspot count and develop a strategy for prevention if necessary (ref 1.19)

Figure 5. Homelessness acceptances by priority need group 2007/08

Priority Need Group	2007/08	
	Number	Percentage
Household homeless as a result of emergency	0	0%
Household including dependent children	52	55%
Household including pregnant women and no other dependent children	8	8%
Applicant 16 or 17 years old	15	16%
Applicant formally "in care" aged 18 to 20 years old	0	0%
Household vulnerable as a result of old age	2	2%
Household vulnerable as a result of physical disability	4	4%
Household vulnerable as a result of mental illness or disability	12	13%
Drug dependency	0	0%
Alcohol dependency	1	1%
Former asylum seeker	0	0
Other special reason	1	1%
Applicant vulnerable as a result of having been "in care"	0	0%
Applicant vulnerable as a result of having served in HM Forces	0	0%
Applicant vulnerable as a result of having been in custody/on remand	0	0%
Applicant vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence/threat of violence	0	0%
Total	**95**	**100%**

Figure 6. Main reason for loss of last settled home among statutory homeless households 2007/08

Reason	2007/08	
	Number	Percentage
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	26	27.4%
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	16	16.8%
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	0	0%
Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	12	12.6%
Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	2	2.1%
Racially motivated violence	0	0%
Other forms of violence	9	9.5%
Racially motivated harassment	0	0%
Other forms of harassment	0	0%
Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	0	0%
Rent arrears on local authority or other public sector dwellings	0	0%
Rent arrears on RSL or other housing association dwelling	0	0%
Rent arrears on private sector dwellings	1	1.1%
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	12	12.6%
Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	5	5.2%
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	1	1.1%
Left prison/on remand	0	0%
Left hospital	4	4.2%
Left other institution or local authority care	4	4.2%
Left HM Forces	0	0%
Other	3	3.2%
Total	**95**	**100%**

Figure 7. Acceptances by ethnicity 2007/08

Ethnic group	Percentage accepted as homeless	Percentage of total population
White	41%	80.1%
African/Caribbean	26%	7.1%
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	8%	8.3%
Other ethnic groups, including Chinese	15%	4.5%
Unknown	10%	0%

Chapter Four

Housing Supply and Support

Affordable Housing

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is key to delivering settled accommodation for Merton residents. The number of social housing lettings has continued to decline since 2001/02, while demand has increased.

In 2007/08, we let 446 homes; a combination of RSL and council properties. 85 of these homes were let to homeless households. The majority of the 446 homes we let were flats without gardens. In previous years the number of available properties has been in decline, largely as a result of the right to buy.

There is a relatively small proportion of social housing in Merton compared to other London boroughs, making up only 14% of all housing stock in the borough. As a result we have implemented other initiatives to meet housing need, such as the private sector rent deposit scheme and empty homes work.

Despite the longstanding imbalance between the supply and demand for affordable homes, the council has continued to maintain its position of having the lowest number of households in temporary accommodation in London. In December 2004 the number of households in temporary accommodation stood at 174. In March 2008 the number had fallen to 105. We are therefore taking positive steps to meet the Governments target to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation.

Our aim is to ensure that homeless people are offered settled accommodation thus decreasing the need for temporary accommodation. We are able to achieve this by improving the supply of housing through:

- Exploring all the available options to secure settled affordable homes, regardless of tenure
- Maximising Section 106 planning agreements to support affordable housing developments
- Exploring new private sector initiatives

The London Plan sets a target of 50% affordable housing on all privately developed housing sites, unless an economic viability appraisal demonstrates that this is not achievable. It also lowers the threshold so that any site accommodating ten homes or more will include a proportion of affordable housing, both social housing and intermediate housing. The London Plan therefore enables us to maximise new affordable housing opportunities.

New affordable housing in Merton is funded with social housing grant provided by the Housing Corporation. £4.6 million has been awarded for 2008 to RSLs for new developments in Merton.

We have worked with the South West London Partnership to set out sub-regional priorities for affordable housing, including the need for larger homes and tenure mix. Funding from the national affordable housing programme is made available on a sub-regional basis by the Housing Corporation. Nomination rights to new properties are agreed between boroughs in the sub-region. Merton is a net importer of nominations under current arrangements.

Land supply is crucial to the provision of affordable housing. We are currently carrying out a strategic land assessment to establish realistic affordable housing targets and site capacity over the next 15 years.

Our private sector rent deposit scheme has attracted a wide range of private tenancies for people on low incomes. The success of the scheme has been facilitated by our fast track housing benefit scheme. Since the scheme began in 2003, 398 tenancies have been enabled.

Access to good quality private rented accommodation is central to decreasing homelessness and remains a key part of the 2008-2013 strategy.

The council also continues to promote options and incentives to underoccupying council tenants to free up larger rented homes for families in housing need. In the coming period we will be working with partner social housing providers to develop a common underoccupation scheme, thus ensuring the best use of housing resources across the borough.

We have also been allocated a grant of £110,000 from the CLG to assist us in the development of an underoccupation strategy and the use of cash incentives schemes to encourage underoccupiers to downsize.

Merton has also continued to utilise housing property assets to provide new accommodation, including eight supported homes for young single homeless people and 15 bed spaces for adults with learning difficulties.

We are currently consulting tenants and leaseholders in the option of transferring our housing stock to a housing association. Assuming a positive ballot planned for Spring 2009, we need to ensure that appropriate nomination rights are secured in order that we can continue to meet our statutory homeless function.

The impact of the 2008 credit crunch must also be considered as we anticipate that this may result in a possible increase in homeless households who have lost their home as a result of rent or mortgage arrears. The affect of this could be larger numbers in temporary accommodation and a greater demand for settled housing through either our housing register or rent deposit scheme.

Priority areas:

- Ensure efficient use of council housing stock (ref 2.1, 2.2)

- Maximise the supply of new affordable housing (ref 2.4, 2.5)

- Ensure the supply of new build housing meets long term housing needs in order to reduce the risk of homelessness in the future (ref 2.10)

- Work with RSL partners to increase the supply of larger housing (ref 2.6)

- Maximise re-housing opportunities in the RSL sector (ref 2.7)

- Maximise the number of empty properties in the private rented sector that have been returned to use (ref 2.11)

- Expand the supply of homes through the rent deposit scheme (ref 2.12)

- Maximise the length of tenancies offered through the rent deposit scheme (ref 2.14)

- Review the terms and conditions of the rent deposit scheme in order to maximise re-housing opportunities (ref 2.15)

- Work with RSLs and service users to review underoccupation schemes in the borough (ref 2.17, 2.18, 2.19)

- Maximise re-housing opportunities for Merton residents in the event of a stock transfer (ref 2.3)

Temporary Accommodation

The main provision of temporary accommodation for homeless households is commissioned through Hall Place, which offers good standard self-contained accommodation. Households residing here are regarded as homeless for the duration

of their stay due to the insecure living arrangements.

We also work with other accommodation providers in the borough who supply temporary accommodation for specific groups of homeless households, such as the YMCA who provide accommodation for single people and Merton's Women Refuge who provide safe and suitable accommodation for women made homeless as a result of domestic violence.

The Government expects all local authorities to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by halve by 2010. The council is committed to meeting this target, our baseline figure was taken in December 2004 when the total number of households in temporary accommodation was 174.

Bed and breakfast is not a suitable form of temporary accommodation because of the lack of facilities, impact on privacy and the health and well-being of households. The Government expects local authorities not to have anyone in bed and breakfast accommodation by 2010. We have already met this target for households with children or where a member of the households is pregnant. We have also been successful in reducing the number of single people in bed and breakfast from 40 at the end of 2003/04 to 12 at the end of 2007/08.

Since the Audit Commission Inspection in 2006 we have implemented a Temporary Accommodation Strategy, which deals with many of the issues raised. During 2008 we will be reviewing the Temporary Accommodation Strategy and must ensure that changes are reflected in the review process for the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

Priority areas:

- Reduce the number of all households in temporary accommodation by 2010 (ref 3.1)

- Reduce the number of households with children, or pregnant women, living in temporary accommodation (ref 3.2)

- Continue to ensure that families with children, or pregnant women, are not accommodated in bed and breakfast (ref 3.3)

- Encourage and support households in temporary accommodation to bid for settled accommodation through our CBL scheme (ref 3.4)

- Options advice for households in temporary accommodation (ref 3.5)

- Achieve permanent housing solutions in the private rented sector for homeless households in temporary accommodation (ref 2.20)

- Review Temporary Accommodation Strategy and update action plan annually to ensure that temporary accommodation meets the needs of every customer (ref 3.6)

Supporting People

Supporting People can be categorised under two main themes: supporting people at home and supported housing.

Supporting People at Home

The review of the Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 found that the vast majority of households applying for assistance with accommodation were vulnerable and accepted as priority need. This may be because of their age, because they have dependant children, or have special needs such as a disability. Although, some of these households may be eligible for help and support from other agencies or council departments, such as Adult Social Care, many do not qualify for this support.

Assistance from the Supporting People Partnership for qualifying households includes advocacy, benefits advice and life skills training. Over 2000 residents in Merton receive such housing support. Our aim is to help all vulnerable people

improve the quality of their lives by making sure that their basic housing and support needs are met. The result is greater independence, better health and a more stable living environment. Re-housing vulnerable households without support makes it more likely that they will be unable to sustain a tenancy and become homeless again.

In 2007, the post of Tenancy Sustainment Officer was created to assist council housing tenants to maintain their tenancies through advice and assistance with budgeting, rent arrears, benefits and anti-social behaviour. A similar service is provided for households in temporary accommodation by our Temporary Accommodation and Floating Support Officer (TAFSO).

During the review of the Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 it emerged that partner organisations need to work together more closely to make sure that advice and support on health is available to homeless households from GP's, hospitals and voluntary and community groups.

The council also recognises that there is a gap in the provision of advice and access to employment and training for homeless people. Over the coming period we will seek to develop a comprehensive approach to assist, signpost and support volunteering, training and employment opportunities for homeless people.

Currently no support services are provided to households renting accommodation through our rent deposit scheme. We will explore the provision of support services for these customers during the coming period.

We are also part of the Notify scheme, which supports statutory service provision for people living in temporary accommodation and who move across borough boundaries. We will continue to work with other statutory partners to ensure the scheme remains fully operational.

Supported Housing
Whilst support can be successfully provided in people's homes there remains a need for supported housing to meet specific needs.

Supported housing in Merton is managed by the Supporting People Team with operational services carried out by council departments, housing associations or voluntary organisation. The Supporting People service funds 272 units of accommodation for homeless people with support needs.

Young people
Supported housing schemes for young single homeless people in Merton are managed by Merton Action for Single Homeless (MASH), YMCA, Pathway, Grenfell Housing Association and Wandle Housing Association. The various schemes supply 81 supported housing units. The support is low level and focussed on preparing young people for living in independent accommodation. A further 11 units are available providing floating support for this client group.

Teenage parents are more likely to suffer social exclusion. We work with Wandle Housing Association to provide six supported housing units and six floating support places for teenage lone parents. Demand for these services exceeds supply. For example, in 2006/07, 16 referrals were made for floating support and two teenage parents were placed in unsupported accommodation.

Older people
Older people can have both physical and mental support needs and because they often lack support networks they need help from statutory or voluntary organisations to help sustain a settled home. Homelessness amongst older people is traditionally low in Merton, only two households were found to be statutory homeless as a result of old age in 2007/08. The low numbers can be put

down to the provision of sheltered housing in the borough, enabling moves from general needs housing to a supportive environment.

There are approximately 1000 homes designated for older people in the borough, provided by the council and RSLs. In the main schemes provide basic sheltered housing support although there are 95 extra care placements in the borough, a mix of private and RSL units. The council has some difficult to let sheltered housing and our Best Value Review for Older People indicates that we need to address this issue in order to continue to meet demand for this type of housing and prevent homelessness.

Ex-offenders

Ex-offenders often have problematic housing histories and are at a high risk of homelessness. We work with Hestia Homes who provide supported housing for ex-offenders in Merton. In 2006/07 eight placements were available in this scheme, which supports clients until they are ready for independent living in permanent accommodation.

Substance mis-use clients

Drug and alcohol misuse can both cause and may also be the result of homelessness. Misuse is also symptomatic of other issues such as mental health problems, experience of physical or sexual abuse, unemployment and relationship breakdown. This client group therefore has multiple support issues and is at high risk of homelessness. Despite this we only accepted one person as homelessness in 2007/08 as a result of drug or alcohol misuse. However, partner agencies indicate that homelessness is a bigger issue among this client group than our figures suggest. As indicated this client group may be vulnerable for a variety of reasons associated with alcohol and drug misuse and the way we record priority need may be disguising the real extent of the issue.

For example, 13% of homeless households in 2007/08 were in priority need and accepted as homeless due to vulnerability resulting from mental illness or disability. It is possible that these clients may also have been vulnerable as a result of drug or alcohol misuse and we need to ensure in future we are recording secondary categories of priority need to create a more accurate picture of need. We also need to work with partner agencies to ensure that people with substance misuse problems are aware of the advice and support services provided by the council.

At present the council has one floating support worker who works with clients leaving drug treatment. We also have 11 supported housing units funded by Supporting People for clients with alcohol problems.

Domestic violence clients

Since the introduction of the Housing Act 2002, people fleeing violence could be considered to be in priority need. Households fleeing their home as a result of domestic violence is one of the main causes of homelessness in Merton.

Refuges remain a common temporary housing solution for people fleeing violence. Supporting People currently funds 20 units in refuges, including three units designated specifically for Asian women.

In 2006/07 we worked with the Safer Merton Partnership to introduce our sanctury scheme. The scheme helps prevent victims of violence from becoming homeless by upgrading the security in their home. The scheme is not an emergency response and not suitable for all clients. A risk assessment will determine suitability. To date only four referrals have been made. We need to investigate the reasons for low take-up and further promote the scheme.

Clients with HIV/Aids

The lifespan and quality of life for people

living with HIV/Aids has increased through advancements in treatment. However, it is imperative they reside in accommodation that helps them to maintain independence. We have worked with the Supporting People Partnership and Wandle Housing Association to secure funding from the Department of Health to fund the development of five units of accommodation for this client group. In addition, Supporting People currently provide funding for nine supported housing units.

Households with mental or physical disabilities

During 2007/08 13% of homeless acceptances were from people with mental health problems. This client group often find independent living difficult and can have difficulty maintaining tenancies. Supporting People currently funds 154 places for people with mental health problems. A Mental Health Accommodation Panel has also been established to ensure that people being discharged from institutional care are able to access the right support and services in the borough in order to prevent homelessness.

According to figures from the Department of Health it is also apparent that clients from BEM backgrounds are more likely to have mental health problems. Given this and the over-representation of homelessness among BEM groups we must work with partner organisations to ensure that support services are tailored appropriately.

People with physical, learning and sensory disabilities comprised 4% of homelessness acceptances in 2007/08. We are keen to develop new initiatives to provide housing outcomes for this group. We are currently working in partnership with Fourability Housing Association to develop shared ownership homes, which will yield eight homes for people with physical or sensory disabilities. In addition, during 2007/08 we

worked with local RSLs to develop 18 new disabled persons units for rent.

Priority areas:

- Explore the provision of support services to customers taking up tenancies through the rent deposit scheme (ref 2.25, 2.26)

- Explore new opportunities for providing supported accommodation for teenage parents (ref 2.27)

- Ensure that no teenage parents are in unsupported accommodation (ref 2.28)

- Ensure that primary and secondary categories of priority need are recorded to ensure information on substance mis-use is accurately recorded (ref 2.29)

- Identify trends in primary and secondary priority need categories (ref 2.30)

- Housing Needs staff to undertake training to assist in the identification of homeless people at risk of substance mis-use (ref 2.31)

- Work with Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) to ensure housing and advice services do not disadvantage people with mental health issues (ref 2.32)

- Ensure support services meet the needs of BEM households who have mental health issues (ref 2.33)

Non-priority Homeless Households

As well as providing a service to statutory homeless households we also have a duty to provide advice to households who are not in priority need. These are mainly single people and couples without dependent children.

In 2007/08, 184 cases of non-priority were seen by the council's housing advice service. There was considerable diversity in the nature of the cases seeking housing advice, these included households of no fixed abode, end of a private sector

tenancy, financial difficulties regarding payments of mortgage and rent, end of social housing tenancy.

Whilst these households are not entitled to an offer of a social housing tenancy the Housing Advice Team provided:

- Casework through the single homeless surgery
- Nominations to the Young Persons Supported Accommodation Panel
- Advice on housing options, including referrals to single homeless projects, hostels and access to social housing
- Advice on private tenants rights
- Advice on welfare benefits

We also work with households facing harassment and unlawful eviction from landlords in the private rented sector. This includes potential enforcement of the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and, where there are issues of disrepair, giving advice on tenants rights under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

Priority areas:

- Review reasons for non-priority homelessness and update service provision to ensure non-priority homeless households receive appropriate advice and assistance (ref 2.34, 2.35)

Chapter Five

Merton's Role in Preventing Homelessness

Housing information and advice is available from a wide range of services across the borough. Some services are provided by the council, others are provided by voluntary and community organisations. These include the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the Wandsworth and Merton Law Centre. The council and its partners provide practical ways to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to find or keep their home.

The review of homelessness in Merton has identified a number of ways in which we can develop and improve homelessness prevention services. These are:

- Encouraging early action to prevent homelessness by outreach work with schools and community groups and by promoting early access to advice services

- Continuing to tackle the major causes of homelessness locally

- Ensuring a properly joined up approach with health services to prevent homelessness as a result of ill health

- Ensure that we promote opportunities for training and employment for people who are at risk of homelessness or who are living in temporary accommodation

Early Prevention
The council is keen to take early action to prevent homelessness. We want to build on existing prevention activities.

Priority areas:

- Reduce homelessness as a result of

parental/relative evictions and tackle expectations through casework intervention (ref 4.2)

- Ensure that young people can access information about homelessness and housing advice by continuing to work with schools to educate young people about the risk of homelessness and the services available to help to prevent it (ref 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

- Ensure information is accurate and improve its availability to service users, community groups and relevant service providers (1.14, 1.15)

- Ensure that staff have up to date skills and knowledge to provide an efficient and effective homelessness prevention service (ref 1.7)

Continuing to Tackle the Major Causes of Homelessness
There are many and sometimes complex reasons why people become homeless. These are explored in chapter three.

The council's approach, which has been successful in reducing the number of homeless applications, will continue to help clients consider all options for staying in their existing accommodation, delaying homelessness in order to make a planned move or accessing private or social sector accommodation. Comprehensive and good quality intervention for clients facing homelessness is key to reducing the number of evictions.

Priority areas:

- Continue to place emphasis on our homeless from home service (ref. 1.6)

- Maximise capacity at the Housing Solutions Shop for providing housing advice and options services (ref 1.13)

Audit Commission Diagnostic

The Audit Commission has advised of their intention to undertake a diagnostic of our homelessness service. It is likely that this will happen in the 2008/09 period. We will implement their recommendations, where feasible, to ensure that the service continues to improve.

Priority area:

- Address the recommendations from the Audit Commission diagnostic (ref 1.3)`

Advice and Options for Employment and Health Services

Homeless people are at a disadvantage in the labour market and are unable to access those services, which can support them into skills training and work. A 2007 report by Professor John Hills, *Ends and Means, the future role of social housing in England* draws attention to the fact that social housing can encourage high levels of worklessness.

Homeless people are also less able to obtain the health services that they need. Accordingly, we will work with local health services, the Job Centre Plus and Merton's Employability Forum to introduce a multi-agency resource pack of housing, health and employment advice. This would be available from all health, housing and other appropriate service points.

Priority areas:

- Work with Job Centre Plus to address the issue of homelessness and worklessness (ref 2.23, 2.24)
- Work with partner agencies to develop a resource pack to ensure homeless households receive advice and support on housing, health, employment and training issues (ref 2.22)

Chapter Six

Youth Homelessness

This chapter is devoted to youth homelessness, as it is recognised that the housing needs of young people are distinct from those of their elders and therefore specific responses are required. The CLG in its 2007 paper *Tackling Youth Homelessness* also suggests that because homelessness, or the risk of homelessness among young people, is so high compared to other groups, authorities must take positive steps to address it.

Tackling youth homelessness forms an integral part of our wider homeless strategy. We aim to achieve the following:

- To prevent homelessness though early intervention
- To ensure sufficient accommodation is available for young people who are or may become homeless
- To ensure the provision of appropriate support for homeless young people

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that young people have information, advice and support
- Identifying the triggers of homelessness and providing appropriate support interventions
- Ensuring that the young person is able to access appropriate housing and support when homelessness is unavoidable

National policy
Every Child Matters

This paper was published in December 2004 and focuses on five outcomes:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

One of the aims of the 'be healthy' outcome is for children and young people to be emotionally and mentally healthy. Two of the outcomes are to keep children and young people safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation and to ensure they have security, stability and are cared for. Under the 'achieve economic well being' outcome the aim is that children and young people live in decent homes and sustainable communities.

Sustainable Communities, Settled Homes, Changing Lives

This strategy was published by the Office of the Deputy Primeminister in March 2005 and aimed to halve the number of households living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010. The strategy recognises that young people can become homeless for a wide range of reasons. Since 2002 all 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers between 18 and 20 years of age have a priority need for accommodation if they become homeless through no fault of their own. *Every Child Matters* recognised that tackling and preventing homelessness amongst young people is critical to ensuring young people are able to realise their potential

Local policy

We recognise that youth homelessness is not simply a housing issue. Other multi-agency strategies will help to achieve our objectives and vice versa.

The Children and Young People Plan

At a local level the council is determined to deliver high quality services for children in the borough, which promote their life chances and help them achieve their ambitions and potential. The Children and Young People Plan 2007-2010 constitutes the first strategic plan of Merton's Children's Trust, which is responsible for leading and delivering the improvement in outcomes for children on behalf of the Merton Partnership. The Children and Young People Plan will contribute to tackling homelessness. Professionals will work together to ensure that the services are better focused on the needs of young people and their families.

Youth Homelessness in Context

Youth homelessness in Merton:

- 28% of all homelessness acceptances in 2006/2007 were from young people aged 16 to 17

- 20% of all homelessness applications in 2006/2007 were from young people aged 16 to 17

- 49% of young people approaching the housing advice service in 2006/2007 were from the Mitcham area: three times the number from Wimbledon

The Housing Needs Survey 2005 found that:

- Children and young people aged 20 years and younger comprise almost one quarter of the population in Merton

- There are 25,783 young people aged 14 to 25 years living in Merton

- Of these 34% are form ethnic minority wards.

Through communication with partners and service users we know:

- Young people prefer to seek advice from agencies that specialise in dealing with young people, such as Connexions and the YMCA

- There is an overrepresentation of homeless applications from young black and ethnic minority groups

- The importance of visiting the family to reduce parental evictions

- There is a need for advice and information on leaving home for young people

- There is a need for involvement of young people in the delivery of homeless services

There are 16 actions that flow from our overall goal of reducing and preventing youth homelessness. These reflect the comprehensive nature of the responses required to deal with the needs of young people. Whilst the actions are listed individually it is important to know that they are very much interlinked. In implementing this strategy it will be important to progress each of the objectives if the overall goal is to be progressed.

Priority areas:

- Undertake feasibility study on the development of a single point of access to deliver housing advice and homelessness services to young people (ref 4.1)

- Ensure home visits take place within 48 hours for 16 and 17 year olds who are threatened with eviction from the family home (ref 4.2)

- Set up a youth housing/homelessness forum and an interactive youth homelessness website (ref 4.3, 4.4)

- Ensure reducing eviction protocols are in place for all young people in supported housing, to include the provision of case conferences upon the threat of eviction (ref 4.17)

- Deliver training programmes for professionals in Connexions and

Children's, Schools and Families regarding housing options (ref 4.18)

• Work with Children's Centres to identify families where there is a risk of family breakdown (ref 4.19)

• Ensure that all young people in temporary accommodation are registered with a GP and can access health services (ref 4.20)

• End the use of bed and breakfast for 16 and 17 year olds (ref 4.9)

• Develop a supported housing scheme providing ten bed spaces in partnership with Pathway and Wandle Housing Association (ref 4.10)

• Undertake a feasibility study with the YMCA for establishing a supported lodgings scheme (ref 4.11)

• Explore with RSLs their ability to provide shared accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds (ref 4.13)

• Develop private rented sector housing solutions for young people in temporary accommodation (ref 4.14)

• Investigate the feasibility of establishing a support network for young people moving into permanent accommodation (ref 4.21)

• Ensuring that young homeless people from BEM backgrounds have fair access to housing and support through the provision of information (ref 1.15)

• Addressing anti-social behaviour in temporary accommodation (ref 4.15, 4.16)

• Work with schools to promote the BEM homeless prevention video, specifically targeting schools in areas where there is known to be high levels of young people presenting themselves as homeless (ref 4.7)

Chapter Seven

Partnership Working and Consultation

Partnerships

The Homelessness Strategy has its foundations in partnership working. The strategy is developed, managed and delivered in conjunction with our partners. We recognise that this is the only way to deliver meaningful outcomes.

The Homelessness Strategy Group comprises the main set of partners responsible for the strategy. The group is relatively small with membership specifically selected from services and providers, both statutory and voluntary, to ensure that there is a wide range of expertise and that clients from a mix of priority need groups are represented. Appendix one sets out the terms of reference and the membership for the strategy group.

The Homelessness Strategy Group has provided a focus for the development of this strategy based on the issues and needs of the client groups they represent. For example, in June 2007 the theme of the strategy meeting was youth homelessness and the results have helped us formulate our priorities for action in this strategy.

The group is accountable to and reports to the Housing Strategy Group, which oversees all housing related strategies, and the Housing Services Management Team.

The Homelessness Forum is a more informal body, with no structured membership. It is open to anyone from a statutory or voluntary organisation that has an interest in homelessness. The forum focuses less on strategy issues and more on service provision. The forum meets bi-annually with each meeting arranged around a prevalent theme agreed by the Homelessness Strategy Group. These meetings are the

main vehicle for consulting and sharing information on homelessness. Appendix two sets out the terms of reference for the forum.

The theme of the June 2007 Homelessness Forum was 2008-2013 strategy development. Consultation at the event was in the form of workshops in which members debated specific issues, such as engaging service users and RSL involvement in homelessness prevention, which were deemed problematic following a homelessness strategy health check in 2007. Debate at the forum suggests that we need to develop actions around:

- Working with partners to develop a consultation register of former and current service users
- Developing a protocol with RSLs on housing options and homelessness

As the forum only meets twice a year, ongoing networking and information sharing is the main issue for members. This has resulted in dissatisfaction and subsequent erratic attendance at meetings. We need to commit to holding forums on an ongoing basis and learn from the good practice methods utilised by the London Borough of Camden who produce an electronic newsletter sent to partners between meetings.

Other partnerships exist across the council and with other organisations that tackle issues concerning housing and homelessness. These are evidenced in certain cases with joint protocols and include:

- Merton Housing Association Group
- Merton Supporting People Partnership
- Merton Landlord Forum
- Merton Single Homelessness Forum

Partnerships outside Merton are also important. As a member of the South West

London Housing Partnership we will discuss and develop practical joint initiatives to help prevent homelessness.

Priority areas:

- Ensure that the needs of homeless customers are represented across the housing strategy service (ref 5.1)

- Provide opportunities for joint working by ensuring the Homelessness Strategy Group meets at least four times per year (ref 5.2)

- Ensure strategic partnership working is effective by reviewing membership to the Homelessness Strategy Group on an annual basis (ref 5.3)

- Work with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group to review performance against the action plan (ref 5.4)

- Work with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group to ensure the strategy continues to reflect best practice and the needs of customers (ref 5.5)

- Provide opportunities for joint working on homelessness by ensuring the Homelessness Forum meets on a bi-annually basis (ref 5.11)

- Facilitate information sharing between members of the Homelessness Forum on an ongoing basis (ref 5.12)

- Work with partner agencies to ensure that future consultation is representative and effective (ref 5.10)

Consultation

In order to ensure that this strategy is fully inclusive and representative of the needs of homeless people we have undertaken consultation with service providers and users.

In addition to consultation with providers via the strategy group and forum, we sent a questionnaire to RSLs operating in Merton to develop a more rounded picture of the work they are doing to prevent homelessness. Appendix three contains the questionnaire sent to RSLs.

Eight RSLs returned questionnaires. The results are qualitative and therefore difficult to collate but in general indicate that:

- Only a small number of RSLs provide advice to homeless households with most making referrals straight to the council

- Homelessness amongst their customers is largely the result of tenancies coming to an end on account of debt problems and rent arrears, relationship breakdown, anti-social behaviour, a lack of move-on accommodation from supported housing and vulnerability associated with combat stress among ex-service personnel

- RSLs recognise tenancy sustainment as an issue but are dealing with it in different ways and to different extents. For example, some RSLs have generic housing officers trained in basic support issues, whilst other RSLs have implemented financial inclusion policies and tenancy sustainment programmes

- A minority of RSLs have a detailed knowledge of our housing advice and prevention service

- Areas of concern include:
  - Move on accommodation for young people
  - Early liaison regards support needs for clients taking up RSL tenancies
  - The availability of larger properties
  - The delivery of incentive schemes, such as underoccupation
  - Managing expectations
  - Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities

Two methods were adopted for consulting

with service users; workshops and questionnaires.

The workshops engaged clients already residing in temporary accommodation and aimed to gauge customer satisfaction with homelessness services. Unfortunately, we were unable to record any meaningful results from the workshops due to low turn out and misconception of its purpose. This reflects issues that have been historically associated with service user involvement in homelessness services due to the transient nature of the homeless population and social exclusion issues.

We therefore also devised a service user questionnaire that was sent to 250 customers in various stages of their homelessness experience, ranging from those living in temporary accommodation to those re-housed in the private sector. We received 38 completed questionnaires. A full breakdown of the results are set out in appendix four. Results suggest that:

- Among households threatened with homelessness there was no real consensus about how their situation could be resolved, although a minority suggested that spend to save schemes or renting in the private sector could help

- Young people facing homelessness would like us to provide them with a 'crash pad' and mediation in order to help them return home or to independent accommodation

- The majority of customers found out about the homelessness service by visiting the Civic Centre and a smaller number through the CAB and word of mouth

- Most customers made contact with the service by personal visit or by telephone

- 63% found it easy to contact the service, whilst 34% had some level of difficulty

- The housing needs service and area housing office provided useful information about housing and homelessness

- Information on housing and homelessness services provided by the YMCA, probation service and social services was limited

- The majority of customers have no knowledge of the sanctuary scheme, mediation, discretionary housing benefit payments, key worker schemes, seaside and country homes, the underoccupation scheme, MASH, supported accommodation and our spend to save scheme.

- The majority of customers who were staying, or had stayed in temporary accommodation, found that

  - The accommodation did not suit the needs of the household

  - Shared facilities, where they existed, were in a poor state of repair

  - It was safe and secure

  - They were able to stay in the accommodation during the day

- The majority of customers threatened with homelessness had received a visit from a caseworker within seven days, although some customers reported waiting over five weeks

- A high percentage of customers had used our CBL scheme and found it easy to use

- Customers are satisfied with the council's opening times

Our action plan for this strategy will reflect the issues highlighted through the consultation work with partners and customers.

We will continue to consult with customers and partner organisations over the lifetime of this strategy. However, we need to recognise and address the ongoing problems associated with service user involvement. Good practice suggests that such issues can be overcome by

establishing a regular service user forum that can become a 'safe' arena for raising issues, helping to develop services and learning skills.

Priority areas:

- Work with RSLs to provide housing advice training in order to standardise advice services and information (ref 1.11, 1.12)

- Ensure information about homelessness and housing advice is up to date and widely available across the borough (1.14, 1.15)

- Research alternative housing options for young people threatened with homelessness e.g. a crash pad service (ref 4.8)

- Through the council's annual quota system provide opportunities for move-on accommodation for young people (ref 4.12)

- Monitor performance and outcomes for caseworker visits (ref 1.4, 1.5)

- Empower service users through a Service Users Homelessness Forum to develop strategy, services and skills (ref 5.6, 5.7)

Chapter Eight

Resources and Challenges

Resources

The availability of funding for prevention, temporary accommodation and support services will have an impact on the council's and partner organisations abilities to deliver this strategy.

The following are the major sources of funding currently identified for services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Council Funding

The council's gross financial resource for the funding of homelessness services including staffing and overheads was £577,000 in 2007/2008. This is projected to fall over the coming years as we work to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation and we re-align budgets to reflect local and national priorities. Prevention activities by the housing advice service, temporary accommodation and support services provided by the TAFSO are funded from this total.

Supporting People

Expenditure through the supporting people budget for supported housing services was £3.4 million in 2007/08. This expenditure is for both accommodation based and floating support services. The figure reflects current decisions made about service funding. These may change at any time to reflect Government decisions about funding availability and the decisions taken by Merton's Supporting People Commissioning Body.

Homeless Grant

The council has been successful in securing an annual homelessness grant from the CLG since 2002/2003. Funding for 2008/2009 has been confirmed at

£120,000. This allocation provides a vital supplement to meet the costs of providing housing options services. The majority of the allocation provides for the private sector rent deposit scheme. It is unclear whether this funding will remain available throughout the life of this strategy.

Disabled Facilities Assistance and Council Housing Adaptations

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) provide financial assistance for the provision of disabled adaptations to enable people to remain in their homes. The council has an allocation from the CLG and also provides match funding from it's own resources. The total budget stands at £500,000. In addition the council's housing service provides adaptations to its homes to enable tenants to remain in their homes. The total budget for this is 2008/2009 is £420,000.

Housing Corporation Funding

In order to deliver a minimum of 100 housing units per year and meet our targets, it is estimated that £5 million funding from the National Affordable Housing programme will be needed each year.

Opportunities

Throughout the lifetime of the strategy, we will continue to maximise opportunities for additional funding to improve services for our customers by bidding to voluntary and statutory agencies.

We are currently awaiting the outcome of a bid to the CLG for enhanced prevention activities. If successful this would help us to work in partnership with the YMCA to deliver a supported housing scheme and to take forward, with Job Centre Plus, issues around worklessness and training.

Challenges

Mortgage Repossessions

After a relatively stable mortgage market, the 2008 credit crunch could mean that for the foreseeable future, maintaining owner occupation will become much more difficult for households with low incomes. The Council of Mortgage Lenders estimates that 45,000 homes in Britain will be repossessed during 2008. Those most vulnerable are first time buyers and the million or so coming off fixed rate mortgages. We may see an increase in presentations and homelessness if local households are evicted from their home as a result of mortgage arrears. This will need to be managed.

Overcrowding

In December 2007 the Government confirmed significant progress has been made to prevent homelessness and reduce temporary accommodation use. They now want local authorities to focus on addressing overcrowding issues alongside homelessness to help improve homes for all.

Temporary Accommodation and Supported Housing Provision

In terms of the housing services general fund budget, the most significant and volatile element related to homelessness concerns the costs of providing temporary accommodation to households accommodated under the homelessness legislation.

Whilst we are making every effort to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in line with Government requirements there will always be demand, particularly from young single people because experience tells us that homelessness prevention is less effective among this client group.

The provision of good quality temporary accommodation is dependent on what the market has to offer. We currently work closely with the Wimbledon YMCA which provides accommodation for 60 single homeless people awaiting permanent housing solutions, who may otherwise have been housed in unsupported temporary accommodation provided for and paid for by Merton Council. There are ongoing discussions regarding potential re-development of the YMCA. The absence of accommodation provided by the YMCA would have financial implications for the authority and lead to real difficulties in the provision of supported housing solutions for single vulnerable people.

Priority areas:

- Maximise funding opportunities from CLG and other sources (ref 6.5, 6.6)

- Ensure good housing management practices and administration of housing benefit to minimise the risk of overspend to the temporary accommodation general fund budget (ref 6.7)

- Identify and track changes in homelessness as a result of repossession and develop services, as appropriate, to tackle the issue (ref 1.16, 1.17)

- Ensure electronic records accurately reflect the make-up of households in order that levels of overcrowding and underoccupation can be accurately assessed (ref 2.16)

Chapter Nine

Strategic Aims 2008-2013

Priorities for the next five years are based on:

- Governments housing and homelessness policy
- A review of the 2003-2008 Homelessness Strategy and action plan
- Audit Commission recommendations and guidelines
- Aims set out in other local strategies and plans
- Consultation with members of the Homelessness Strategy Group, Homelessness Forum and service users.
- A review of local trends and services

Our six key main aims are (not listed in any order of priority):

1. Early intervention and prevention activities

The prevention of homelessness is central to the Government's agenda in its approach in tackling homelessness. Although Merton has been successful in maintaining low numbers of homelessness acceptances and low numbers in temporary accommodation, current practices need to be maintained and new initiatives considered in order to assist in further reducing the incidence of homelessness across the borough.

2. To meet housing need through the use of existing housing, increasing the supply of appropriate housing solutions and providing support

As the demand for housing continues to outweigh the supply, it has become vitally important to ensure access to appropriate housing and the best use of all options available. We also need to consider new initiatives for expanding the housing solutions agenda.

It is essential too that support services are in place to enable homeless households to maintain their existing housing, as well as progress to independent living. This minimises the incidence of repeat homelessness.

3. To provide good quality accommodation for homeless households

Although Government is challenging local authorities to halve the numbers in temporary accommodation, we also need to ensure that wherever homelessness has become inevitable, the quality of any accommodation offered is of a good standard.

4. To provide a youth homelessness service that will prevent homelessness where possible and secure appropriate accommodation and support where homelessness has become inevitable

Developing a strategic approach to the housing needs of young people has now become a Government requirement.

5. Continue to develop consultation and strengthen joint working partnerships

We need to ensure that we consult with users and partner agencies on a regular basis to deliver a highly efficient and collaborative service.

6. Ensuring resources effectively address the issue of homelessness in Merton

Intrinsic to the success of the strategy is how well we use our resources.

Chapter Ten

Action Plan 2008-2013

Strategic Aim 1: Early intervention and prevention activities

Objective 1. Continue to develop early intervention, options and advice activities

Ref.	Priority Area	Action	Timescale	Lead Officer	Partner Organisations
1.1	Ensure an effective, responsive and customer focussed housing needs service through Customer Service Excellence accreditation	Achieve Customer Service Excellence accreditation	March 2010	Service Improvement Manager/Housing Options Manager	Corporate Performance and Business Improvement Team
1.2	Review housing needs service standards	Implement a single customer service charter	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	
1.3	Ensure that continual improvements are made to homelessness prevention activities in light of Audit Commission recommendations	Review outcomes from the recommendations of the Audit Commission diagnostic and formulate an improvement plan	March 2009	Housing Options Manager/Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	
1.4	Monitor performance of housing advice activities	Implement customer service module for the housing advice service	September 2009	Housing Options Manager	
1.5	Monitor casework activity to ensure effective outcomes are achieved	Implement framework for monitoring homelessness cases	October 2008	Casework Coordinator	

1.6	Continue to prioritise the needs of households in insecure accommodation through home visits and the promotion of housing options and CBL	Ensure caseworkers undertake home visits within five days of a case being referred	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager
1.7	Ensure staff have the skills and knowledge to provide an efficient and effective homelessness prevention service	Implement and complete the homelessness and prevention training programme for the housing needs team	March 2009	Housing Options Manager
1.8	Ensure the homelessness service is efficient, effective and reflects legislation, codes of practice and good practice	Review homelessness applications procedure	September 2008	Casework Coordinator
1.9	Ensure information about homelessness prevention is accurately recorded and accessible	Review data collection processes for recording reasons where imminent homelessness has been prevented	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager
1.10	Analyse information on homelessness prevention and develop services through good practice	Review the reasons where imminent homelessness has been prevented and ensure this is reflected in prevention and casework procedures	December 2008	Housing Options Manager

1.11	Work with RSLs to standardise advice and information to enable Merton residents to access quality housing advice at a variety of sources and locations across the borough	Develop a suite of protocols with RSLs on the provision of housing advice, options and the prevention of homelessness	August 2009	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Merton Housing Association Group (MerHAG)
1.12	Provide training to RSLs on housing options and homelessness prevention, targeting BEM RSLs, to enable Merton residents to access quality housing advice at a variety of sources and locations across the borough	Provide training to all RSLs on housing options and homelessness prevention, ensuring BEM RSLs are specifically targeted	December 2009	Housing Options Manager	MerHAG, BEM RSLs
1.13	Maximise capacity at the Housing Solutions Shop for providing housing advice and options services	Integrate homelessness and housing options services at the Housing Solutions Shop	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	Property Shop Working Group
1.14	Ensure the accuracy of public information about housing advice and homelessness	Review annually public leaflets and information on the councils website	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	

1.15	Ensure information about housing advice and homelessness are widely available	Ensure through a communication and distribution plan that public information is distributed across the borough, specifically targeting groups and organisations representing young people, BEM households and customers with mental health problems	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
1.16	Identify and track changes in homelessness as a result of mortgage repossession	Monitor on a monthly basis the number of households making homelessness applications as a result of mortgage repossession	Ongoing	Casework Coordinator	
1.17	Develop services to prevent homelessness as a result of mortgage repossession	Analyse changes in homelessness as a result of mortgage repossession and work with the CAB and Court Desk to identify service improvements	March 2009	Casework Coordinator	
1.18	Prevent homelessness amongst people leaving prison or who are on remand	Implement a protocol for people who are on remand or in custody	December 2008	Housing Options Manager	Probation Service
1.19	Update information on rough sleeping	In line with CLG good practice undertake a rough sleepers hotspot count in Wimbledon	March 2010	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group

Ref	Objective	Action	Target	Responsible	Partner
1.20	Ensure asylum seekers have access to suitable accommodation and housing advice	Hold monthly surgeries at Asylum Welcome	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	Asylum Welcome
Objective 2. Tackle the major causes of homelessness					
1.21	Reduce homelessness as a result of domestic violence	Work with partners to produce and publish a domestic violence resource pack for victims of domestic violence	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	Safer Merton Partnership
1.22	Reduce homelessness as a result of domestic violence	Research and report to the Homelessness Strategy Group on the reasons for low take-up of the sanctury scheme and consider actions where appropriate	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	Safer Merton Partnership
1.23	Reduce homelessness as a result of domestic violence	Develop and launch a housing options staff guide to deal with customers experiencing domestic violence	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	
1.24	Reduce homelessness as a result of termination of assured shorthold tenancies	Achieve a 10% reduction annually, from a baseline of 12, in homelessness acceptances from households who have lost their home as a result of an assured shorthold tenancy coming to an end	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	

1.25	Reduce homelessness as a result of parental/relative evictions	Evaluate performance of the pilot mediation scheme run by Jigsaw4U, in conjunction with the London Borough of Sutton, and consider actions where appropriate	October 2008	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	London Borough of Sutton, Jigsaw4U
1.26	Reduce homelessness as a result of parental/relative evictions	100% of eligible young people to be referred to mediation	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
1.27	Reduce all major causes of homelessness	Identify trends in all main causes of homelessness and review prevention and casework procedures to reflect this	June 2009	Casework Coordinator	
Objective 3. Reduce homelessness among BEM households					
1.28	Assess the impact of the strategy	Undertake an equalities impact assessment of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013	September 2009	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
1.29	Implement the departmental equalities impact schedule	Review homelessness and housing advice services in line with the equalities impact schedule set by the Departmental Equalities Steering Group	As directed	Housing Options Manager	Include relevant partners and service users in assessments

	Action	Target	Timescale	Lead	Partners
1.30	Further develop outreach opportunities with BEM communities	Review and revise Engagement Strategy for Hard to Reach Groups	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	BEM community groups (as listed in the Engagement Strategy for Hard to Reach Groups)
1.31	Ensure the information we hold about BEM households is accurate	Improve the collection of diversity data through the Data Quality Strategy	March 2009	Housing Performance Manager	
1.32	Reduce the level of homelessness among BEM households	Achieve a 5% reduction annually in the number of BEM households accepted as homeless	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
1.33	Identify the specific housing needs of BEM households in order to tackle homelessness	Work in partnership with BEM community groups and service users to ensure that homelessness services are tailored to meet particular needs of BEM households	March 2010	Housing Options Manager	BEM community groups, Service User Homelessness Forum
1.34	Improve communication with BEM communities about housing and homelessness	Two presentations each year to cultural, community and faith groups	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
Strategic Aim 2: To meet housing need through the use of existing housing, increasing the supply of appropriate housing solutions and providing support					
Objective 1. Maximise the supply of affordable housing					
2.1	Ensure efficient use of the council's housing stock	Process all new voids within 14 days of receiving specification	Ongoing	Assessment and Re-housing Team Leader	Property Services, Neighbourhood Management, Home Connections

2.2	Ensure efficient use of the council's housing stock	Meet the target for average re-let period (31 days 2008/09), target updated annually	Ongoing	Assessment and Re-housing Team Leader	Property Services, Neighbourhood Management, Home Connections
2.3	Maximise re-housing opportunities for Merton residents in the event of a stock transfer	Achieve 100% nomination rights	April 2010	Head of Housing	New RSL
2.4	Work in partnership with the South West London Development Group to maximise the supply of affordable housing	Deliver the South West London National Affordable Housing Programme	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager	South West London Development Group, Housing Corporation, RSLs
2.5	Work in partnership with RSLs to maximise the supply of new affordable housing, both rented and low cost home ownership	Project manage RSLs development programme to deliver 105 affordable housing completions annually for the period 2008-2011	2008-2011	Housing Development Manager	Housing Corporation, RSLs, developers, planning
2.6	Work with RSL partners to increase the supply of larger housing	35% of new developments to be larger homes (three and four beds)	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager	Housing Corporation, RSLs, developers, planning
2.7	Maximise re-housing opportunities in the RSL sector	Achieve 100% of RSL nominations for new-lets	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager	Housing Corporation, RSLs, developers, planning
2.8	Ensure the supply of new build properties meets the needs of BEM households	Ensure that the needs of BEM communities are met by developing method statements with RSL's and the Housing Corporation	2008-2011	Housing Development Manager	Housing Corporation, BEM RSLs, developers, planning

2.9	Ensure the supply of new build properties meets the diverse needs of all homeless customers	Collate results of tenant satisfaction survey on equality issues for new developments completed in 2007/08	January 2009	Housing Development Manager	Consultation and Communications Team
2.10	Ensure the supply of new build properties meet long term housing needs in order to reduce the risk of homelessness in the future	Encourage RSL's to build new homes to life time home standards	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager	Housing Corporation, RSLs, developers, planning
2.11	Maximise the number of empty properties in the private rented sector that have been returned to use	Ensure that at least 65 empty homes are returned to use annually	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator
2.12	Expand the supply of homes through the rent deposit scheme	Achieve 10% increase in lettings through the rent deposit scheme on an annual basis	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator	
2.13	Ensure pro-active liaison with private sector landlords to maximise housing solutions	Hold two landlord forums per year	Ongoing	Housing Strategy Officer	
2.14	Maximise the length of tenancies offered through the rent deposit scheme	50% of all new tenancies through the rent deposit scheme to have a let period of two years or more	Ongoing	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator	

2.15	Maximise re-housing opportunities through the rent deposit scheme	Consult with landlords and service users to review the terms and conditions of the rent deposit scheme to ensure it reflects current needs and issues	March 2010	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator	Private Landlords Forum, rent deposit scheme customers
Objective 2. Increase the take-up of incentive schemes and alternative housing tenures					
2.16	Ensure electronic records accurately reflect the make-up of households to ensure the best use of the council's housing stock	On a bi-annual basis review database of tenants occupying three, four and five bed homes to minimise underoccupation and overcrowding	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	
2.17	Work with partner RSLs to review underoccupation schemes in the borough	Implement a common underoccupation scheme	March 2011	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	MerHAG
2.18	Ensure the views of service users are central to the development of a new common underoccupation scheme	Hold at least one workshop with council and RSL residents	June 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Communication and Consultation Team, MerHAG
2.19	Ensure the views of service users are central to the development of a new common underoccupation scheme	Devise and distribute questionnaire to council and RSL residents	June 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Communication and Consultation Team, MerHAG

2.20	Achieve permanent housing solutions in the private rented sector for homeless households in temporary accommodation	Promote housing options and qualifying offers in the private sector to all households where an outcome has not been identified within six months of a placement in temporary accommodation	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
Objective 3. Ensure support services and supported housing are available to prevent homelessness					
2.21	Ensure households leaving temporary accommodation receive the support they need to maintain a permanent tenancy	Work with RSLs and the council's housing management service to ensure the provision of a resettlement package for households leaving temporary accommodation	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	TAFSO, Tenancy Management Team, MerHAG
2.22	Ensure homeless households receive advice and support on housing, health, employment and training issues	Work with health providers, Job Centre Plus, Merton's Employability Forum and Education to produce a housing, health and employment resource pack for homeless customers	March 2011	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager/ Housing Options Manager	Primary Care Trust, Health Visitors, GPs, Job Centre Plus, Connexions, Education, Merton's Employability Forum
2.23	Address the issue of homelessness and worklessness	Contact Job Centre Plus to explore opportunities for working together at the Housing Solutions Shop	December 2009	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Job Centre Plus

2.24	Address the issue of homelessness and worklessness	Work in partnership with Job Centre Plus to carry out a skills audit of homeless households	March 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Job Centre Plus, TAFSO
2.25	Explore the provision of support services to customers taking up tenancies through the rent deposit scheme	Explore the possibility of introducing a floating support service for the rent deposit scheme	August 2009	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Supporting People Partnership
2.26	Explore the provision of support services to customers taking up tenancies through the rent deposit scheme	Evaluate capacity of existing staff levels to develop casework support services for rent deposit scheme customers	March 2010	Housing Options Manager	Private Sector and Homesales Co-ordinator
2.27	Provide supported accommodation for teenage parents	Work with RSLs and the Supporting People Partnership to explore new opportunities for providing supported accommodation for teenage parents	June 2009	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Supporting People Partnership, RSLs
2.28	Provide supported accommodation for teenage parents	No teenage parents in unsupported accommodation	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
2.29	Ensure that primary and secondary categories of priority need are recorded to ensure that information on substance misuse is accurately recorded	Review the Academy procedure for recording primary and secondary priority need categories	August 2008	Housing Options Manager	Information and Support Services

2.30	Identify trends in primary and secondary categories of priority need, specifically substance misuse	Monitor trends in primary and secondary priority need categories over a 12 month period	August 2009	Housing Options Manager	
2.31	Identify homeless people at risk of, or involved, in substance misuse	Housing Needs staff to attend drug and alcohol awareness training	March 2010	Housing Options Manager	Community and Housing Learning and Development Team
2.32	Ensure housing and advice services do not disadvantage people with mental health issues	Work with the CMHTs to identify gaps in services and access to information for people with mental health issues	March 2012	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	CMHTs
2.33	Ensure support services meet the needs of BEM households who have mental health issues	Work with the South West London and St Georges Mental Health Trust, Supporting People Partnership and BEM organisations to ensure BEM households who have mental health and housing problems have a housing plan	March 2012	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Mental Health Trust, Supporting People Partnership, BEM community groups
2.34	Ensure non-priority homeless households receive appropriate housing advice and support	Review the reasons for non-priority homelessness over the period 2003-2008	March 2009	Housing Options Manager	

2.35	Ensure non-priority homeless households receive appropriate housing advice and support		
	Update non-priority homelessness procedures and policy to ensure they address and reduce homelessness	December 2009	Housing Options Manager
Strategic Aim 3: Provide good quality accommodation for homeless households			
Objective 1. Minimise the use of temporary accommodation			
3.1	Reduce the number of all households living in temporary accommodation by 2010		
	No more than 87 households in temporary accommodation	March 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager
3.2	Reduce the number of households with children, or pregnant women, living in temporary accommodation		
	Achieve a 7.5% reduction annually in the average number of families, with dependent children, or pregnant woman, placed in temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager
3.3	Continue to ensure that families with children or pregnant women are not accommodated in bed and breakfast		
	No families with children or pregnant women in bed and breakfast, except in an emergency and only for up to six weeks	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager

Ref	Action	Detail	Timescale	Lead	Partner
3.4	Encourage and support households in temporary accommodation to bid for settled accommodation through CBL	TAFSO to visit and promote CBL to all households in temporary accommodation who have failed to bid for accommodation within three months of being placed in temporary accommodation	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	TAFSO
3.5	Provide ongoing options advice for households in temporary accommodation	100% of people in temporary accommodation to receive an options interview once every six months	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
Objective 2. Improve the quality of temporary accommodation					
3.6	Ensure that temporary accommodation meets the needs of every customer	Review annually the Temporary Accommodation Strategy Action Plan	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
Strategic Aim 4: Provide a youth homelessness service that will prevent homelessness and secure appropriate accommodation and support where homelessness has become inevitable					
Objective 1. Develop services to prevent youth homelessness					
4.1	Provide a borough-wide tailored housing advice service for young people	Undertake feasibility study on the development of a single point of access for housing advice and homelessness services for young people in the borough	August 2009	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager/Housing Options Manager	YMCA, Connexions

4.2	Provide a responsive housing advice service for young people, specifically to reduce homelessness as a result of parental/relative evictions	Ensure casework visits take place within 48 hours for 16 and 17 year olds who are threatened with eviction	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	
4.3	Ensure young people are involved in service improvement and have information to make informed choices about services	Establish a youth housing/homelessness forum	March 2009	Housing Options Manager/Housing Strategy Officer	
4.4	Ensure young people are involved in service improvement and have information to make informed choices about services	Set up an interactive youth homelessness website	September 2009	Housing Options Manager/Housing Strategy Officer	Bold Creative
4.5	Ensure that young people can access information about homelessness and housing advice, specifically young people from BEM groups	Develop an education resource pack to be delivered in senior schools	March 2012	Housing Options Manager	Education, senior schools
4.6	Ensure that young BEM people can access information about homelessness and housing advice	Deliver objectives in the ethnic minority innovation video project plan	March 2009	Housing Options Manager/Housing Strategy Officer	As directed in project plan
4.7	Work with senior schools to provide young people with information on housing and homelessness, focussing on schools in Mitcham	BEM homelessness prevention video to be promoted to senior schools for use in personal and social education classes	March 2009	Housing Options Manager/Housing Strategy Officer	Education, senior schools

4.8	Research alternative options for young people threatened with homelessness	Explore feasibility of introducing a 'crash pad' service for young people facing housing crisis	March 2012	Housing Options Manager	
Objective 2. Ensure that suitable accommodation is available for young people					
4.9	End the use of bed and breakfast for 16 and 17 years olds	No 16 or 17 years olds in bed and breakfast, except in an emergency and for a maximum of six weeks	March 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	
4.10	Provide supported housing options for young people	Work in partnership with Pathway and Wandle Housing Association to complete a supported housing scheme, containing ten bed spaces, for young people	August 2010	Housing Development Manager	Pathway, Wandle Housing Association
4.11	Provide supported housing options for young people	Undertake a feasibility study for the development of supported lodgings	December 2008	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	YMCA
4.12	Provide move-on accommodation for young people	Review with stakeholders annual quotas for move-on accommodation for young people	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	

4.13	Ensure young people have a range of housing solutions available to meet their needs	Undertake a feasibility study into the provision of shared RSL accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds	March 2012	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager	Preferred RSL partners, MerHAG
4.14	Ensure young people have a range of housing solutions available to meet their needs	Work with private sector landlords to develop a rent deposit scheme for 16 and 17 year olds	November 2009	Housing Development Manager/ Private Sector and Homesales Coordinator	
4.15	Ensure that temporary accommodation provides a safe and secure environment for young people	Implement a system for recording incidents of anti-social behaviour in temporary accommodation	October 2009	TAFSO	
4.16	Ensure that temporary accommodation provides a safe and secure environment for young people	TAFSO to respond to reports of anti-social behaviour in temporary accommodation within 24 hours	Ongoing	TAFSO	
Objective 3. Provide support services to young people					
4.17	Ensure supported housing schemes work to reduce the risk of eviction among young people	Implement reducing eviction protocols, to include the provision of case conferences upon the threat of eviction	March 2010	Housing Options Manager	
4.18	Ensure that council departments and organisations dealing with young people can offer a range of advice and support to prevent homelessness	Deliver training programmes on housing options to the council's Children's Families and Schools Department and Connexions	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	Children's, Families and Schools, Connexions

No.	Action	Objective	Timescale	Lead	Partner
4.19	Work with Children's Centres to provide support and advice to families at risk of breakdown	Ensure 100% of families at risk of family breakdown receive housing advice	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	Children's, Families and Schools
4.20	Ensure young people can access support from health services	Ensure that 100% of young people in temporary accommodation are registered with a GP	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	TAFSO
4.21	Support young people moving into permanent accommodation	Investigate the feasibility of establishing a support network for young people moving into permanent accommodation	March 2013	Housing Options Manager	Youth Housing/ Homelessness Forum

Strategic Aim 5: Develop consultation and strengthen joint working partnerships

Objective 1. Deliver the Homelessness Strategy through effective partnerships

No.	Action	Objective	Timescale	Lead	Partner
5.1	Ensure the needs of homeless households are represented across the housing strategy service	Homelessness Strategy Group member to attend the over-arching Housing Strategy Group	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	
5.2	Provide opportunities for joint working on the Homelessness Strategy	Homelessness Strategy Group to meet four times per year	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	
5.3	Ensure strategic partnership work is effective	Review membership to the Homelessness Strategy Group on an annual basis	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group

5.4	Work with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group to review performance against the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	Assess performance against the action plan on a quarterly basis, using the traffic light system	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
5.5	Work with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group to ensure the strategy continues to reflect best practice and the needs of customers	Undertake a full review of the strategy and action plan on an annual basis, giving consideration to budgetary issues	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
Objective 2. Engage service users to ensure that the Homelessness Strategy is fully inclusive and representative					
5.6	Empower service users to develop strategy, services and skills	Establish a Service User Homelessness Forum	September 2009	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
5.7	Empower service users to develop strategy, services and skills	Hold two Service User Homelessness Forums per year	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
Objective 3. Improve services through consultation and joint working					
5.8	Work with partners in the sub-region to consider benchmarking opportunities	Introduce a homelessness benchmarking scheme across the sub-region	December 2008	Housing Options Manager	Housemark, Acclaim Consultants
5.9	Consider feasibility of introducing mystery shopping for housing needs services	Investigate mystery shopping options and implement scheme	December 2009	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Service Improvement Team

5.10	Ensure that consultation is representative and effective	Work with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group to formulate a consultation register of former and current service users	May 2009	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
5.11	Provide opportunities for joint working on homelessness through the Homelessness Forum	Homelessness Forum to meet twice a year	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	Homelessness Strategy Group
5.12	Facilitate information sharing between members of the Homelessness Forum on an ongoing basis	Implement a bi-monthly forum newsletter	July 2009	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader	
Strategic Aim 6: Ensure resources effectively address the issue of homelessness in Merton					
6.1	Undertake a value for money review of partnerships	Map services provided by partners and calculate cost savings	March 2010	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager/Housing Options Manager	
6.2	Ensure key housing needs processes provide value for money	Complete value for money analysis on homelessness prevention and options and submit recommendations to the Housing Services Management Team	August 2009	Housing Options Manager	

6.3	Ensure key housing needs processes provide value for money	Complete value for money analysis on allocations, nominations and assessments and submit recommendations to the Housing Services Management Team	March 2010	Housing Options Manager
6.4	Ensure service provision is assessed against the Homelessness and Housing Advice KLOE	Undertake annual self assessment	Ongoing	Service Improvement Manager/Housing Options Manager
6.5	Maximise funding opportunities from the CLG and other sources	Ensure bids are placed within timescale	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager
6.6	Maximise funding opportunities from the CLG and other sources	External funding to be fixed agenda item for Homelessness Strategy Group meetings	Ongoing	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader
6.7	Good housing management practices and administration of housing benefit to minimise the risk of overspend to the temporary accommodation general fund budget	No un-agreed overspend in temporary accommodation budgets	Ongoing	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager

Appendix One

Merton Homelessness Strategy Group

Terms of Reference

1.0   Introduction/Context

The Homelessness Act 2002 changed the way local authorities responded to homelessness with an emphasis being placed on early intervention and prevention. Within 12 months of the Act coming into force local authorities were required to publish a homelessness strategy and have an ongoing responsibility to publish a new strategy every five years thereafter. The Act further prescribes that authorities should formulate their homelessness strategies for preventing homelessness in their district, securing sufficient accommodation in the district and securing the satisfactory provision of support. In doing so the Act clearly states that authorities may include provision in their strategies relating to specific actions that they expect public authorities and voluntary organisations to undertake.

Merton's Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008 reflects the requirements of the Act via the following strategic aims, which are set out in the strategy:

- To reduce the incidence of homelessness through prevention

- Maximise housing and support options and choice for all homeless households

- Develop an effective, evidence based inter-agency strategy that minimises homelessness in the long-term

- Meet the diverse needs of all people who are homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless.

To develop and deliver an effective Homelessness Strategy the authority believes that a multitude of agencies must work together. In response the Homelessness Strategy Group was formulated. The group draws experts from a wide variety of areas where homelessness is an issue, these include health, probation and children's services. The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan tasks the strategy group to meet at least four times per year.

2.0   Objectives

- Undertake statutory responsibilities relating to Homelessness Strategies, as set out in Section 1 to 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002, to include:
    - Review, amend and develop the Homelessness Strategy
    - Review levels of homelessness in the borough
- Monitor and enforce the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Identify gaps in service provision
- Agree quality, standards and choice
- Share knowledge and provide information to assist partners in service delivery
- Debate and problem solve key strategic issues highlighted by members

- Review Government policy on homelessness

- Agree strategies to reduce homelessness

- Consult stakeholders on policy and strategy changes

- Make recommendations to the Housing Strategy Review Group and Housing Services Management Team

- Ensure links are made with the following strategies, via the Housing Strategy Review Group:

    - Older People's Strategy

    - Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy

    - Private Sector Housing Strategy

    - Affordable Warmth Strategy

- Seek and apply in partnership for external funding

- Steer direction of Homelessness Forums

3.0   Membership

Name	Job Title & Organisation
Steve Langley *Chair*	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager, Community and Housing, London Borough of Merton (LBM)
Andy Redfearn *Vice Chair*	Director, YMCA
Amanda Kendall *Secretary*	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader, Housing Needs, LBM
Melissa Caslake	Service Manager Community Support, Children, Families and Schools, LBM
Eileen Nutting	Supporting People Manager, Community and Housing, LBM
Mark Omorogbe	Senior Probation Officer, London Probation Service
Annalise Elliot	Safer Merton Manager, Environment and Regeneration, LBM
Andrea Scale	16+ Team Manager, Children, Families and Schools, LBM
Kamla Sumbhoolaul	Service Manager, South West London and St Georges Mental Health NHS Trust
Tom White	CMHT, South West London and St Georges Mental Health NHS Trust
Elliot Brunton	Housing Options Manager, Community and Housing, LBM
David Keppler	Revenues and Benefits Manager, Corporate Services, LBM

Graham Slater	Threshold Housing Advice
Cindy Evans	Service Manager Older People and Homecare, Community and Housing, LBM
Lesley Smith	Assistant Head of Neighbourhood Management, Community and Housing, LBM
Angela Chu	Housing Strategy Manger, Community and Housing, LBM
Peter Mulloy	Director of Housing, Wandle Housing Association

Additional members to be co-opted where appropriate to the theme of each meeting.

The role of Chair and Vice Chair to be reviewed and re-elected annually by all members of the Homelessness Strategy Group.

The meeting of the Homelessness Strategy Group will be quorate if six or more members are present, to include either the Chair or Vice Chair.

4.0 Role of Members

Chair/Vice Chair

- Agree meeting themes with members
- Work with secretary to prepare agenda
- Ensure meetings start and end promptly
- Encourage all members to participate in discussion and decision making
- Agree and sign off minutes within three working days of receipt
- Ensure feasible decisions are made and authorise actions proposed by members
- Oversee work streams, work in conjunction with Secretary to ensure approved tasks are completed and approve work completed
- Ensure roles and responsibilities of members are adhered to
- Ensure that the group remains focussed on its stated objectives and that these objectives are met

Secretary

- Record minutes of meetings
- Circulate minutes to members within 15 working days of a meeting taking place
- Prepare agenda for meetings in conjunction with the Chair/Vice Chair and set timings for each agenda item
- Circulate reports/summary papers and agenda at least ten working days in advance of a meeting
- Communicate with members to arrange for meetings to be hosted
- Notify members of meetings, providing at least 30 working days notice
- Issue meeting reminders ten working days in advance of a meeting

- Follow up work streams agreed at meetings and ensure tasks completed by members to timescale

All Members

- Attend Homelessness Strategy Group meetings every quarter or to send a delegate where it is not possible to attend.
- Confirm attendance at meetings within 28 days of a meeting invitation being received.
- Review minutes of meetings and provide feedback to the Secretary within 14 days of receipt.
- Review articles and briefing papers.

Appendix Two

Merton's Homelessness Forum

Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction/Purpose

The Homelessness Act 2002 set out statutory responsibilities for local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy for their borough/district. Accordingly, the London Borough of Merton published its first homelessness strategy in 2003, covering the period 2003-2008. Thereafter, there is an obligation to keep the strategy under review and to produce a new one every five years.

Merton's 2003-2008 strategic commitments are to:

- Reduce the incidence of homelessness through prevention

- Maximise housing and support options and choice for all homeless households

- Develop an effective, evidence based inter-agency strategy that minimises homelessness in the long-term

- Meet the diverse needs of all people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless

In order to meet these commitments the London Borough of Merton believes that we must work effectively with a multitude of partner agencies. Merton's Homelessness Forum is the opportunity for the authority to work with agencies that have an interest in homelessness or represent homeless clients. It is also the opportunity for partner agencies to network with other partners and to influence council policy and strategy in relation to homelessness.

2.0 Objectives

- Provide networking opportunities for members

- Exchange information with members about good practice, services, strategy, policy and other relevant issues and concerns

- Participate in the development of homelessness strategy and policy

- Review new policy and strategy proposed by the London Borough of Merton in relation to homelessness

- Identify and debate issues or problems with existing strategy, policy or other matters raised by members of the Forum or Homelessness Strategy Group

- Identify gaps in service provision and review/propose ways of bridging gaps

- Make recommendations to the Homelessness Strategy Group on issues, gaps in service provision, strategy or policy

- Meet bi-annually

3.0   Meetings

The Forum will be held bi-annually. Each meeting will follow a set theme, which will be agreed by the Homelessness Strategy Group who is responsible for steering the Forum. In addition the format of the Forum will be standardised to include:

- A main presentation on developments/issues regarding London Borough of Merton's homelessness policy, strategy or services

- A guest speaker relevant to the theme of the event

- Networking opportunities

- Workshops to debate issues relevant to the set theme

4.0   Membership

The Forum is open to anyone working in the statutory or voluntary sector that has an interest in homelessness and subscribes to the objectives of the forum.

All members will be circulated information regards the activities of the Forum and Homelessness Strategy Group. However, in order to ensure meetings remain focused and are manageable, attendance will be limited to 40 members per meeting. Places at meetings will be reserved on a first come, first serve basis.

The Forum will be attended by members of the Homelessness Strategy Group and will be chaired by the Homelessness Strategy Group Chair, which will be subject to review annually by the strategy group.

Organisation and circulation of information regarding the Forum will be the responsibility of the Secretary.

Name	Role	Job Title/Organisation
Steve Langley	*Chair*	Housing Needs and Enabling Manager, Housing Needs, LBM

Contact Details
Tel: 020 8545 3712 or
email: steve.langley@merton.gov.uk

Name	Role	Job Title/Organisation
Amanda Kendall	*Secretary*	Housing Needs Policy and Projects Team Leader, Housing Needs, LBM

Contact Details
Tel: 020 8545 4709 or
email: amanda.kendall@merton.gov.uk

The Forum will deemed to be quorate if 15 or more members are present.

5.0   Role of Members

Chair

- Agree the theme for the Forum in partnership with the Homelessness Strategy Group

- Work with Secretary to prepare the agenda

- Ensure meetings are conducted in a timely manner

- Ensure that the Homelessness Strategy Group reaches decisions concerning issues and debate raised at the Forum and that in turn decisions are approved by the Housing Services Management Team and Housing Strategy Review Group

- Ensure that the Forum remains focussed on its stated objectives and that these objectives are met

Secretary

- Prepare agenda in conjunction with the Chair and the Homelessness Strategy Group

- Prepare attendee resource packs for the Forum, to include information forwarded by members for exchange at the meetings

- Make arrangements for minutes to be taken during main presentations and at break-out groups

- Circulate minutes within 15 working days of a Forum meeting taking place

- Notify members of a Forum meeting with a minimum of 20 working days notice

- Circulate quarterly newsletter produced by the Homelessness Strategy Group

- Ensure information exchanged at meetings and debate had by break-out groups at meetings are summarised and fed into the agenda of the Homelessness Strategy Group for decision making purposes

- Work with members of the Forum to identify service users who may wish to participate in a Service Users Homelessness Forum

Members

- Reserve a place at Forum meetings five working days in advance of a meeting taking place

- Liase with the Secretary to ensure relevant information is exchanged at Forum meetings via attendee resource pack

- Complete feedback questionnaire at the end of each Forum

- Report activities of the Forum to representatives within your organisation or to other organisations who you understand may have an interest in the subject matter

6.0   Structure

The Homelessness Forum shall report to the Homelessness Strategy Group. The Secretary shall be responsible for ensuring reporting lines between the Homelessness Forum and Homelessness Strategy Group are maintained.

Issues and themes discussed by the Forum and agreed by the Homelessness Strategy Group will be filtered down into a Service Users Homelessness Forum. The aim of this sub-forum is to gain a service user perspective in order to ensure that council policy, strategy and response to issues raised by the main Homelessness Forum are customer focussed. The sub-forum will report to the Homelessness Strategy Group although information regarding outcomes will be shared with the main Homelessness Forum.

Appendix Three

Homelessness Prevention Questionnaire for Registered Social Landlords

Q1. Do you provide advice and assistance for homeless households who approach your organisation?

Q2. As an RSL, what levels of homelessness are you currently experiencing?

Q3. What are the main causes of homelessness?

Q4.   What strategies are in place to help tenants sustain their tenancies?

Q5.   What is the trend of tenants needing management transfers due to anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, racial harassment and other hate crime?

Q6.   What schemes are in place to tackle anti-social behaviour and other hate crime?

Q7. **What housing options are available to tenants who are overcrowded to move either within or out of the area?**

Q8. **What scope is there to increase the numbers of reciprocal transfers?**

Q9. **What is your view on the overall homelessness service provided by the London Borough of Merton?**

Q10. Do you contract out any services?

Q11. Apart from the shortage of accommodation, what other challenges do you face with regards to tenants seeking re-housing?

Appendix Four

Homelessness Review Questionnaire

Merton Council would like to make sure that we are providing a high quality homelessness service to all our users.

Yours views and experiences are really important to us. They will help us to make changes and improvements to our services.

The information that you give us will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used for the purposes of the new Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

It would really help us if you could take the time to complete the questionnaire and using the envelope provided return it to us by 23rd May 2008 or alternatively return it to a Housing Needs Officer at the Civic Centre.

Q1. Are you currently threatened with homelessness?

Yes   **50%**
No   **47%**

Q2. If you answered yes to Q1, what services may prevent you from becoming homeless?

Mediation	**5%**
Temporary crash pad	**5%**
Spend to save scheme	**11%**
Sanctury Scheme	**5%**
Renting in the private sector	**11%**
Counselling	**3%**
Other	**3%**

Q3. As part of our review, we are considering different ways of assessing homeless applications for young people. Which of the following would you prefer? (Please tick one only)

The council continues to assess homeless applications and provides supported temporary accommodation and/or refers to support agencies if necessary   **53%**

Assessments and advice on provision of temporary accommodation undertaken by a multi-agency panel that will also offer other services such as advice on benefits, employment, education, mediation etc   **21%**

Assessment and provision of accommodation undertaken by an independent organisation e.g. YMCA   **8%**

Q4. Merton is considering alternative approaches in its provision of temporary accommodation for young people. Which would you prefer? (Please tick one only)

The council continuing to support young people in temporary accommodation while their application is being assessed	**34%**
Offering a temporary solution such as a crash pad, which provides an opportunity for young people to have breathing space, and family mediation in order to facilitate either a permanent return to the family home, a temporary return home in preparation for a planned move, or a move to supported or independent accommodation	**42%**

Q5. How did you find about Merton Council's Homelessness Service?

Council Offices	**58%**
Internet	**5%**
Word of Mouth	**13%**
Leaflets	**0%**
CAB	**16%**
Yellow Pages	**0%**
Used the service before	**3%**
Referred by Shelter	**0%**
Other	**3%**

Q6. How did you first make contact with the Homelessness Service?

Telephone	**24%**
Email	**0%**
Letter	**5%**
Fax	**0%**
In person	**68%**
Other	**0%**

Q7. How easy was it to contact the Homelessness Service?

Very Easy	**26%**
Fairly Easy	**37%**
Not Very Easy	**18%**
Difficult	**13%**
Very Difficult	**3%**

Q8. **Which of these best describes your reason (s) for approaching the Homelessness Service?**

Mortgage or rent arrears	5%
Threatened with eviction or repossession	42%
Neighbour dispute	3%
Homelessness	26%
Threatened with homelessness from family member	21%
Threatened with homelessness from relative/friend	13%
Housing Benefits	8%
Renting a home from the private sector	18%
Other	3%

Q9. **If you have seen any of the following services, please tick how helpful you found the information provided**

	Not Useful	Useful	Very Useful
Housing Needs Assessment	16%	58%	11%
Housing Advice	13%	50%	16%
Homelessness Persons Unit	13%	45%	3%
Temporary Accommodation Support Service	18%	29%	13%
Housing Area Office	11%	37%	5%
YMCA	5%	11%	0%
Probation Service	13%	8%	0%
Social Services	8%	18%	0%
The Property Shop	8%	21%	3%

Q10. **We would like to know which of the following options you have heard about. Please tick all that apply.**

	Yes	No
The Sanctury Scheme	3%	63%
Mediation for young people	16%	50%
Private sector rent deposit scheme	66%	18%
Choice Based Lettings	79%	11%
Housing Advice	87%	3%
Discretionary housing payments	21%	53%
Key worker scheme	24%	53%
Shared ownership scheme	50%	29%
Mutual exchange	50%	24%
Seaside and country homes	13%	53%
Underoccupation scheme	8%	61%
The YMCA	37%	37%
MASH	5%	61%
Supported accommodation	21%	55%
Spend to save scheme	8%	58%

Q11. Were you referred to any of the agencies listed in Q10 , if so please list them?

No   3%
No further responses listed

Q12. Thinking about the officers you dealt with when making a referral or when receiving advice, how satisfied were you with the information provided by the following schemes? Please only complete for the services you have used.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
The Sanctury Scheme	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Mediation for young people	0%	3%	8%	0%	0%
Private sector rent deposit scheme	8%	8%	16%	0%	5%
Choice Based Lettings	8%	21%	16%	8%	0%
Housing Advice	18%	32%	24%	8%	3%
Discretionary housing payments	3%	5%	11%	0%	0%
Key worker scheme	0%	3%	13%	0%	0%
Shared ownership scheme	5%	8%	5%	0%	0%
Mutual exchange	5%	3%	5%	0%	0%
Seaside and country homes	0%	0%	11%	0%	0%
Underoccupation scheme	0%	0%	11%	0%	0%
The YMCA	0%	3%	8%	0%	0%
MASH	0%	0%	8%	0%	0%
Supported accommodation	0%	3%	13%	0%	0%
Spend to save scheme	0%	0%	11%	0%	0%
Temporary accommodation	5%	13%	16%	3%	3%

Q13. Have you ever had to stay in temporary accommodation?
Yes   **47%**
No   **42%**

Q14. If you have stayed in temporary accommodation we would like to ask you a few questions about your experience

	Yes	No
Was the accommodation affordable	26%	29%
Was the accommodation suitable for you/ your family's needs	21%	37%
Was the accommodation clean, well furnished and in a good state of repair	26%	26%
Was the accommodation safe and secure	34%	21%
If you were using a shared bathroom, or shared kitchen was it in a good state of repair	11%	26%
Could you stay in the accommodation during the day	39%	18%

Q15. Have you had a home visit from a Caseworker?

Yes   **29%**
No   **63%**

Q16. If yes, how satisfied were you with the information provided by the Caseworker?

Very satisfied	**8%**
Satisfied	**11%**
Neither satisfied or unsatisfied	**5%**
Dissatisfied	**3%**
Very Dissatisfied	**5%**

Q17. How long did you have to wait for a visit from a Caseworker?

0-7 days	**16%**
1-2 weeks	**0%**
3-4 weeks	**3%**
5+ weeks	**11%**

Q18. Have you ever bidded on the Choice Based Letting Scheme for a property?

Yes   **66%**
No   **26%**

Q19. How did you make your bid?

Internet	**45%**
Telephone	**13%**
Text	**0%**

Q20. Did you need assistance to make your bid?

Yes   **21%**
No   **47%**

Q21. Who helped you to make your bid? Please state below.

A friend

Q22. If you needed assistance in bidding, how easy was it to find help?

Very easy	**16%**
Fairly easy	**16%**
Not very easy	**8%**
Difficult	**0%**
Very difficult	**3%**

Q23. What best from the list below describes your support needs?

Physical disability	**11%**
Profound deafness or hard of hearing	**3%**
Visual impairment	**3%**
Single homeless	**5%**
Refugee or asylum seeker	**0%**
Victim of domestic violence	**3%**
Ex-offender	**0%**
Young person	**11%**
Teenage parent	**5%**
Drug problems	**0%**
Alcohol problems	**0%**
Learning disability	**0%**
Homeless family	**47%**
HIV & AIDS	**0%**
Mental health problems	**8%**
Other	**3%**

Q24. How long have you received your current service?

0-3 momths	**8%**
4-6 months	**11%**
7-12 months	**26%**
13-17 months	**5%**
18+ months	**16%**
No longer receiving a service	**11%**

Q25. Are you satisfied with Merton Council's opening times?

Yes	**92%**
No	**0%**

Q26. Please let us have any additional comments you would like to make about our homelessness and housing needs service?

To say thank you for completing the questionnaire you will automatically be entered into a prize draw. The prize is a £15 shopping voucher. In order to be entered for the prize draw, please complete your contact details below. Your details will only be used to contact you if you win and will not be entered into a database or used for any other purpose.

Name:

Address:

Telephone number:

If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address shown in the box below

Information is also available in large print, in Braille and on tape

If you would like more information in your own language, please contact us at the address shown in the box below.

Albanian
Nese deshironi me shume informacion ne gjuhen tuaj, ju lutemi te na kontaktoni ne adresen e dhene ne kutine me poshte.

Arabic
إذا أردت معلومات إضافية بلغتك الأصلية الرجاء الاتصال بنا في العنوان المدون ضمن الإطار أدناه.

Bengali
যদি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় লেখা আরও তথ্য চান তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন, তলার বক্‌সে আমাদের ঠিকানা রয়েছে ।

Chinese
如果你需要用中文印成的資料，
請按低端方格內提供的地址与我們聯系。

Farsi
اگر مایل به اطلاعات بیشتر به زبان خود هستید، لطفا با ما از طریق آدرس زیرتماس بگیرید.

French
Pour tout renseignement complémentaire dans votre propre langue, veuillez nous contacter à l'adresse figurant dans l'encadré du bas.

Gujarati
જો તમને તમારી પોતાની ભાષામાં વધારે માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને નીચે અંતમાં આપેલા ખાનામાં દર્શાવેલા સરનામે અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

Punjabi
ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਲ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਖਾਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Somali
Hadii aad u baahan tahay faahfaahin intaa kabadan oo ku soobsan afkaaka hooyo ama Af Somali fadlan lana soo xiira cinwaanka hoos ku qoran.

Spanish
Si usted desea más información en su propia lengua, por favor contáctenos en la dirección al pie del formato.

Tamil
உங்கள் மொழியில் மேலதிக தகவலைப் பெற விரும்பினால், அடியிலுள்ள பெட்டிக்குள் தரப்பட்டுள்ள விலாசத்தில் எம்முடன் தொடர்பு கொள்ளுங்கள்.

Urdu
اگر آپ اپنی زبان میں مزید معلومات حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو براہ کرم ہم سے اس پتہ پر رابطہ قائم کریں جو کہ نیچے کے بکس میں درج ہے۔

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