

Youth homelessness

A Review by the Housing Select Committee



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Members of the Select Committee

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Contents

Chair’s introduction: Cllr Ami Ibitson	4
Review terms of reference	5
Executive summary	6
Methodology	8
Findings	10
Developing Early Intervention Strategies	13
Enabling young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their needs	16
Co-ordinating services and tackling the wider causes of homelessness	21
Comparative information	23
Expected outcomes	24
Recommendations	26
Glossary	28
Appendices	30

Chair's introduction

Cllr Ami Ibitson



Lewisham faces a number of challenges in tackling homelessness, including youth homelessness, but is determined to improve its performance to match the best services in London. As a result, the Housing Needs Service has undergone major change to enable it to focus much more on homelessness prevention and the Council is due to implement a new youth homelessness strategy shortly, with the aim of ensuring that there are no 16-17 year olds in Bed & Breakfast accommodation and that young people are placed in appropriate supported housing. Given this focus on improving homelessness services and given the importance of tackling youth homelessness in particular, my Committee decided to carry out a review into youth homelessness to ensure that the new strategy would achieve its stated aims and improve outcomes for homeless young people. We therefore focussed on the implementation and expected impact of the new youth homelessness strategy, and aimed to identify specific actions that might be taken by the Council to enhance the strategy and further improve the services provided to young homeless people.

One of the roles of the Housing Select Committee is to “make recommendations to the authority and/or Mayor and Cabinet on proposals for housing policy” and this review has helped the Committee fulfil this important role. I believe that our findings and recommendations will help ensure that sufficient funding is identified for all aspects of the strategy; that the more aspirational elements of the strategy are implemented; that additional, worthwhile initiatives are developed; that young people have access to a suitable balance and spread of supported accommodation; and that the expectations of young people are managed.

I would like to thank all the council officers who were involved in the review, Lesley Seary, Genevieve Macklin, Amanda Downie, Fiona Kirkman, Ian Smith, Judith Ramsden and Geeta Subramaniam; and our guest witnesses who came to give evidence, Richard Michael, Rebecca Long and Donna Kerr. Finally I would like to thank the committee members for their input and we look forward to seeing our recommendations being taken on board by Mayor and Cabinet.

Cllr Ami Ibitson

Chair of the Housing Select Committee

Terms of Reference

Our review considered the steps being taken by the Council to improve its performance in terms of tackling youth homelessness, to match the best services in London. In relation to this, we focussed on the development of the Council's youth homelessness strategy.

The following terms of reference were agreed for the review:

1. To review the draft youth homelessness strategy including its implementation and expected impact, taking into account:
 - best practice from a London borough recognised as being a 'centre of excellence' in youth homelessness
 - the views of local organisations working with homeless young people.
2. To identify specific actions that might be taken by the council to further enhance the youth homelessness strategy and improve the services provided to homeless young people.

Executive summary

Our review found that the new youth homelessness strategy was a positive step and we welcomed the proposals within the strategy. However, we felt that a number of additional actions could be taken to improve the impact of the strategy and we felt that more needed to be done to secure funding for some of the more aspirational elements of the strategy.

Early Intervention Strategies

We feel that the schools education programme, the proposed mediation service and developing a 'time out' service should be priorities within the strategy. We are concerned that funding has only been identified for the initial, pilot year of the schools education programme and that funding has not yet been identified for the proposed mediation service. We also feel that it is important for Education officers to have a greater input into the development of the schools education programme. We therefore recommend that:

- 1. The pilot Schools Education Programme should be closely monitored and, if found to be successful, the Council should seek to identify funding to allow the programme to continue, as a matter of priority.**
- 2. A representative from Education should attend every meeting of the Schools Programme steering group in order to provide input from an education perspective.**
- 3. The mediation service should be designated a priority and significant efforts should be made to identify funding.**
- 4. The Council should develop a 'Time Out' service as part of the youth homelessness strategy to allow young people to be offered a period of time away from home before negotiating a managed return.**

Enabling young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their needs

We feel that the current balance and spread of supported accommodation should be examined closely to ensure that all vulnerable young people are accommodated appropriately and that all types of options are considered. We also feel that more support should be provided to young people to help them manage the transition from supported accommodation to independent living, and that, in particular, advice on budgeting should be provided. We therefore recommend that:

- 1. As part of the Supporting People review (a) the balance and spread of supported accommodation should be considered, in particular, the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds who are not necessarily ready for independent living; and (b) extending the current supported lodgings scheme for care leavers to young homeless people with low needs should be considered.**
- 2. Before being re-housed, young people should be obliged to take a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting).**

Comparative information and expected outcomes

Having taken into consideration the comparative information presented to us and having considered the strategy as a whole, including the expected outcomes, it is our view that more emphasis should be placed on managing expectations, in line with the approach adopted by the London Borough of Southwark. We also feel that service users, young homeless people themselves, should be consulted on the strategy and their views fed into the development of the strategy. Finally, it is our view that the strategy's outcomes should be closely monitored and we should be kept updated on the impact of the strategy. We therefore recommend that:

- 1. Officers dealing with young homeless people should place more emphasis on managing expectations, in line with the approach taken by Southwark, to ensure that young people are aware that homelessness is not an easy option and is not a fast track to a Council flat.**
- 2. Service users should be consulted on the youth homelessness strategy and their feedback should be fed into the development of the strategy.**
- 3. Mayor & Cabinet should track the progress made in achieving the desired outcomes of the strategy, listed at paragraph 32 of this report (which will provide an indication of the success of the strategy); and regular updates are provided to the Housing Select Committee.**

Methodology

The review was delivered in the following way.

We considered a scoping paper for the review in **November 2008**, followed by two evidence gathering sessions in **January** and **February 2009**. These sessions involved:

Assessment of documentation: Officers provided us with comprehensive written information on all aspects of the new youth homelessness strategy, including a copy of the draft strategy. We also considered two case studies and received written evidence from council officers on the outcomes of a focus groups involving young people, including the Young Mayor and his advisers.

Questioning of officers: Officers attended the first evidence session to discuss the new strategy and answer our questions.

Questioning of external witnesses: Representatives from the London Borough of Southwark, the Marsha Phoenix Trust¹ and St Christopher's Fellowship² attended the second evidence session to provide their views on the best approaches to tackling youth homelessness and answer our questions.

Specifically, the following written and verbal evidence was considered at each session:

Evidence session one:

- Written and verbal evidence from the Housing Needs Service and representatives from various services in the Children & Young People Directorate on the key priorities and actions within the draft youth homelessness strategy and the expected outcomes. In particular, the committee considered the three main strands of the strategy: (a) developing early intervention strategies; (b) providing appropriate accommodation options for young people; and (c) providing holistic services to young people to ensure all their needs (including access to health, education, training and employment services) are met.
- Two case studies of young people who had previously approached the Housing Options Service for information and advice – to allow Members to consider how the experiences of these young people might differ once the new strategy is fully implemented.

¹ The Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust is a Supported Housing Project, based in Lewisham, for single homeless young women aged 16 to 25, with two hostels in Lewisham. The organisation also assists hostel residents in gaining the skills needed to function independently in society.

² St Christopher's fellowship is a children's charity that is also a housing association, providing a unique combination of care, accommodation, housing, education, training and support to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Evidence Session two:

- Verbal evidence from the London Borough of Southwark, the Marsha Phoenix Trust and St Christopher’s Fellowship on the best approaches to tackling youth homelessness and their views on the Council’s new strategy.
- Written evidence from council officers on the outcomes of the focus group involving young people, including the Young Mayor and his advisers.

Minutes of the two evidence sessions can be found at Appendices B & C. The draft Youth Homelessness Strategy is attached at Appendix D.

Findings

A: Background

1. Lewisham faces a number of challenges in tackling homelessness. Homelessness is a significant issue in the borough and a large number of households (including 16 and 17 year olds) are accepted as homeless every quarter. At the start of our review we heard that, during the third quarter of 2008 (July - September 2008), 230 households in Lewisham were accepted as being homeless and in priority need and out of these 230 households, 27 households were 16 or 17 years olds made unintentionally homeless.³
2. However, the Council has expressed its determination to improve its performance in terms of tackling homelessness to match the best services in London. In order to do this, the Housing Needs Service has been undergoing major change to enable it to focus much more on homelessness prevention and reducing the number of people living in temporary accommodation, including 16 and 17 year olds. Tackling youth homelessness is an important focus for the Council and the following actions in particular have been designated as key priorities for the Housing Needs Service in 2008/09:
 - implementing a new youth homelessness strategy and ensuring that (a) there are no 16-17 year olds in B&B accommodation and (b) young people are placed in appropriate supported housing
 - Creating a jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team to provide assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs.
3. Given the Council focus on improving homelessness services and the importance of tackling youth homelessness in particular, we decided to carry out a review into youth homelessness, focussing on the implementation and expected impact of the new youth homelessness strategy. Our aim was to identify specific actions that might be taken by the Council to enhance the strategy and further improve the services provided to young homeless people. We felt that the issue merited an in-depth review as the issue was:
 - **An issue of national importance** – the Government is committed to ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010; improving access to homelessness mediation across the country; and creating a national supported lodgings development scheme.

³ Data source: Lewisham's PIE return to DCLG

- **A strategic or corporate priority for the Council and its partners** – addressing homelessness is an important strand of Lewisham’s Sustainable Community Strategy and a corporate priority; and a number of indicators in the Local Area Agreement relate to youth homelessness.
 - **Quality of service or performance issue** – this is a priority area for service improvement.
4. At the start of our review in November 2008, we noted that significant improvements had been achieved during 2008 and that levels of youth homelessness in the borough had been dropping overall since April 2004. We also noted that there were currently no young people in B&B accommodation, compared to 28 at the start of 2008 and 4 at the end of June 2008. However, although the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds accepted as homeless were dropping and were below the national average,⁴ we felt that the numbers were still high enough to be of concern. We were also mindful that (a) the numbers of young people coming to the Council for advice and assistance on housing issues remained high, with 16 and 17 year olds comprising over 50% of all enquiries from single households; and (b) the Council was keen to build on the successes achieved so far and accelerate the pace of change. Indeed, challenging targets had been set for reducing the levels of youth homelessness⁵. We therefore felt that a review into the action being taken to further improve the way in which youth homelessness was being tackled in the borough would be worthwhile.
 5. We noted that the two key priorities for the Housing Needs Service for 2008/09, relating to youth homelessness, had been completed: drafting a youth homelessness strategy; and creating a jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team, in order to address the challenges around homelessness and, in particular, youth homelessness. We were informed that the major focus of the youth homelessness strategy would be early intervention and that the newly created SHIP Team would play a very important role in the strategy, providing assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs. Specialist Young People Assessment Officers (jointly funded by Children’s Social Care and Housing Needs) would work collaboratively with a number of other teams and services

⁴ The national acceptance rate for young people (16/17 year olds and 18-20 year old care leavers combined) is 4,880 or 8% of acceptances for 2007-08. Lewisham's acceptance rate for those two groups for 2007-08 was 7.2%. Data Source: CLG P1E statistical release 2007-08.

⁵ For example, the target for young people acceptances is 4 per month (9 were accepted in September 2008).

(Education, Youth Offending, Probation, Lewisham PCT, Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Action) in order to deliver tailored support to young people.

The national context

6. 16 and 17 year olds and young people aged between 18 and 20 who have formerly been in care have a priority need for accommodation under homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996). This means they must be secured suitable accommodation if they become homeless through no fault of their own. A relatively high number of young people are accepted by local authorities as being owed a main homelessness duty and many are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation⁶. Although the high numbers may reflect the fact that more young people are getting the help they need, the Government would like to see the number of young people accepted as homeless reduced.
7. The Government's homelessness strategy *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives*⁷ was published in March 2005 and as part of this strategy, the Government, via the Department for Communities and Local Government, is working with local authorities and voluntary sector partners to:
 - prevent vulnerable young people becoming homelessness, through early identification and intervention
 - support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider support needs are met
 - manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled accommodation to ensure continued access to the services they need.
8. In November 2006 the Government announced a specific package of measures to tackle youth homelessness. These included:
 - a commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, by 2010

⁶ A total of 1140 young people were accepted as homeless in England in the second quarter of 2008 (April to June).

See: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/xls/963636.xls>

At the end of June 2008, a total of 420 16 and 17 year olds were in bed and breakfast style accommodation in England, of which 160 had been there for longer than six weeks. See:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/doc/963629.doc>

⁷ See: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/sustainablecommunitiessettled>

- improved access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a general expectation of such services
 - the creation of a new national supported lodgings development scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.
9. Tackling youth homelessness is therefore a key priority for the Government.

B: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority One – Developing Early Intervention Strategies

10. At our first evidence session in January 2009 we considered the first priority of the draft youth homelessness strategy: developing early intervention strategies. Tackling youth homelessness is not solely about providing appropriate accommodation for young people but working jointly with other services to prevent youth homelessness by intervening at an early stage. We noted that, in order to achieve this, the strategy recommended that the following actions were undertaken:
- Working with Social Care, Youth Services and the Youth Offending Services to develop and jointly commission early intervention services aimed at young people aged 12-16 years at risk of homelessness. (Studies have demonstrated that young people who have previously had involvement with services such as social care pre 16 years are more likely to become homeless).
 - Consolidating existing funding for mediation services into one accessible service, jointly commissioned by housing, social care and the youth service.
 - Developing and implementing joint protocols for referring families in temporary accommodation to children's centres to ensure families are getting the support they need to feel secure.
 - Development of a parenting support service for parents struggling to maintain their children at home.
 - Development of a schools education programme to be delivered in schools in Lewisham to promote independent living skills and provide information on realities in moving out of home. (We noted that funding for this had already been obtained for 2009/10 to develop a peer education programme through South East London boroughs from the Department for Communities and Local Government).

Findings

- Training all frontline housing advice staff in Lewisham Information and Sharing Assessment (LISA) and Common Assessment Framework to promote more effective and earlier identification of needs.
 - Improving access to information and advice for young people on their housing options. (We noted that this included developing a Lewisham Council leaflet regarding the housing options for young people in the borough and developing information on the Lewisham Council website).
 - Producing a poster campaign in 2009 to raise awareness of youth homelessness in the borough.
 - Implementing new IT systems at the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Service and Housing Advice to improve qualitative and quantitative data on youth homelessness.
11. We considered the actions advocated by the strategy including the aspiration to develop a new mediation service, jointly commissioned by housing, children's social care and the youth service, with the aim of preventing relationship breakdown between young people and their relatives. At our second evidence session in February we heard from Rebecca Long in relation to this proposal and noted her view that a robust mediation service was essential in order to prevent youth homelessness. We also heard that Southwark already ran a successful mediation scheme, although officers felt that there were still improvements to be made to this (outsourced) service and were looking at training existing prevention staff to undertake this role. In addition, we heard that the mediation service in Greenwich was also proving successful and could help in a number of unexpected ways (e.g. the service always did an income check on the family of the client presenting to make sure that the family is in receipt of all the benefits they are entitled to). However, we noted that funding for this initiative had yet to be identified.
12. The second proposal that we considered in detail, was the schools education programme, which would be rolled out in Lewisham in April 2009 (with the first sessions being delivered in September 2009). We noted that the scheme would be voluntary and would link into the citizenship element of the curriculum. The programme would be delivered by 'peer educators' - young people with current or recent experience of homelessness, who had undertaken a course to enable them to deliver sessions in schools. We also noted that information would be provided to teachers as well as pupils as they

were often the first port of call for young people facing homelessness. Donna Kerr suggested that it was important to monitor where young homeless people came from (e.g. if particular schools were over-represented) as this would allow the programme to be targeted where it was needed most. However, we were informed that Lewisham had tracked homeless approaches last year and no specific trends regarding schools had been found. Nonetheless, specific schools would be targeted according to perceived need. We noted with concern that the programme only had funding for one year. We also heard that more input from education officers in relation to the Schools Programme steering group would be beneficial and we hoped that this would be achieved.

13. We considered a suggestion by Rebecca Long that did not currently feature in the draft strategy – that it would be beneficial to offer young people ‘time out’ – a period of time away from home before a managed return. This suggestion was also endorsed by Donna Kerr.
14. Having taken into consideration all the evidence presented on early intervention strategies, it is our view that the schools education programme, the proposed mediation service and developing a ‘time out’ service should be priorities within the strategy. We also feel that it is important for Education officers to have a greater input into the development of the schools education programme.

Recommendations:

1) We are concerned that funding has only been identified for the initial, pilot year of the schools education programme. We therefore recommend that (a) the pilot schools education programme be closely monitored and, (b) if found to be successful, the Council should seek to identify funding to allow the programme to continue, as a matter of priority.

2) We recommend that a representative from Education attends every meeting of the Schools Programme steering group in order to provide input from an education perspective.

3) The Committee is concerned that funding has not yet been identified for the proposed mediation service and recommends that the mediation service is designated a priority and significant efforts are made to identify funding.

4) We recommend that the Council develops a ‘Time Out’ service as part of the youth homelessness strategy to allow young people to be offered a period of time away from home before negotiating a managed return.

C: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority Two – Enabling young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their needs

15. In relation to the strategy's second priority, we considered the importance of ensuring that young people who present as homeless and who, unfortunately, are unable to return home are not accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation. We noted that it was essential to have access to appropriate supported housing to accommodate young people with varying degrees of support need. In order to ensure that the council had access to appropriate accommodation options and was in a position to provide appropriate support to homeless young people, we noted that the strategy proposed that the following actions should be taken:

- Further development of the Single Homeless Intervention & Prevention service as a one stop shop for advice and assessment of young people in housing need, including expanding the service to include the provision of employment surgeries for young people and access to training and educational advice.
- Completion of the review of young people's supported housing service by March 2009.
- Development of 14 assessment beds for young people at St. Christopher's Fellowship in order to provide emergency accommodation for young 16 and 17 year olds.
- Ensuring all young people have a children in need and housing support assessment.
- Exploring the option of developing supported lodgings as alternative to remand for young offenders and as an alternative to B&B.
- Increasing the support for young people to enter the private rented sector by potentially extending the remit of the current floating support service, Lewisham Reach.
- Ensuring all pregnant young people or any young people in B&B or other unsupported temporary accommodation are referred to floating support services.
- Commissioning research into the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual & Transgender young people in borough and commissioning of services as appropriate.

- Working with the Leaving Care Team to ensure young people leaving care are given appropriate accommodation and support to lead independent lives.
16. At the first evidence session held in January 2009, we considered the role that would be played by the new, jointly funded Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Team in supporting young people and helping them access appropriate accommodation. We noted that the team had been specifically created to provide assistance and advice to young people about their housing options and support needs and involved specialist Young People Assessment Officers (jointly funded by Children's Social Care and Housing Needs) working collaboratively with a number of other teams and services (Education, Youth Offending, Probation, Lewisham PCT, Teenage Pregnancy and Drug Action) in order to deliver tailored support to young people. We welcomed this development. At the second evidence session in February 2009, we considered Richard Michael's suggestion that a key factor in reducing homelessness was managing expectations and that, in relation to this, it was crucial that all professionals coming into contact with the young person 'sang from the same song sheet'. We felt that the collaborative working in the SHIP team would help ensure this. We also noted Donna Kerr's suggestion that it was crucial to make it clear to clients, when explaining housing options, that they would not be guaranteed housing and also try to get them to question whether social housing was something to aspire to. Donna had observed that many young homeless people had very high expectations and wanted, for example, to turn down flats without gardens. Again, the SHIP team would have a key role in ensuring that clients were realistic about their options.
17. We heard that the proposal to ensure that all young people presenting as homeless to the SHIP team had a 'child in need assessment' was already in place; and that this meant that the most vulnerable young people were identified, appropriate support services arranged and that either a return to family, or towards independence if rehabilitation was not possible, was facilitated. We welcomed this development. We also welcomed the news that there were currently 280 supported housing places funded by Supporting People in the borough and that, since July 2008, there had been no young people in bed and breakfast accommodation at the end of each month. We heard that this progress had been due to a number of initiatives including:
- The joint funding of 3.5 Youth Assessment Officer posts, funded by the Housing Needs Service and Children's Social Care based at the SHIP Service. (The purpose of these posts was to focus on the early

intervention and assessment of 16 and 17 year olds threatened with homelessness and the identification of suitable supported housing for them if they are unable to return home).

- Improved referral arrangements for emergency placements of young people at Farnborough House. (Farnborough House provides 14 emergency places for young people aged 16 and 17 years).
 - Developing a protocol with InTouch Floating Support service to assess the needs of young people who are placed in B&B. (InTouch will provide support to the young person whilst they are in B&B and ultimately help move them on to more appropriate accommodation.)
18. We also heard that, since April 2008, the Housing Options Centre had had 32 presentations from 16/17years old that were pregnant or had children. Twenty-three were provided with bed and breakfast accommodation and three of these households had two children or more. Whilst there were 54 supported accommodation places for teenage parents funded by *Supporting People* in the borough, there was significant demand for these units of accommodation. In order to ensure that these supported housing units were allocated to those most in need, we noted that all young people aged 16-21 years old who were pregnant or had children who presented to the authority as homeless also had a support needs assessment. We acknowledged that if these units were not available the Council had to accommodate the applicants in B&B. We noted that there were particular difficulties where teenage parents with more than one child were concerned, as all the supported accommodation options available in Lewisham only offered mother and baby units and therefore could not accommodate larger households. Therefore, if there were two children involved, the client would be accepted under the statutory duty and re-housed. However, we heard that the *Supporting People* team would be reviewing the provision of supported housing for young people and would explore ways in which the needs of young people could best be met, particularly in relation to the need for larger accommodation. We noted that Southwark's provision had been reviewed by *Supporting People* and it had been confirmed that it had no high-support projects and that provision for people with high support needs needed to be improved. As a result a high needs support project was developed.
19. We considered other vulnerable client groups and noted that St Christopher's could cater for people with high disability needs and also worked with young fathers. Donna Kerr reported that an examination of the exit forms completed when young people left supported accommodation suggested that Lewisham had clients with lower needs

than neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Lambeth and Southwark). However, this could be because Lewisham was turning away some high needs clients because it was unable to accommodate them. In particular, as well as more provision for higher need clients in general, Donna felt that there needed to be more supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds. We were therefore pleased that the *Supporting People* review would be considering provision for clients with high needs. We also noted that the new assessment centres at Farnborough House and Belmont Place would help ensure that clients' needs were more accurately assessed and that clients would be more appropriately placed than they had been previously.

20. We also considered supported lodgings (where families let a room in their house to a young homeless person with support from the Council) and noted that this could be very beneficial and that supported lodgings had worked well in Southwark for people with lower needs. We noted that Lewisham currently offered this for care leavers and that once the *Supporting People* young person's review had taken place, the Council would consider extending this to young homeless people.
21. At the second evidence session in February, Rebecca Long reported that when 16/17 year olds were accepted as statutory homeless by Lewisham they could bid for housing even though, arguably, they were too young to be re-housed. They were also, sometimes, housed before 19/20 year olds who had been on the housing list for longer, due to their status and banding, which Rebecca felt was unfair. We noted the officer response that the Council's new allocations scheme would help to address this issue. In addition, the new emphasis on prevention would see far fewer young homeless people accepted under the statutory duty, as another route would be taken, meaning that they were more likely to be placed in supported accommodation and offered their own flat at a much later stage as a 'move on' option⁸. We also noted that, if the young person's support worker felt that they were not ready for their own flat, they would not be offered one; and once in their own flat they would have access to a floating support package if required. In other words, an assessment approach would be followed (rather than a complete embargo on re-housing 16 and 17 year olds) and young people would only be housed once they had been assessed as being ready. Rebecca also suggested that there should be a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting) before young homeless people were provided with their own flat.

8. Prior to the establishment of the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Service, a large number of homeless applications from 16/17 year olds were accepted, the use of B&B accommodation was widespread and social housing was often provided.

22. We noted that Southwark was robust in terms of managing expectations in relation to social housing and made it clear to young people that private accommodation was the most likely option following their time in supported accommodation. We noted that this often meant that young people were placed in shared private accommodation with appropriate support (the single room rent provision which applies to under 25s means that young people cannot afford to rent their own flat but can only afford to move into a room in shared accommodation). We also noted that they were often housed in groups so that appropriate support could be offered. However, we recognised that shared accommodation was not always suitable and noted that Lewisham was not considering this option currently, as officers did not have the capacity to look at shared accommodation at present, although it might be considered in future. Although a proposal in the strategy was increasing the support for young people to enter the private rented sector, officers were also aware that the Council had taken the view that Lewisham might be open to legal challenge if it avoided taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denied them the opportunity of social housing. This made the championing of private accommodation difficult.
23. Having taken into consideration all the evidence presented on accommodation options for young homeless people, it is our view that the current balance and spread of supported accommodation should be examined closely to ensure that all vulnerable young people are accommodated appropriately and that all types of options are considered. We also feel that more support should be provided to young people to help them manage the transition from supported accommodation to independent living, and that, in particular, advice on budgeting should be provided.

Recommendations:

1) We recommend that, as part of the Supporting People review (a) the balance and spread of supported accommodation be considered, in particular, the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds who are not necessarily ready for independent living; and (b) extending the current supported lodgings scheme for care leavers to young homeless people with low needs be considered.

2) We recommend that, before being re-housed, young people should be obliged to take a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting).

D: Youth Homelessness Strategy Priority Three – Co-ordinating services and tackling the wider causes of homelessness

24. It is well documented that once a young person is homeless it is difficult to access health services and maintain education or employment. We were therefore pleased that the draft youth homelessness strategy sought to address these issues and that the homelessness service would be looking to establish links with employment services to enable young people to access work and/or training and ensure that they could access health services to meet their physical and emotional needs. We noted that, in order to achieve this outcome, the following actions would be taken as part of the strategy:

- Continuing to work with its partners Connexions, Lewisham College and other schools to develop initiatives so young people feel engaged and can reach their full potential by removing the barriers to learning.
- Playing a role in strengthening the strong interaction between health, housing, social care and education, particularly in Sure Start areas and supporting new initiatives such as Family Learning and the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot project which is linked to Jobcentre Plus and New Deal initiatives.
- Developing employment surgeries for young people through the SHIP service as part of the wider objective to co-locate and integrate housing services with access to training, employment and benefit advice.
- Exploring whether there is funding available to develop a foyer in the borough Since launching in 1992, the UK Foyer network has grown to over 130 local Foyers supporting more than 10,000 homeless 16 to 25 year-olds each year. (Foyers can provide a stable and secure community in which young people can support one another and achieve independence; help with finding appropriate employment, training or education to make this possible; training in basic skills and independent living skills; and help with finding permanent accommodation and ongoing support when the young person has left the Foyer).
- Developing referral protocols with Primary Care Trust for young people in supported housing or homeless accommodation to ensure access to health services.

- Ensuring health promotion activities are delivered in hostels and supported housing.
 - Developing referral protocols and identify gaps in services for young people experiencing mental distress to improve emotional well being.
 - Developing move on options for young people into social housing as part of allocations policy review.
 - Working with young people and the housing management providers to design individual 'life plans' encompassing the attainment of life skills, tenancy management, training and employment to raise aspirations and maximise opportunities.
 - Exploring the possibility of developing agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour, including staying out of trouble, observing curfews, or starting and remaining in employment, training or education.
25. We felt that these actions were positive, as we recognised that homelessness could compound a number of problems faced by young people, as it often had a negative effect on their mental health and could contribute to the onset or exacerbation of existing substance misuse problems. There is also strong evidence to suggest that homelessness impedes young people's participation in employment, education or training. It is therefore important that a holistic approach is taken in relation to youth homelessness.
26. In terms of the proposal to develop agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour, including staying out of trouble, observing curfews, or starting and remaining in employment, training or education; we were interested to note Rebecca Long's assertion that the experience of being homeless needs to be tougher with stringent rules and boundaries. She felt that this was essential for prevention purposes – making yourself homeless should not be seen as an easy option and a fast track to a new flat. We therefore welcomed this proposal and noted that the schools education programme (referred to in Section B of the report) would also be beneficial in this respect as peer educators could spell out the realities of being homeless with authority and make the family home seem more attractive.

It is our view that the actions advocated by the draft strategy in relation to addressing the wider needs of young homeless people are positive and should be welcomed. In particular, we are pleased that the Council will be seeking to develop agreements with accommodated

young people to commit to certain standards of behaviour, as we feel that the experience of being homeless needs to be tougher with strict rules and boundaries. Presenting as homeless should not be seen as an easy option or a fast track to getting your own flat.

E: Youth Homelessness Strategy – comparative information

28. We considered the approach to youth homelessness taken by Southwark Council and heard that a restructure had taken place in order to ensure that a more holistic and seamless service was provided. The Special Needs Unit and the Homeless Persons Unit had been merged to become the HASS (Housing Assessment and Support Service) which was an appointment only service comprising of two Homeless Assessment Teams, two Resettlement teams, a Vulnerable Adults Team, a Sustain Team and a Youth Homeless team. At the same time a new Housing Options Centre had been set up as a separate business unit to provide an off street approach point, run a number of schemes and deal with Housing Register issues. We noted that any client with identified support needs (including under 18s) was signposted by the Housing Options Service to one of the support services in HASS with a view to preventing homelessness by getting the client into supported accommodation. The Youth Homeless Team was made up of a Team Leader, YOT (Youth Offending Team) Resettlement officer, Youth Resettlement Officer, Homeless Preventions Officer (who managed to prevent 50% of homelessness at visit stage), Teen Parents Resettlement Officer, Connexions Worker and a Social Worker.
29. In relation to the Homeless Preventions Officer, we noted that she achieved her target of preventing 50% of homelessness approaches by methods such as visiting the family home to try to address any underlying issues such as overcrowding (in which case she would provide assistance in relation to the housing allocations system etc.). She also collected statistics on the schools of young people presenting as homeless to ensure that these schools are then targeted, with sessions being delivered in citizenship classes.
30. We noted that Lewisham’s draft youth homelessness strategy was broadly in line with Southwark’s in that the main emphasis was on prevention. We also noted that, as was now the case at Lewisham, Southwark very rarely took homeless applications from under 18 clients as they were normally able to find suitable supported accommodation for that person. However, we noted that (a) officers

at Southwark still had access to, and offered if appropriate, B&B accommodation and; (b) social housing was rarely offered to young homeless people – the expectation was that, following a period in supported accommodation, the client would move into private accommodation. Thus, whilst both Lewisham and Southwark would avoid taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty, Lewisham would still offer social housing to the client once they were 18 if officers felt that the young person would be disadvantaged by it not being offered. The view taken by the Council was that Lewisham might be open to legal challenge if it avoided taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denied them the opportunity of social housing (because if the young person had been accepted under the statutory duty they would have been offered social housing).

F: Youth Homelessness Strategy – Expected outcomes and other issues

31. We heard that to date, service users had not been consulted on the new strategy, but we welcomed the fact that this would be addressed.
32. We noted that the key aim of the strategy was to prevent youth homelessness wherever possible and that the following indicators would help establish whether or not the council had successfully achieved this outcome:
 - No young people 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation
 - A reduction in the number of young people presenting as homeless to the local authority by 25% by 2013
 - An increase in the number of young people accessing supported housing and a reduction in the number of void units in young people's supported housing projects from 10% in 2007/08 to 4% in 2008/09
 - 90-100 young people successfully moving from supported housing into independent accommodation each year
 - 60-70% young people in supported housing (excluding assessment beds) to be in education/training or employment
 - An increase in awareness amongst young people of housing options in the borough. This will be measured from feedback questionnaires from young people in schools who take part in the peer education programme.

33. In relation to these indicators we noted that (a) a reduction in the number of young people presenting as homeless to the local authority by 25% by 2013; (b) an increase in the number of young people accessing supported housing and a reduction in the number of void units in young peoples supported housing projects from 10% in 2007/08 to 4% in 2008/09; and (c) 90-100 young people successfully moving from supported housing into independent accommodation each year would be the three most challenging indicators.
34. Having taken into consideration the comparative information presented to us and having considered the strategy as a whole, including the expected outcomes, it is our view that more emphasis should be placed on managing expectations, in line with the approach adopted by the London Borough of Southwark. We also feel that service users, young homeless people themselves, should be consulted on the strategy and their views fed into the development of the strategy. Finally, it is our view that the strategy's outcomes should be closely monitored and we should be kept updated on the impact of the strategy.

Recommendations:

- 1) We recommend that officers dealing with young homeless people place more emphasis on managing expectations, in line with the approach taken by Southwark, to ensure that young people are aware that homelessness is not an easy option and is not a fast track to a Council flat.**
- 2) We recommend that service users are consulted on the youth homelessness strategy and their feedback is fed into the development of the strategy.**
- 3) We recommend that (a) the Mayor & Cabinet tracks the progress made in achieving the desired outcomes of the strategy, listed at paragraph 32 of the report (which will provide an indication of the success of the strategy) and (b) regular updates are provided to the Housing Select Committee.**

Recommendations

Our recommendations are set out below. We expect our recommendations to be taken on board as part of the implementation of the new youth homelessness strategy.

Recommendations

- 1. The pilot Schools Education Programme should be closely monitored and, if found to be successful, the Council should seek to identify funding to allow the programme to continue, as a matter of priority.**
- 2. A representative from Education should attend every meeting of the Schools Programme steering group in order to provide input from an education perspective.**
- 3. The mediation service should be designated a priority and significant efforts should be made to identify funding.**
- 4. The Council should develop a 'Time Out' service as part of the youth homelessness strategy to allow young people to be offered a period of time away from home before negotiating a managed return.**
- 5. As part of the Supporting People review (a) the balance and spread of supported accommodation should be considered, in particular, the availability of supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds who are not necessarily ready for independent living; and (b) extending the current supported lodgings scheme for care leavers to young homeless people with low needs should be considered.**

- 6. Before being re-housed, young people should be obliged to take a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting).**
- 7. Officers dealing with young homeless people should place more emphasis on managing expectations, in line with the approach taken by Southwark, to ensure that young people are aware that homelessness is not an easy option and is not a fast track to a Council flat.**
- 8. Service users should be consulted on the youth homelessness strategy and their feedback should be fed into the development of the strategy.**
- 9. Mayor & Cabinet should track the progress made in achieving the desired outcomes of the strategy, listed at paragraph 32 of this report (which will provide an indication of the success of the strategy); and regular updates are provided to the Housing Select Committee.**

Glossary

B&B	Bed and Breakfast accommodation
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
HASS	Housing Assessment and Support Service (London Borough of Southwark)
LISA	Lewisham Information and Sharing Assessment and Common Assessment Framework
SHIP	Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Legislation and definition of terms

Legislation

1. Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places statutory duties on local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Authorities must consider all applications from people seeking accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation. A main homelessness duty (see next paragraph) is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a priority need group.
2. Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household until a settled home becomes available for them. Where households are found to be intentionally homeless or not in priority need, the authority must make an assessment of their housing needs, provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves. Where the applicant is found to be intentionally homeless but falls in a priority need category the authority must also ensure that accommodation is available for long enough to give the applicant a reasonable opportunity to find a home.
3. Priority need groups: this include households with dependent children; pregnant women; people who are vulnerable because of mental illness or physical disability; applicants aged 16 or 17; applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care; applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces; and applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

Supporting People

4. The *Supporting People* programme was launched in 2003 with the aim of providing a better quality of life for vulnerable people, helping them to live more independently and maintain their tenancies. The programme is funded by Government grant and is delivered by local authorities. It provides housing related support to help prevent any problems that might lead to hospitalisation, institutional care or homelessness. It can also help smooth the transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.

Appendices

Appendix A: Acknowledgments

The Committee would like to thank the following for their contributions to the review:

External witnesses:

- Rebecca Long, Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust
- Donna Kerr, St Christopher's Fellowship
- Richard Michael, London Borough of Southwark

Council officers:

- Amanda Downie – Housing Needs Manager
- Fiona Kirkman – Supporting People Manager
- Alistair Pettigrew – Head of Children's Social Care
- Judith Ramsden – Joint Commissioning Manager (CYP)
- Ian Smith, Referral & Assessment Service Unit Manager
- Geeta Subramaniam, Head of Crime Reduction

Appendix B: Minutes of the evidences session held on 14 January 2009

Review into Youth Homelessness: Evidence Session One

4.1 Councillor Ron Stockbridge joined the Committee for this item onwards, because he had a prejudicial interest in relation to the previous item (Phoenix Community Housing) as he was the Council appointed Member of Phoenix Housing Board.

4.2 Amanda Downie, Housing Needs Manager, introduced the report which outlined the key priorities and actions contained in the draft Youth Homelessness Strategy; provided some information on the expected impact of the strategy; addressed the Committee's key lines of enquiry; and provided some case studies of young people who had previously approached the Housing Options Service for information and advice, explaining how the experiences of these young people might differ once the new strategy was fully implemented.

4.3 Members considered oral evidence from the following Council officers in addition to Amanda Downie, who outlined the contributions that their teams would be making to the implementation of the strategy:

- Fiona Kirkman – Supporting People Manager
- Ian Smith – Referral & Assessment Service Unit Manager
- Judith Ramsden – Joint Commissioning Manager (CYP)
- Geeta Subramaniam – Head of Crime Reduction

4.4 In particular, the committee considered the three main strands of the strategy: (a) developing early intervention strategies; (b) providing appropriate accommodation options for young people; and (c) providing holistic services to young people to ensure all their needs (including access to health, education, training and employment services) are met. The following key points were noted:

- **Early intervention strategies** - it was hoped that various services would be developed and consolidated - including a single, accessible mediation service and a parenting support service.
- **Providing appropriate accommodation options** - 14 assessment beds for young people would be developed as an alternative to B&B accommodation in order to provide suitable emergency accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

- **Providing holistic services** - the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) service would help ensure that young people had access to education, training and health services as well as housing services.
- **Children's Social Care** - this service would be involved in the assessment of young people in housing need to ensure that social care needs were also met and that mediation to prevent family breakdown was offered if appropriate.
- **Children & Young People** - this Directorate had been involved in the development of the Youth Homelessness Strategy due to the synergies with the Children & Young People Plan including the joint aim of raising young people's aspirations. The support offered to families had been reviewed with the prevention of youth homelessness in mind. The use of parenting co-ordinators was being developed and it was hoped that parenting classes would be held this year. The youth service was working with higher need young people in particular and would be offering mentoring services. Furthermore, pathfinder funding had been awarded for a family intervention programme, based on the Dundee model and it was hoped that this would be provided by April 2009 and that it would have a positive impact on the prevention of youth homelessness.
- **Supporting People** – The programme offered floating support and accommodation options and was looking to develop these and work with teenage parents in particular. Supported lodgings for young people with higher needs would be developed and the team was working with the London Borough of Southwark to find suitable providers.

4.5 Councillor Page observed that the strategy aimed to support young people to enter the private rented sector by extending the remit of the current floating support service, Lewisham Reach; and asked how appropriate this was. It was noted that young people would not be placed in the private sector immediately as they would initially be placed in supported housing to ensure they got access to education, training and health services etc. However, it was often a very good 'move-on' option once the young person was in steady employment. The team worked with private landlords to make sure the property was of a reasonable standard and that the tenancy was secure for at least a year. They also offered financial incentives to landlords to renew tenancies. One barrier to accessing the private rented sector was that young people under 25 were only eligible for 'single room rent' benefit only, so were expected to find a room in a shared house rather than a one bedroom flat.

- 4.6 The Chair noted that the strategy depended heavily on sharing information and collaborative working and asked how this would work and be evaluated. The Committee noted that a group of officers would be identified as ‘owning’ the strategy and they would be responsible for ensuring its implementation and making sure that the information sharing and collaborative working required, took place. Genevieve Macklin, Head of Strategic Housing, explained that the strategy review group would be responsible for implementing and monitoring the overarching housing strategy *and* the youth homelessness strategy which sat under it and would need to demonstrate progress. The very detailed action points arising from the youth homelessness strategy would be monitored by the homelessness forum.
- 4.7 In response to a question from the Chair about engaging disengaged young people, Judith Ramsden acknowledged that youth disengagement was a big issue for the council and that it sometimes ‘bubbled up’ as youth homelessness. A different way of working with young people was being implemented, based on successful models from elsewhere, with the key priority being building trust before referral to specialist services. The key worker system where the young person had his or her own mentor was very important but the building up of trust was essential for this system to work. It was further noted that the move away from B&B accommodation (where young people had no support and no rules) was positive as B&B accommodation tended to encourage disengagement. The strategy would ensure that all emergency accommodation was supported accommodation, in order to promote engagement.
- 4.8 In response to a further question from the Chair, Amanda Downie, Housing Needs Manager, explained that the main cause of youth homelessness was parental relationship breakdown and the main challenge was the core group of young people that were very difficult to accommodate as they had specialist and high needs.
- 4.9 **RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted and fed into the committee’s review.

Appendix C: Minutes of the evidences session held on 25 February 2009

Review into Youth Homelessness: Evidence Session Two

3.1 The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

- Rebecca Long, Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust
- Donna Kerr, St Christopher's Fellowship
- Richard Michael, London Borough of Southwark

3.2 The witnesses provided the Committee with some background information on what their organisations did:

Rebecca Long (RL) - Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust was a local charity that had been providing hostel accommodation for homeless young women for over 30 years.

Donna Kerr (DK) - St Christopher's Fellowship offered a variety of services and provided 49 supported housing places in Lewisham for 16-25 year olds; had a new assessment centre for 14 young people (and would be open to referrals soon); and was about to roll out a schools programme in April 2009.

Richard Michael (RM) - The London Borough of Southwark had restructured its team last year to provide more holistic services for homeless people and had two resettlement teams (for vulnerable adults and young people).

3.3 The Committee asked, and received answers to, the following questions (summaries of the responses given can be found beneath each question):

3.4 Have any service users been consulted on the new strategy? (Cllr Scott)

Amanda Downie (AD): Not specifically but this can be picked up on.

3.5 What are the main areas of difference between Southwark's and Lewisham's approach to youth homelessness? (Cllr Johnson)

RM: Lewisham's new strategy is broadly in line with Southwark's - the main emphasis should be prevention and both approaches have this emphasis. At Southwark, however, officers still have access to B&B accommodation. Southwark also runs a mediation scheme, although there are still improvements to be made to this

(outsourced) service and the council is looking at training existing prevention staff to undertake this role.

3.6 Council and charity organisations working in this area? (Cllr Johnson)

RL: When 16/17 year olds are accepted as statutory homeless they can bid for housing even though many would argue that they are too young to be re-housed. They are also, sometimes, housed before 19/20 year olds who have been on the housing list for longer, due to their status and banding. There should be an embargo on 16/17 year olds being housed – they should be in supported accommodation. In addition there should be a mandatory course on resettlement/independent living (covering topics such as budgeting) before young homeless people are housed.

AD: The new allocations scheme will help address this issue. In addition, the new emphasis on prevention will see far fewer young homeless people accepted under the statutory duty, another route will be taken, meaning that they are more likely to be placed in supported accommodation and be offered their own flat at a much later stage as a 'move on' option. In addition, if their support worker feels that they are not ready for their own flat, they will not be offered one. Once in their own flat they would have access to a floating support package if required. In other words, an assessment approach would be followed and young people would only be housed once they had been assessed as being ready.

RM: Southwark does not house 16/17 year olds as it avoids taking any 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty. Southwark also works hard to manage expectations and makes it clear to young people that the expectation is that once they leave supported accommodation at 18 they will be moving into the private rented sector.

AD: Under the new strategy Lewisham will also avoid taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty but will offer social housing once they are 18 if officers feel the young person would be disadvantaged by it not being offered. The view taken by the Council is that the Council might be open to legal challenge if it avoids taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denies them the opportunity of social housing (because if the young person had been accepted under the statutory duty they would have been offered social housing).

3.7 What is offered to particularly vulnerable young homeless people (e.g. those with disabilities, mental health problems, those that are pregnant)? (Cllr Scott)

RL: Unfortunately we cannot house pregnant women once the pregnancy is advanced as we do not have the appropriate facilities.

AD: Lewisham does have some specialist supported places for young single mothers and pregnant women, although these will only take one child. If there are two children involved, the person is accepted under the statutory duty and re-housed.

RM: In those circumstances Southwark would do the same. Southwark was reviewed by *Supporting People* and it was confirmed that there were no high-support projects and that provision for people with high support needs needed to be improved. We now have the Gateway Project which is a high support needs project and covers mental health needs.

AD: We currently have little provision for young homeless people with high support needs and will be reviewed by *Supporting People* shortly. This issue is likely to come out and we may need to reconfigure in order to address this.

DK: St Christopher's is not the right environment for babies. However, we can cater for people with high disability needs and we also work with young fathers. An examination of exit forms when young people leave supported accommodation suggests that Lewisham has clients with lower needs than neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Lambeth and Southwark). However, this could be because Lewisham is turning some high needs clients away because they are unable to accommodate them.

RL: The new assessment centres at Farnborough House and Belmont Place will help ensure that people with high needs are more accurately placed than they are at present.

3.8 Should Lewisham adopt the same policy as Southwark and encourage private accommodation as opposed to council housing? (Cllr Owolabi-Oluyole)

AD: Originally (before the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) Service was created) a lot of homeless applications from 16/17 year olds were accepted, the use of B&B accommodation was widespread and social housing was often eventually provided. However, Lewisham now offers supported accommodation and then (sometimes) social housing as a 'move on' option (rather than under the statutory duty). The problem with private accommodation for young people is that the single room rent provision (which applies to under 25s) means they cannot

afford to rent their own flat but can only afford to move into a room in shared accommodation. This is not always suitable.

RL: Moving from supported accommodation into private accommodation can be successful but not for under 25s. It is difficult to provide suitable shared accommodation.

RM: Southwark is robust in its private accommodation policy in order to manage expectations. Young people are sometimes placed in shared accommodation and can be housed in groups with appropriate support.

AD: Lewisham is not considering this option currently, as we do not have the capacity to look at shared accommodation at present, although we may consider it in future. Lewisham has also taken the view that the Council might be open to legal challenge if it avoids taking 16/17 year olds under the statutory duty and then denies them the opportunity of social housing.

3.9 What additional services would you like to see offered by the Council? (Cllr Johnson)

RL: A robust mediation service would be beneficial. Also offering young people 'time out' – a period of time away from home before a managed return. Also, the experience of being homeless needs to be tougher and there should be stringent rules and boundaries. It can't be the easy option and a fast track to a new flat. Peer educators can spell out the realities of being homeless and make the family home seem more attractive. Assessment centres must promote a safe return home wherever possible.

AD: A mediation service is proposed in Lewisham's new strategy, although it is subject to funding being identified. A joint initiative with Social Care (who already provide a mediation service) might be possible.

DK: More work on prevention at an earlier stage would be helpful although it will take a long time to demonstrate results. It is important to monitor where young homeless people come from (e.g. are particular schools over-represented) as this allows the prevention work to be targeted where it is needed most. In addition, (a) there needs to be more supported accommodation for vulnerable 18-21 year olds who are not necessarily ready for independent living; (b) organisations must work more closely with each other in order to provide a seamless service; (c) 'Time out' options are a good idea; and (d) more provision is needed for higher need clients.

3.10 What is the impact of work in schools and what systems are in place for identifying and reporting pupils at risk? (The Chair)

DK: The problem with working in schools is that it does not bear fruit until the pupils are 16 so it can take a long time to measure the impact. The peer education programme is voluntary and links into the citizenship element of the curriculum. Information is provided to teachers as well as pupils as they are often the first port of call for young people facing homelessness.

RM: in Southwark, our homelessness prevention officer meets her target of preventing 50% of homelessness approaches. She will visit the home and try to address any underlying issues (e.g. overcrowding). She collects statistics on the schools of young people presenting as homeless and these schools are then targeted, with sessions being delivered in citizenship classes.

AD: Lewisham is not currently working with schools but the peer education programme run by St Christopher's and already operating in Southwark will be implemented in Lewisham from April (with the first sessions being held in September). The programme involves young people with current or recent experience of homelessness, who undertake a course before leading sessions on youth homelessness for their peers. However, the programme only has funding for one year. Lewisham tracked homeless approaches last year and no specific trends regarding schools were found.

DK: representatives from the five boroughs receiving the service sit on a steering group and it would be helpful to have more input from education officers.

3.11 Is the main reason behind youth homelessness family breakdown? (The Chair)

RL: The young women at Marsha Phoenix have often fallen out with their mothers.

DK: Family breakdown is the main reason and a fairly high percentage cite violence or threats of violence.

RM: Family breakdown is the main reason, although other reasons may lie behind this (e.g. overcrowding, the young person being not in employment, education or training). Our prevention officer will try to address this (e.g. putting the young person in touch with connexions, providing mediation etc.).

DK: For example, the mediation service in Greenwich does an income check and makes sure the family is in receipt of all the benefits they are entitled to.

3.12 What are the main challenges faced in reducing youth homelessness and are there any gaps in the services being offered? (The Chair)

RM: Prevention and managing expectations are key. In relation to the latter it is crucial that all professionals coming into contact with the young person 'sing from the same song sheet'.

DK: It is crucial to make it clear to the young person that they will not be guaranteed housing and also get them to question whether social housing is something to aspire to. Some young people have very high expectations and want to turn down a flat if, for example, they don't have a garden.

AD: We now insist on young people presenting as homeless accepting a visit to the family from an officer and we only offer supported accommodation in the first instance. (Previously we were providing flats). Prevention services are working as the number of young people approaching the service and then being accommodated has dropped.

3.13 The Committee also discussed supported lodgings (where families let a room in their house with support from the Council) and noted that this could be very beneficial. Supported lodgings had worked well in Southwark for people with lower needs. Lewisham currently offered this for care leavers and once the *Supporting People* young persons review had taken place, the Council would consider extending this to young homeless people.

3.14 In relation to the comment that it would be helpful to have more input from education officers on the steering group for the peer education programme, Councillor Scott suggested referring the matter to the Children and Young People Select Committee. However, it was noted that Members would be considering all the evidence submitted as part of this review at the Committee's next meeting and would be able to agree the review recommendations at that meeting.

3.15 RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee be updated on the outcome of the consultation with service-users; and
2. That the evidence received be noted and fed into the review.

Appendix D: The Youth Homelessness Strategy

Secure Futures:

**Lewisham's Youth
Homelessness Prevention
Strategy**

2009-2014

**London Borough of
Lewisham**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government's Homelessness Strategy, *Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives* was published in March 2005 and recognised that young people can become homeless for a multitude of reasons, many of which stem from complex issues. The Government is committed to reducing and preventing youth homelessness and has recognised that in order to successfully achieve this, young people's needs must be addressed holistically. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is working with local authorities and voluntary sector partners to:

prevent vulnerable young people becoming homeless, through early identification and intervention;

support homeless young people and those living in temporary accommodation to ensure their housing and wider support needs are met; and manage the transition of young people between temporary and settled accommodation to ensure continued access to the services they need.

The Social Exclusion Unit's report *Transitions: Young adults with complex needs 2005* noted that when young people present for advice and assistance with their housing needs, their other circumstances were rarely assessed holistically and they were often not signposted to other agencies that could assist them.

In order to have an effective youth homelessness strategy, there is not only a need to address young people's housing needs, but also work collaboratively with other agencies to address their health, training, education and employment requirements. This requires local authority housing services to work at a strategic level to co-ordinate services and ensure there are robust joint working arrangements in place to meet young people's needs.

In 2006, the Government launched its own Youth Homelessness Strategy which included a commitment to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all 16 and 17 year olds by 2010, except in emergency situations. It also aimed to improve access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a universal expectation of such services. Another key tenet of the Government's strategy is to establish supported lodgings schemes across the country, providing accommodation and advice for young people who can no longer stay in the family.

In May 2008, the Government published the paper, *Joint working between housing and Children's services: preventing homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people*. This non statutory guidance aims to assist local authorities in the exercise of their powers and duties in respect of joint working to meet the needs of children and young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Our Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy aims to address these issues.

THE PRIORITIES OF THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY

For many young people leaving home to live independently will be a positive move and will be part of a planned and supported process. Unfortunately this will not be the case for a small but significant number of young people. Many are often forced to leave home because of violence and abuse and without any support or help they are left at risk of homelessness and its consequences.

Our Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy aims to address these issues by developing appropriate services to respond to the needs of homeless / inappropriately housed young people in Lewisham. At a national level the current government agenda is clearly focused on tackling issues of social exclusion for vulnerable young people. Recent legislation such as the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Children's (Leaving Care) Act 2000 have gone some way to setting the foundations to develop a comprehensive service for vulnerable young people.

Our wider Homelessness Prevention Strategy sets the overall tone of our response to homelessness which includes prevention, increasing the range of housing options, providing appropriate accommodation and support and tackling worklessness. The development of a bespoke Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy enables us to place greater focus on the housing needs of young people.

Preventative work is important to minimise the number of young people experiencing housing crises in the first place and is, in the long term, the more effective approach. Yet there will be a need to deal with housing crisis and provide support and interventions for young people in immediate need. The Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy sets out to tackle homelessness but more importantly, to enable our young people to raise their aspirations and make the transition into adulthood and independence in a supported and planned way.

Our priorities are:

- To develop early intervention strategies for preventing youth homelessness
- To enable young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their housing needs
- To provide co-ordinated services and support to ensure the wider causes of youth homelessness are tackled and young people are reaching their potential

To develop early intervention strategies for preventing youth homelessness

The main reason for a young person becoming homeless is relationship breakdown with parents or relatives. We believe that it is the best interests of 16 and 17 years old to live in the family home, unless it would be unsafe or unsuitable for them to do so because they would be at risk of violence or abuse. Where a young person has left home and seeking help, reconciliation with the immediate or wider family will be considered. We established the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Team (SHIP) in September 2008 as the central assessment and referral service for single people within our homelessness service. A key aim for the homelessness service is to work collaboratively with Children's Services, Youth Offending Teams, and Probation services, PCTs, Teenage Pregnancy Units and Drug Action Teams to deliver tailored support to young people. This has been taken forward through the introduction of three Youth Assessment Officers and one part time officer based within the SHIP team. Their role is to make a careful assessment of the young person's circumstances by carrying out a home visit and evaluating any risk to them remaining in the home. If reconciliation can not be achieved, the team will advise the young person on their housing options and where appropriate refer them to suitable supported housing.

We will be developing the Single Homeless Intervention & Prevention Team to serve as a one stop shop for advice and assessment of young people in housing need. An integral part of this will be providing a suite of relevant housing options for young people.

In trying to achieve a holistic approach in tackling youth homelessness, parents must play a role in prevention. An effective tool in the prevention of youth homelessness is the employment of mediation services. We will be consolidating the funding available for mediation services into one accessible service, jointly commissioned by Housing, Social Care and the Youth Service. We are also looking to develop parenting support services with information and advice for parents struggling to maintain their children at home. Another idea we will be exploring is the development of a 'time out' service, which will allow young people to be offered a period of time away from home before negotiating a managed return to home.

There are a considerable number of Children's Centres in the borough that provide a range of services to families with children under the age of five - integrated early education and childcare services, family support, health services and links to Jobcentre Plus. Children's Centres provide an ideal setting for early intervention work with children and young people and their families. We will work closely with our Children's Centres to identify families in crisis and ensure timely support and advice is provided.

The SELHP have been successful in securing £50,000 from the CLG to undertake a sub-regional peer education programme for 12 months commencing in April 2009. The programme will be delivered by St. Christopher's Fellowship which aims to educate young people about the

realities of homelessness and the preventative services available so we can reduce the risk of homelessness amongst 16-17 year olds. The programme will target a number of schools across the sub-region and will train young people to become peer educators deliver these sessions. We are committed to working with Education Services and voluntary organisations to educate and support young people to make informed decisions about their futures. We will ensure that a representative from Education is invited to attend the steering group for the St. Christopher's peer education project. The project will be closely monitored by the South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP) and if found to be successful, we will seek to identify further funding to ensure it continues.

The SELHP Homelessness Group designed and produced an information booklet, *Think before you leave home*, which provides essential housing advice to 16-25 year olds. The booklet has been nominated as an example of good practice by the newly established National Youth Homelessness Scheme which is responsible for preventing youth homelessness. Lewisham continues to work with its sub-regional partners to find innovative ways of tackling homelessness, particularly amongst young people.

What actions will we be taking

- Work with Children's Social Services, youth services to develop and jointly commission an early intervention service for young people aged 12 -16 years old and at risk of homelessness
- Consolidate existing funding for mediation services into one accessible service which is jointly commissioned by housing, social care and the youth service
- Develop the St. Christopher's Peer Education programme to be delivered in schools in Lewisham to promote independent living skills and provide information on realities of moving home and ensure a Lewisham representative attends the steering group
- Investigate the possibility of developing a 'time out' service to enable young people to be offered a period of time away from home before negotiating a managed return
- Develop a parenting support service for parents struggling to maintain their children at home
- Implement a new IT system to improve quantitative and qualitative data on youth homelessness
- Collate information on levels of Domestic Violence experienced by young people in the borough

How will we know if we have been successful

- Number of young people accessing mediation service
- Number of Lewisham schools undertaking peers education programme
- Number of children attended peers education programme
- Number of people accessing parenting support service
- Reduction in number of young people experiencing domestic violence

To enable young people to access appropriate accommodation and support to meet their housing needs

It is imperative that no 16 or 17 year olds are placed in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) accommodation except for an emergency. If used for an emergency, there is a commitment from both Housing Services and Children's Services that it should be used for the shortest time possible and support is offered to the young person during their stay. Young people placed in B&B indefinitely can lead to consequences such as increased emotion and mental health problems, further estrangement from family members, and increased propensity to use drugs and alcohol. The local authority has a responsibility to safeguard children and young people and the Youth Homelessness Strategy underpins this obligation. Since October 2008, no young people have been placed in B&B. We have improved referral arrangements for emergency placements of young people by working more collaboratively with partners. For example, Centrepoin provides us with 14 emergency places for young people aged 16 and 17 years.

Greenwich and Lewisham Nightstop provides temporary emergency accommodation for young homeless and vulnerable people aged 16-25 years in the homes of trained and vetted volunteer hosts, on a one night at a time basis. They are currently working with St. Christopher's to draw up an information pack for teachers as part of the peer education programme.

We have in place a Joint Assessment and Referral Protocol for Working with Homeless 16 & 17 year olds which aims to provide an accessible and seamless service for young people aged 16 and 17 who are homeless or potentially homeless. The protocol ensures that young people's needs are assessed and appropriate housing and support provided. The Young People Assessment Officers undertake the assessment and if required, provide young people with appropriate supported housing.

It is well evidenced that families living in temporary accommodation can often feel isolated and require extra support to access services whilst a permanent offer is found or pending investigations into their homeless status. We are developing and implementing joint protocols for referring families in temporary accommodation to Children's Centres and other associated support services so families are not marginalised and fully aware of the assistance they can receive from the local authority and other agencies. Lewisham

Information and Sharing Assessment (LISA) and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are tools in which we can identify the needs of children at a much earlier stage and ensure families are linked in with the right support. We continue to train its frontline staff on LISA and CAF to ensure better joint up working with colleagues and other agencies.

We are committed to putting the right mechanisms in place to avoid any young person leaving care having to present as homeless. We are working closely with the Leaving Care Team to ensure young people leaving care are given the appropriate accommodation and support to lead independent and successful lives.

We will be undertaking a review of young people's supported housing service to ensure it meets with current and future needs and is flexible in the level of support which is required for young people. Part of this review will be to consider the level of supported accommodation available for 18-21 year olds who are not yet ready for independent living. We are also exploring the possibility of developing agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour including, staying out of trouble, observing curfews, or starting or remaining in employment, training or education. Compliance with the terms of agreement will be taken into account when accessing move-on accommodation.

Supported lodging schemes provide accommodation for a young person within a family home. Supporting lodgings are suitable for young people who are not ready to live independently and require support to develop independent living skills. The young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder - or "host". For these reasons and to minimise the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, we are exploring the option of developing a supported lodgings scheme for young people and particularly, young offenders in the borough.

We are aware that many young people with disabilities aspire to live independently but to do so, may require extra support to make the transition to leave home into homeownership or the private rented sector. Supporting People are funding Hyde Housing association and *InTouch*, its support subsidiary to pilot a new service supporting access to the HOLD programme. This programme is designed to assist people with a long term disability to purchase a home suitable for their needs on the open market on a shared ownership basis. The service is available to people who have both learning and physical disabilities and who are on long term benefits. *InTouch* are currently working with 8 people to access home ownership options as part of this scheme.

For young people, over the 18 years old and those moving on from supported housing, the private rented sector can provide much needed accommodation. However, there are a number of concerns about young people living in the private rented sector:

- Expensive
- Lack of support available to enable young people to maintain their tenancies

- Landlords not fulfilling their responsibilities
- Sharing facilities

We are aware that some young people in supported housing could live independently in the private rented sector with floating support. With the Supporting People Team, we will be investigating this possibility of increasing floating support to enable those young people to access the private rented sector. The private rented sector has grown significantly over the last few years which emphasises the importance of ensuring that the sector is an attractive tenure of choice for young people. As part of our wider Housing Strategy, we will be working closely with landlords, developers and housing providers, to ensure the sector realises its potential for providing secure, high quality, and affordable homes, and that private rented housing contributes fully to the development of sustainable local communities.

Stonewall and Shelter jointly worked on a project called Sexual Exclusion: Issues and best practice in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual housing and homelessness (2005). Its aim was to raise awareness of the significant housing and homelessness problems that lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience. It is documented that young lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people face key problems related to housing:

- Young people thrown out of their home because of their sexuality
- Young people suffer physical and verbal harassment inside and outside the home
- Currently the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are not monitored.

We will be commissioning research into the needs of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people to ensure their housing needs are being addressed and to commission new services where appropriate. We will also ensure that the Homelessness Service's monitoring systems are capturing information on LGBT young people when they access the service for help.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) households are more than likely than White British households to live in overcrowded conditions. Studies have shown that overcrowding is one of the risk factors that can lead to young people becoming homeless. We received additional funding from the government to tackle the problem of overcrowding in social housing. We have used part of the funding to encourage overcrowded social housing tenants to find suitable housing in the private rented sector via our Freshstart scheme. The other funding has been used to support our Underoccupation Scheme in order to release more 3 bedroom properties. We have bid for more money from the government to continue our work and we have been successful. A new idea we will be exploring is around mitigation initiatives for overcrowded families i.e. additional facilities such as wash hand basins, toilets, remodelling internal space, and linking children into after school programmes to complete homework activities.

What actions will we be taking

- Develop the SHIP service as one stop shop for advice and assessment of young people in housing need
- Complete a comprehensive review of supported housing provision for young people, particularly for vulnerable 18 -21 year olds
- Explore the potential of extending the current floating support service to young people in private rented accommodation
- Develop assessment beds for young people at St. Christopher's
- Ensure all young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness receive appropriate assessments to determine their future housing options
- Explore option of developing supported lodgings as alternative to remand for young offenders
- Develop agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour
- Develop an awareness/education course for young people who are re-housed to enable them to live independently and to sustain their tenancy
- Ensure all pregnant young people or any young person in temporary accommodation receives floating support services
- Commission research into the housing needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual & Transgender young people in borough and commission services as appropriate
- Work with the Leaving Care Team to ensure young people leaving care are given appropriate accommodation and support to lead independent lives

How will we know if we have been successful?

- Number of vulnerable young people living in private rented sector receiving support from floating support service
- Number of young people accessing the private rented sector
- Number of young people in supported lodgings
- Number of young people who have signed up to behaviour agreements
- Number of young people in temporary accommodation receiving floating support
- Number of young people leaving care accessing settled accommodation

To provide co-ordinated services and support to ensure the wider causes of youth homelessness are tackled and young people are reaching their potential

The Sustainable Community Strategy seeks to 'inspire all our young people to achieve their full potential by removing the barriers to learning... Encourage and facilitate access to education, training and employment opportunities for all our citizens'. Education is a key factor in determining and transforming people's life chances. A key Local Area Agreement target (National Indicator:117) is to increase the number of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment.

It is well documented that once a young person is homeless it is difficult to access or maintain education or employment. It is essential that Lewisham seeks to address these issues; and the homelessness service will be looking to establish links with employment services to enable young people to access work and/or training.

Combating worklessness is a central goal of the Housing Strategy and a key aim is to work with Jobcentre Plus, Registered Social Landlords, voluntary sector agencies, other council departments to overcome barriers to work and to facilitate access into work initiatives. We plan to develop employment surgeries for young people as part of the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention (SHIP) to integrate and co-locate housing, training and employment services.

Apprenticeships are a government backed scheme to enable young people, especially, to access employment. Government plans are that 1 in 5 young people should follow an apprenticeship (currently the figure is less than 1 in 15). We have agreed to deliver a total of 100 apprenticeships by 2012 as part of the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

Housing providers in Lewisham such as Hyde, London and Quadrant and Phoenix, already have schemes to promote employment and training opportunities. We will use every opportunity to attract funding streams to Lewisham for these purposes.

We continue to work with our partners Connexions, Lewisham College and other schools to develop initiative so young people feel engaged and can reach their full potential by removing the barriers to learning.

We will work with young people and housing management providers to design individual 'life plans' which encompass the attainment of life skills, tenancy management, training and employment to raise aspirations and maximise life opportunities. Also, we are investigating the possibility of developing agreements with young homeless people seeking accommodation to commit to certain standards of behaviour, including staying out of trouble, observing curfews, or starting and remaining in employment, training or education.

We will explore the possibility of developing a foyer in the borough. Foyers were launched in 1992, and the UK Foyer network has grown to over 130

local Foyers supporting more than 10,000 homeless 16 to 25 year-olds each year. Foyers can provide a stable and secure community in which young people can support one another and achieve independence; help with finding appropriate employment, training or education to make this possible; training in basic skills and independent living skills; and help with finding permanent accommodation and ongoing support when the young person has left the Foyer.

Enabling greater access to health services is another key aspect of youth homelessness. Being homeless can have harmful effects on physical and mental health and young people are particularly vulnerable. We are committed to the Every Child Matters agenda and will ensure that young people are linked into health services to enhance well being and also to address any risk and/or dependence on substance misuse. We are developing protocols with the Primary Care Trust for young people in supported housing or homeless accommodation to enable better access into health services. Promotion of health services and activities will be delivered in hostels and supported housing. We are also developing referral protocols and identify gaps in services for young people experiencing mental distress to improve emotional well being.

Our Allocations Policy is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is open, transparent, fair and reflects the needs of the borough. Move on options for young people into social housing is forming part of the allocations review.

The overarching aim of this strategy is to enable young people to live independent lives and to achieve this, we will co-ordinate partners to provide settled, affordable and sustainable housing options via the private sector and social housing routes.

What actions will we be taking

- Develop employment surgeries for young people as part of the SHIP service
- Work with partners in education to develop initiatives to encourage young people to take up vocational/academic activities.
- Investigate the option to develop a Foyer to assist young homeless people in Lewisham
- Develop referral protocols with Primary Care Trust for young people in supported housing or homeless accommodation
- Ensure health promotion activities are delivered in hostels and supported housing
- Develop referral protocols and identify gaps in services for young people experiencing mental distress and improve emotional well being

- Develop move on options for young people for young people into social housing as part of allocations review
- Design individual 'life plans' for young people entering social/private rented housing to link them into education/employment opportunities

How will we know if we have been successful

- Number of young people accessing employment surgeries
- Number of health promotion activities run in hostels and supporting housing
- Number of young people signed up to 'Life Plans' with their housing management provider
- Number of apprenticeships

DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy is a 5 year strategy. However this strategy comes at a time of significant change in the housing market and institutional context for housing policy. The housing market is facing unprecedented difficulties in the wake of the recession, creating serious challenges for policy making and delivery.

In order to ensure that the strategy is able to adapt it will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The actions falling under each of the strategic objectives are incorporated into service plans, team plans and individual performance plans and we use our performance framework to ensure they are delivered.

Throughout the plan we have identified performance measures under each of the 8 strategic objectives to enable us to measure outcomes. A number of these performance measures also feature in our LAA. Our Local Area Agreement (LAA) sets out the priorities for the borough and has been agreed between the Government, the local authority, the Local Strategic Partnership and other key partners.

Working in partnership to deliver the Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy

Delivery of the Housing Strategy will be monitored through the Sustainable Development Partnership of the LSP and the following groups.

Sustainable Development Partnership Board – a sub partnership group of the Local Strategic Partnership established recently to progress the priorities contained within the Regeneration Strategy, Housing Strategy and the Local Development Framework in order to meet the vision of the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Lewisham Homelessness Forum – a group made up of statutory agencies and

voluntary organisations who deliver a range of services to homeless people.

Housing & Disability Group – a group made up of council officers from social services, housing, occupational therapy and key representatives from the third sector to ensure the current housing issues, both strategic and operational, of disabled people in the borough are being met.

The Young Mayor – The Young Mayor serves a one year term and is an advocate and spokesperson for the borough's young people and inform and advise the current Mayor Steve Bullock on issues relating to young people. The Young Mayor is supported by a Young Advisors Group.

Young Citizen's Panel – a group of approximately 300 young people that the Council, Young Mayor, health service, police and colleagues and others work alongside to address issues affecting young people in Lewisham.

The PIs set out in the report are also included in the Customer Services performance dashboard and reports are generated on a regular basis for the Directorate Management Team, the Executive Management team of the Council, the Local Area agreement, the LSP and the Sustainable Development Partnership and key partners.

Appendix 1

The Nature and Levels of Youth Homelessness and Housing Need in Lewisham

Levels of Youth Homelessness

Lewisham has a population of 250,000 people with over 35% from black or ethnic minority communities (BME). The population of children and young people in Lewisham is 23.4%, of which 47.9% are BME. It is therefore a young borough and that poses challenging policy decisions in meeting the housing needs of young people.

The 2006 Young Peoples' survey showed that one of the key concerns for young people in the borough was overcrowded housing. Overcrowding is a core issue for Lewisham, the housing needs data shows that 10% of households are overcrowded and this increases when considering BME households for example, 20% of Black African households are overcrowded.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation conducted the first UK-wide review of youth homelessness for a decade and published its report in May 2008. It revealed that the number of young people accepted as homeless has fallen in England and Wales in the last three years. However, at least 75,000 young people are in contact with homelessness services every year. This included 43,075 young people (aged 16–24) who were accepted as statutorily homeless in the UK and at least 31,000 non-statutorily homeless young people using Supporting People services during 2006–07

The report found that young women are more likely to be statutorily homeless than young men. The main trigger for youth homelessness is

relationship breakdown (usually with a parent or step-parent). For many, this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involves violence. The report indicated there was a lack of suitable emergency accommodation and move-on options but floating support was widely available and appeared effective. The report also highlighted the link between homelessness and mental health and/or drug misuse in that it can act as a catalyst or compound the issues further. The report also cited a strong association between homelessness and withdrawing from education, employment or training. Many young people reported feeling that their lives were “on hold” whilst experiencing homelessness.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) in its policy briefing, *Tackling Youth Homelessness* (March 2007) showed that the number of young people aged 16-17 seeking housing assistance from local authorities in England because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness is relatively high, compared to other groups. In 2005/6, over 8,000 young people aged 16 and 17 (together with 18-20 year old care leavers) were accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need specifically because of their age, and therefore owed a main homelessness duty. This represented 9% of all homeless acceptances by local housing authorities in England.

In 2007/08, 59 (8%) young people aged 16 and 17 years and care leavers were accepted as homeless in Lewisham, which is slightly below the national average. Levels of youth homelessness in the borough have been dropping considerably over the past year due to early intervention measures and the effective use of home visits.

However, the numbers of young people presenting at the Council for advice and assistance on housing issues remains high, with 16 and 17 year olds comprising over 50% of all enquiries from single households.

Presentations to the Housing Options Centre and SHIP for advice and assistance since January 2008

Month	Total no of households approaching HOC for advice & assistance	Total no Single Households to HOC	Total no Single Households to SHIP	No households aged 16&17 approaching HOC	No households aged 16&17 approaching SHIP	Percentage of total approaches aged 16/17	Percentage of single approaches aged 16/17
Jan 08	1270	261	-	148	-	12%	56%
Feb 08	1115	170	-	98	-	9%	58%
March 08	816	128	-	81	-	10%	63%
April 08	974	215	-	109	-	11%	53%
May 08	871	275	-	146	-	16%	53%
June 08	858	136	-	116	-	14%	85%
July 08	863	203	-	135	-	16%	67%
Aug 08	1222	335	-	149	-	13%	45%
Sept 08	880	109	146	54	25	8%	31%
Oct 08	922	31	219	5	35	4%	16%
Nov 08	829	43	211	3	23	3%	16%

Reasons for Youth Homelessness

The main cause of homelessness in Lewisham for all households is friends/family eviction and this is the overwhelming reason why 16/17 year olds are made homeless. There are however a number of underlying reasons why parents ask their children to leave home.

Characteristics of young people presenting as homeless

In May 2007 the Housing Needs service, Youth Offending Service, Children’s social care, and the Education service identified whether young people presenting as homeless in the last year had previously been in contact with other services in the Council. Of the 134 young people who had contacted Housing Options Centre in the past year:

- 7 (6%) of young people had previously been statemented
- 18 (14%) had had at least 1 or more fixed term exclusions from school and 2 had been permanently excluded from school

- 100 (75%) had been referred to Children’s Social Services
- 24 (18%) were known to the Youth Offending Team of which:
 - 5 (21%) of them had a least one fixed term exclusion whilst at school and 2 were statemented
 - 22 (92%) had previously been referred to Children’s Social care. 9 (41%) of those young people appear to have had their first contact with social services when they were 12 or 13 yrs old

From the data, there did not appear to be any link between young people presenting as homeless coming from particular schools. Identifying young people who may be at risk of homelessness and developing early intervention strategies is essential in preventing homelessness. As can be seen from the data above, prioritising early intervention work with young people under 16 years old is critical in tackling youth homeless successfully. Early intervention is possible as many young people are known by other Council services before their housing situation becomes problematic and the Council’s Homelessness Service is approached.

Teenage Parents

The Index of Multiple Deprivation data shows that poverty has increased in Lewisham since 2004 and income deprivation affecting children is particularly severe for majority of Lewisham Wards. Currently, Lewisham has the third highest rate of teenage pregnancy in London and is among the highest in the country. The main reason for homelessness in the borough is friends and family no longer willing to accommodate and teenage pregnancy is often a reason for asking 16 and 17 year olds to leave the family home.

Between January and June 2008, 161 single people were accommodated in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) under the homeless legislation in Lewisham, and 61 (38%) of these were 16 or 17 year olds. The Department of Communities and Local Government have stated that no 16 and 17 year olds should be accommodated in B&B by 2010. Since October 2008, no 16 or 17 year olds have been placed in B&B. The creation of the Single Homeless Intervention and Prevention Team (SHIP) has been instrumental in avoiding the use B&B and utilising supported housing schemes like Marsha Phoenix, Centrepont and Stopover to accommodate young people.

From January 2008 to November 2008, we accepted 161 homelessness applications from 16 and 17 years old. Many of these acceptances were based on the young person being pregnant or having children. Whilst there are 54 supported accommodation places for teenage parents funded by the Supporting People programme in the borough, there is significant demand for these particular units of accommodation. If these units are not available and it is an emergency, we potentially have to place teenage parents in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Teenage parents with more than one child also experience difficulties in

accessing supported housing as currently all the accommodation projects only offer mother and baby units. These units are not suitable for larger households. Teenage parents with more than one child often have high support needs and floating support providers have reported that there is difficulty with engaging with clients in self contained accommodation. The Housing Options Centre with the SHIP team will be working closely with the Supporting People team to review the provision of supported housing for young people and exploring ways in which we can best meet the needs of young people, particularly looking at the need for larger accommodation from teenage parents with more than one child.

We are on track to achieve the Local Public Service Agreement target to reduce the under-18 conception rate by 55% by 2010. Since 1998, there has been 15% reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies. This has been achieved through greater integration of services and partner agencies working to tackle teenage pregnancy. Key activities undertaken in 2007/08 to address this priority:

- Developing a comprehensive sex and relationship education (SRE) that is delivered in schools through a partnership with the Sexual and Reproductive Health outreach team and the Healthy Schools initiative.
- Setting up a sexual health information and advice drop in service that includes an extensive condom distribution scheme delivered at Connexions, Catford Library, Lewisham College, the Leaving Care team and some youth clubs.
- Creating a Mobile Sexual Health Zone which promotes healthy lifestyles and provides advice on sexual health and substance misuse for young people. This initiative visits non-traditional settings such as housing estates and other areas where young people congregate.
- Monitoring very vulnerable young people more closely with the use of concern sheets and contacting young people by mobile to follow up and support them to attend various sexual health checks
- Tailoring personalised support for young parents from the 'Sure Start Plus' team of professionals from a variety of agencies.
- Establishing a project to reduce the number of unplanned subsequent pregnancies in young mothers under 19 years of age. Appointments offered by Connexions to attend antenatal sexual health session and post-natal contraception follow up

Young Offenders

Nationally, approximately 70% of young offenders re-offend within 12 months of release from custody, with one study suggesting that 27% re-offend within one month of release. The risks of re-offending are significantly increased at

the point of release if mainstream and specialist services, such as supported accommodation, re-engagement with school, substance misuse services, and health services from local GPs etc are not in place swiftly and accessibly.

The level of need of young people in custody is high. National figures show that between 40 – 49% of young people in custody have been in local authority care at some point, with about 18% still subject to care orders. Educationally, half the youth offending population are functioning below the level of the average 11 year old on entry to an institution, with over 31% having mental health problems, and 45% using one or more type of drug. Forty per cent of girls in custody and 25% of boys reported suffering violence at home, with 33% of girls and 5% of boys reporting previous sexual abuse. Clearly the level of vulnerability of children and young people in custody is significant, and it is essential that local services are better able to respond to these needs quickly and effectively as soon as a young person leaves a secure institution.

A London Youth Resettlement Pledge has been developed and has identified ten key services/supports which London young people need on leaving custody. There are services which young people should be entitled to but many struggle to access on leaving custody. An essential tool in driving the Youth Homeless Strategy forward is the joint accommodation assessments between the Youth Offending Team and Local Authority Homeless Services for all homeless 16, 17 and 18 year olds prior to release from custody for advice on housing options and where appropriate, provision of accommodation and support.

Care Leavers

The Department for Communities and Local Government's paper, *Joint Working between Housing and Children's Services* (May 2008) states that around 6,000 young people leave care in England each year. It is evident that these young people will need support to help them live independently and have settled accommodation. The Government is committed to increasing the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation through the implementation of Public Service Agreement (PSA) 16. The PSA aims to increase the proportion of vulnerable adults who have a home and are in a job, education or training. Lewisham is committed to supporting this aim and it is required under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 to work with young people preparing to leave care to keep in contact; maintain the pathway plan and keep it under regular review; and to appoint a personal adviser.

In Lewisham, the number of care leavers in employment, education and training has increased by 9% from 2003 to 63.6%. We have a successful programme of traineeships for looked after children and prioritised housing for care leavers. Over 2007-08, four applicants who were formerly in care and aged between 18 to 20 years old were found homeless and in priority need. We continue to work closely with the Leaving Care Team to ensure that young people leaving care have the advice and support to make the transition into adulthood and are living in settled and affordable accommodation so the risk of homelessness is eliminated.