

Promoting the Social Inclusion of Homeless People

Addressing the Causes and Effects of Homelessness
in Northern Ireland

Consultation document

PSI Working Group on Homelessness

November 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

1. Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) is an element of the wider New Targeting Social Need (New TSN) policy, which aims to tackle social exclusion in Northern Ireland. In 2001, a consultation exercise took place on the future priorities to be tackled under the PSI initiative. Responses to the consultation identified homeless people as one of the groups at greatest risk of social exclusion. As a result, a cross-departmental and cross-sector PSI Working Group on Homelessness was established, led by the Department for Social Development.
2. The Working Group's remit was to consider how best to ensure that the risk of homelessness is reduced and that the full range of appropriate services is available to those who find themselves homeless.

Homelessness in Northern Ireland

3. Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion. It is more than a housing issue: homelessness can occur as a result of poor health, unemployment or poverty, for example. If services are not in place to effectively address these issues, then the lack of a stable home environment can present a wide range of problems beyond housing and can bring difficulties in accessing other services.
4. The problem of homelessness has increased in recent years in Northern Ireland, particularly between 1999/2000 and 2002/03. Over this period, the number of households who made homelessness applications to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), which has certain statutory duties to those found to be homeless, increased by 49% and the number awarded full duty status increased by 65%. There is evidence to suggest that the growth has slowed considerably in the last year.

The Structure of this Consultation Paper

5. This consultation paper addresses the following issues:
 - **Section 2** provides some background information on the PSI initiative;
 - **Section 3** provides a brief definition of 'homelessness', outlines the stigma that people who are homeless may experience, and indicates the impact of social exclusion upon homeless people;
 - **Section 4** examines the extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland, and identifies the households it is most likely to affect;

- **Section 5** details the current policies, programmes and strategies under way in Northern Ireland that are relevant to preventing and tackling homelessness;
- **Section 6** sets out a wide range of proposals to prevent homelessness, and to improve the means of responding to it, arranged under the following headings:
 - Prevention;
 - Housing;
 - Health and social services;
 - Tackling financial disadvantage;
 - Employability;
 - Education; and
 - Criminal justice and community safety;
- **Section 7** sets out a number of proposals for changes to legislation, relating to:
 - Advice and information about homelessness;
 - The priority need categories within the homelessness legislation, with specific reference to 16-17 year olds and care leavers;
 - A statutory right to review of homelessness decisions, and a subsequent right of appeal to the county court;
 - A multi-agency approach to preventing and responding to homelessness;
 - A requirement for the NIHE to produce a homelessness strategy every five years; and
 - A multi-agency approach to the development and implementation of homelessness strategies;
- The multi-agency approach makes reference to how the NIHE works with public and voluntary sector partners, such as health and social services, education services, criminal justice agencies and registered housing associations;
- **Section 7** also makes recommendations regarding matters that should be included in the guidance that is issued to NIHE staff regarding homelessness decisions. These recommendations make reference to:
 - Definitions of homelessness;
 - The provision of advice and information to prevent homelessness;
 - Applications from care leavers and those discharged from institutions, including prison; and
 - The use of temporary accommodation generally and Bed and Breakfast accommodation in particular;
- **Section 8** addresses the equality implications for the nine categories of persons covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and

- **Section 9** outlines how to respond to this consultation exercise. Consultees should carefully consider any potential equality implications for the Section 75 groups outlined in section 8, when addressing the questions raised.

Implementation of the strategy

6. The Government is committed to preventing homelessness wherever possible, and tackling it effectively when it occurs.
7. In this consultation paper, the Working Group sets out its proposals for a strategy through which relevant agencies can work together to prevent and respond to homelessness and social exclusion. At this stage, these proposals do not represent official Government policy. The purpose of the consultation exercise is to test the ideas proposed with interested parties.
8. Following this consultation exercise, the findings will be translated into action through a planned and co-ordinated approach to the development and implementation of the strategy. It is intended to publish a final strategy in 2005.
9. The strategy will set out how, in conjunction with relevant agencies, the various measures agreed can best be taken forward, by whom and within what timescale, including the performance measures to be put in place to monitor progress and effectiveness.

Resources

10. New TSN means Departments using more of their existing resources to benefit the most disadvantaged people, groups and areas. It is about changing the way things are done so that programmes and services are organised and delivered in ways that are more helpful to disadvantaged people.
11. The strategy emerging from this consultation exercise will aim to ensure that the resources already devoted to preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of homeless people, by government departments and statutory agencies, are used in a joined-up way to deliver better services for those who are affected by homelessness.
12. It may be, however, that additional investment may be required to take forward some elements of the final strategy that emerges from this consultation. This will need to be addressed as part of future expenditure reviews, recognising of course that there are always competing priorities for limited resources. The outcome of this consultation exercise and the decisions that are made as a result, will feed into that process.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Child in need (as defined by Articles 17 and 18 of the Children (NI) Order 1995) refers to a person under the age of 18 who is either: (a) unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him or her of services by an authority; (b) his or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services; or (c) he or she is disabled.

DE – Department of Education

DEL – Department for Employment and Learning

Dependent child, within the context of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, refers to all children under 16, and all children aged 16-18 who are in, or are about to begin, full time education or training, or who for other reasons are unable to support themselves and who live at home.

DHSSPS – Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

DSD – Department for Social Development

Eligible child (under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) refers to a 16 or 17 year old who has been looked after by an authority for a prescribed period, which began after he or she reached a prescribed age and ended after he or she reached the age of 16.

Former relevant child (under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) refers to an 18 to 21 year old who may be either (a) a person who qualified as a relevant child *or* (b) a person who qualified as an eligible child.

Full duty applicants or **full duty status** refers to those applicants under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 who are found to be homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and homeless unintentionally.

HSS – Health and Social Services

Intentionality refers to the test applied to applicants under the Housing (NI) Order 1988 to determine whether the applicant deliberately did something, or failed to do something, which resulted in them becoming homeless.

Multiple needs is defined as a person or household who is unlikely to be able to live successfully in unsupported accommodation as a result of the presence of more than two problems from a range which includes mental health problems, misuse of various substances, physical health problems, challenging behaviours and vulnerability because of age.¹

Neighbourhood harassment refers to a dispute between neighbours resulting in harassment or other threatening behaviour.

New TSN – New Targeting Social Need

NIHE – Northern Ireland Housing Executive

ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Person qualifying for advice and assistance (under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) refers to a child or young person under 21, who, after reaching the age of 16 but while still under 18 was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002.

Presenters – applicants for whom the NIHE conducts a homelessness assessment.

Priority need status refers to those groups who, under Article 5 of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, have a priority need for accommodation. This includes people who: are pregnant; have dependent children; are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason; are threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as fire or flood; have been subject to violence and are at risk of violent pursuit; or are a young person at risk of sexual or financial exploitation.

PSI – Promoting Social Inclusion

Relevant child (under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002) refers to a 16 or 17 year old who is not being looked after by an authority, and was (before last ceasing to be looked after) an eligible child.

Sharing breakdown refers to the dissolution of an arrangement or agreement for sharing accommodation.

Social landlords refers to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and registered housing associations.

Social housing and **social rented sector** refer to housing accommodation held under Northern Ireland Housing Executive or registered housing association tenancies.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion. It is more than a housing issue: homelessness can occur as a result of poor health, unemployment or poverty, for example. If services are not in place effectively to address these issues, then the lack of a stable home environment can present a wide range of problems beyond housing and can bring difficulties in accessing other services.
- 1.2 There is evidence that the problem of homelessness has increased in recent years in Northern Ireland, particularly between 1999/2000 and 2002/03. Over this period, the number of households who made homeless applications to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), which has certain statutory duties to those found to be homeless, increased significantly. The growth has, however, slowed considerably in the last year.
- 1.3 In 2002, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Social Development Committee produced a report on homelessness which called for a joined-up approach to dealing with, and committing resources to, homelessness. In the same year, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive published its *Homelessness Strategy*, which set out a new and comprehensive approach to helping people to avoid homelessness and tackling homelessness when it occurs. In May 2004, the Public Accounts Committee reported on the Northern Ireland Audit Office's publication, *Housing the Homeless*.
- 1.4 This public consultation document seeks to build further on this work, by addressing the social exclusion of homeless people in Northern Ireland. The Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Homelessness has drawn together interests from both inside and outside Government to suggest changes that are needed to existing services, and improvements that might be introduced.
- 1.5 This document seeks views on these issues, and asks whether there are additional measures that should be considered. It must be stressed that at this stage the measures proposed in this consultation paper simply represent the suggestions of the working group. They do not represent official Government policy. The purpose of this consultation is to test reaction to the recommendations, in particular their practical and financial feasibility, from the organisations that may have a role in implementing them, from those who would be affected by them and, more generally, from all those with an interest in the issue of homelessness. Following consideration of the results of the consultation exercise, the Department for Social Development intends to produce a final strategy for addressing the social exclusion of homeless people in 2005.

2. PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Background

- 2.1 Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) is an important element of the wider New Targeting Social Need (New TSN) policy, which aims to tackle social exclusion in Northern Ireland. New TSN means Departments using more of their existing resources to benefit the most disadvantaged people, groups and areas. It is also about changing the way that things are done so that programmes and services are organised and delivered in ways that are more helpful to disadvantaged people.
- 2.2 People who are in social need can be disadvantaged in many ways. They may, for example, be poorly skilled, unemployed or living on a low income. They might live in areas blighted by crime. They may have difficulties accessing services that others take for granted. Some people are subject to combinations of problems and the effects of these are so severe that it is impossible for them to lead what most people would consider to be normal everyday lives.
- 2.3 The term ‘social exclusion’ describes what can happen to people who are subject to the most severe problems. Social exclusion has to do with poverty and joblessness, but it is more than that. It is about being cut off from the social and economic life of our community.²
- 2.4 The factors that cause social exclusion do not always fit comfortably within the areas of responsibility of individual Government Departments. This can lead to duplication in some areas and gaps in others. Furthermore, there are some groups within our community whose members tend to be more at risk of exclusion than others and whose needs must be addressed by Departments and other agencies in a coherent way.
- 2.5 The PSI initiative involves Departments working together and in partnership with others to identify and tackle factors that can contribute to social exclusion, and to undertake positive initiatives to improve and enhance the life and circumstances of the most deprived and marginalized people in our community.
- 2.6 In 2001, consultation took place on the future priorities to be tackled under the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN. Responses to the consultation identified a number of priority groups, including homeless people, whose exclusion from society should be addressed. In consequence, a cross-departmental and cross-sector *PSI Working Group on Homelessness* was established, led by the Department for Social Development. Its terms of reference and membership are detailed in **Appendix 3**.

- 2.7 The New TSN initiative as a whole was recently formally evaluated, as a result of which it was proposed that New TSN evolve into a wider anti-poverty strategy. Evidence suggests that the poorest households are increasingly made up of lone parents and people with disabilities. Certain groups, particularly women, children, households looking after children with disabilities and young households are over-represented in terms of having low income.³ Such groups are also likely to be affected by homelessness, as shown in **section 4** of this report. Tackling homelessness is, to a great extent, also about tackling poverty.
- 2.8 The Working Group's remit was to consider how best to ensure that the risk of homelessness is reduced and the full range of appropriate services is available to those who do find themselves homeless.
- 2.9 The reviews by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Assembly's Social Development Committee provide a basis on which to improve existing arrangements for dealing with the needs of people who are homeless. In addition, the Public Accounts Committee's report makes recommendations for future action.
- 2.10 The Working Group has sought to build further upon the recommendations from these and other relevant reviews. In this consultation paper, we outline a number of suggested measures that aim to tackle the potential causes of homelessness at source.
- 2.11 In the course of its work, the Working Group has examined: research on homelessness; the advice of homeless people and their representatives; the roles and responsibilities of all statutory, public and voluntary sector bodies in relation to homeless people; and models of good practice.
- 2.12 We would particularly like to thank those homeless people and frontline agencies who contributed to the Working Group's focus groups, for giving their time and sharing their views on homelessness and how best to prevent and respond to it.
- 2.13 The papers considered by the Working Group in preparing this report are available on request from the contact point listed in **section 9**, or on the Department's website, at www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing/Social-Inclusion.asp

The consultation exercise and implementation of the strategy

- 2.14 The Government is committed to preventing homelessness wherever possible, and tackling it effectively when it occurs.
- 2.15 In this consultation paper, the Working Group sets out its proposals for a strategy through which relevant agencies can work together to prevent and respond to homelessness and social exclusion.

- 2.16 When the consultation exercise is complete, the findings will be translated into action through a planned and co-ordinated approach to the development and implementation of the strategy which the Department for Social Development intends to publish in 2005.
- 2.17 The strategy will set out how, in conjunction with relevant agencies, the various measures can best be taken forward, by whom and within what timescale, including the performance measures to be put in place to monitor progress and effectiveness.

Resources

- 2.18 Significant resources are already provided by Government, directly and indirectly, to address the needs of the homeless in Northern Ireland through the money allocated to Government Departments and their agencies. For example, in 2002/03 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive spent £23 on services specifically for the homeless through a variety of programmes such as Special Needs Management Allowance, Housing Benefit and grants to the voluntary sector. In addition, the Department for Social Development allocated £6m to Housing Associations specifically for homeless projects. The social housing new build programme, and efforts to promote affordable housing generally, also contribute to alleviating the problems of homelessness. Organisations working in other areas, such as the health and social services, also spend considerable resources on services for the homeless, and some examples of these services are provided at **section 5** of this paper.
- 2.19 In October 2004 the Government published its Draft Priorities and Budget document setting out its proposed priorities and spending plans for Northern Ireland for the three year period 2005/06 to 2007/08. Whilst these proposals are still the subject of consultation, they provide some indication of the resources which may be available over the next three financial years. Within housing, it is anticipated that almost £290m will be allocated to housing associations to support new build over the next three years, whilst the Housing Executive may receive almost £565m. Within these allocations, there is considerable scope to address the needs of the homeless from a housing perspective.
- 2.20 New TSN means Departments and their agencies targeting their existing resources to benefit the most disadvantaged people, groups and areas. Many of the proposals in this consultation paper aim to ensure that the resources **already** devoted to preventing homelessness and meeting the needs of homeless people, by Government departments and statutory agencies, are used in a joined-up way to deliver better services for those who are affected by homelessness. It is not necessarily about spending more money, rather spending it better.

- 2.21 One of the aims of the consultation paper is to test the feasibility of the proposals made, not least from a financial perspective, with all those organisations that may be affected. The Working Group recognises that there are always competing priorities for limited resources and that not everything is possible. It will be important for the final strategy emerging from this consultation to be affordable and deliverable and that unrealistic expectations are not created.

3. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ‘HOMELESS’?

What is homelessness?

- 3.1 The current legislation provides that a person is ‘homeless’ if they have no accommodation available for their occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. A person will not be treated as having accommodation unless it is reasonable for them to continue to occupy it, and it is available for occupation by them and anyone who might reasonably be expected to live with them.
- 3.2 This legal definition of homelessness was reviewed by the PSI Working Group and found to be satisfactory, though some proposals for changes to the law are outlined in **section 7**.
- 3.3 For the purposes of its review, the Working Group looked wider than this legal definition in order to be as inclusive as possible regarding the issue of homelessness and the people it affects. This included:
- Persons without shelter of any kind, including people sleeping rough, victims of fire and flood, and newly arrived immigrants;
 - Persons living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for homeless people;
 - Persons in accommodation that is insecure, rather than held on an impermanent tenure, including those with only short term permission to stay and those with no legal rights or permission to remain in accommodation;
 - Persons involuntarily sharing accommodation in unreasonable circumstances; and
 - Persons who are threatened with homelessness, as defined here, including those in institutions and due for release with no accommodation, those facing possession proceedings and those required to leave current accommodation.
- 3.4 These circumstances are described in full in **Appendix 4**. However it is **not** proposed that legislation should be amended along the lines of the description in Appendix 4.
- 3.5 ‘Homelessness’ does not simply refer to people sleeping on the streets, or without a roof over their heads. People who are homeless may be living in temporary accommodation, staying with friends or even, in some circumstances, living in their own home. Because the legal definition says that accommodation should be ‘reasonable’, people may be considered as homeless if their accommodation is not habitable, or if they have special needs that their accommodation does not meet.*

* For example, if a person living in a two-storey house becomes a wheelchair user, with the result that they cannot access their bedroom or bathroom, they may be found to be statutorily homeless because it is not reasonable to

Challenging the stigma of homelessness

“Being homeless can happen to anyone.”⁴

- 3.6 There is a widely held belief that homelessness is primarily caused by personal or individual failings. There is also a general lack of awareness of the structural factors which play a part in determining which people in society become homeless.
- 3.7 This general societal view is illustrated in the results of a survey of the population undertaken on behalf of the Simon Community Northern Ireland. It was found that 41% of respondents felt that the principal responsibility for causing homelessness was with the individual, while a further 25% allocated principal responsibility to the family.⁵
- 3.8 However, as **section 4** of this document demonstrates, homelessness is more likely to affect two household types: single person households and lone parent households. This suggests that the structural factors that can cause homelessness are likely to be as significant as family factors or individual factors, such as the personal ability of the individual to successfully resolve or manage issues, with appropriate help.
- 3.9 Stereotypes about why people are homeless, the type of people who become homeless and assumptions about their behaviour can affect the services available to them. For example, stereotypes might mean that the services designed to assist homeless people are threatened, or that the opening of a hostel for homeless people is opposed by other members of the community.
- 3.10 These stereotypes contribute to a stigma of homelessness. This stigma may be found within the community as a whole, where opposition to the presence of homeless people in what is usually their own community serves to increase their social exclusion.

“You have to deal with the opinions from outsiders – the stigma of where you live – your address.”⁶

- 3.11 Stigma may also be found among employers or among service providers. It can make it more difficult for homeless people to resettle into a permanent home, to receive the health or social support that many people take for granted, to access employment or to take an active role within their own community.

expect them to continue to occupy their accommodation. Likewise, if they are elderly and their needs change, they may be considered statutorily homeless for the same reason. This issue is discussed further in **Appendix 5**.

“You do get GPs who are very supportive of homeless people and there are others who don’t want to know homeless people, who stereotype the homeless person and so are not prepared to take on anybody.”⁷

- 3.12 Focus groups with providers of temporary accommodation found that it is believed, both by homeless people and by those who work with them, that employers often have preconceived ideas about homeless people and believe that they are not employable. Research across the UK has found that three out of five homeless people felt that employers were less likely to give a job to a person who was homeless.⁸
- 3.13 Homeless people have the same entitlements to services, to employment and to safe, reasonable housing as everyone else. Prejudice against them which prevents them accessing services, jobs and accommodation ultimately makes resettling as part of a community more difficult.
- 3.14 The stigmatisation of homelessness can also deter people with housing problems from seeking help. There may be reluctance, particularly among rural homeless people, to seek help from statutory or voluntary agencies, due to feelings of stigma associated with the term ‘homeless’. Other problems, such as domestic violence, may be associated with stigma in themselves, making victims reluctant to run further risks such as becoming homeless. It is vital that information and support is available to those who need it, and that users of services are not stigmatised simply because they are in need.
- 3.15 Addressing the stereotypes that affect homeless people is a key challenge in improving the services available to them. Promoting the social inclusion of this group within society as a whole requires that the human rights and rights to equality of opportunity that are available to all members of society are recognised as applying to people who are homeless.
- 3.16 It is, however, necessary to take a realistic view of the cultural changes that can be achieved. Unless existing community attitudes are challenged, it will continue to be difficult to deliver services to people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness. Mechanisms are needed which encourage key stakeholders within communities to come together to agree solutions, rather than preventing service delivery or forcing services to move elsewhere.
- 3.17 The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister’s recent consultation document, *A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland*, pointed to the need for local communities to be supported and assisted to find local solutions and local accommodations where poor relations exist between communities. Local communities were encouraged to build partnerships between and within

communities, and to engage in the ownership, development and implementation of programmes to meet these needs.⁹

- 3.18 The consultation responses to *A Shared Future* noted that ‘good relations’ should go beyond the relations between the two main community traditions in Northern Ireland, to address differences within these communities as well as the needs of other groups – persons of different race, sexual orientation, persons with a disability and other groups covered by equality legislation. Respondents identified ‘A real need for civic leadership’ in order to facilitate the promotion of respect and diversity.¹⁰ A similar approach to integrating communities and challenging stigma may be effective in respect of people who are homeless.

The impact of social exclusion

- 3.19 Households that are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, may find it more difficult to access relevant services. Yet being homeless is likely to create a greater need for some services. The stress associated with becoming homeless can have a significant negative impact on both physical and mental health. At the same time, accessing health services, such as registering with a GP and obtaining referrals, may become more difficult, particularly if a household is living in emergency or temporary accommodation.
- 3.20 Once homeless, it may be more difficult to produce acceptable evidence of identity, which is a requirement for anyone seeking to obtain financial services, such as opening a bank account or receiving welfare benefits. Existing debts, such as rent arrears, can mean that accommodation is harder to obtain. Financial exclusion can in turn affect access to transport, which may be necessary in order to access services.
- 3.21 Recent research has identified levels of poverty in Northern Ireland that are higher than Great Britain, though similar to levels in the Republic of Ireland.¹¹ Certain household types are more likely to experience poverty, including younger households, lone parent households and households where there is no family member in work due to unemployment, sickness or disability.
- 3.22 In addition to the risk of poverty being higher, levels of financial exclusion are higher in Northern Ireland. People who lack access to mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, particularly current accounts, are unable to avail of discounts that may be offered on payments via direct debit, and are more likely to borrow from sources such as moneylenders charging higher rates of interest. Homeless people are one of the groups that have been identified as being at particular risk of financial exclusion.¹²

- 3.23 Homelessness also has implications for employability. The increased stress and health problems that are often a consequence of becoming homeless can make getting or keeping a job more difficult. Living in temporary accommodation can mean that some jobs, for example those involving being on call or night work, are inaccessible because they conflict with hostels' opening hours.
- 3.24 Where families with children are in temporary accommodation, access to education services can be disrupted, particularly if the household moves between a number of different placements. This can have an adverse impact upon the attainment and achievement of children in school, potentially creating further difficulties for them in later life.

*"I have been at four different schools since we left home last year.
I haven't had time to make new friends –
I still think of my friends as the ones I had when I went to my old school.
None of them knows me now."
(11 year-old girl living with her family in temporary accommodation)¹³*

- 3.25 Homelessness is therefore not an isolated problem, but part of a broader phenomenon of social exclusion. Research across Europe suggests that there is persuasive evidence about 'the relationship between homelessness and other factors which are either an indicator of social exclusion or associated with high social risk. Two such factors are poverty and long-term unemployment.'¹⁴
- 3.26 For these reasons, homelessness is highly relevant to New TSN policies. Promoting the inclusion of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness requires a co-ordinated approach from Government Departments, particularly those with responsibility for housing, providing health and social services, tackling poverty, preparing people for and supporting them into employment, and promoting community safety. Under the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative, relevant Departments and other agencies will commit to working in partnership to tackle social exclusion among homeless people in a coherent way.

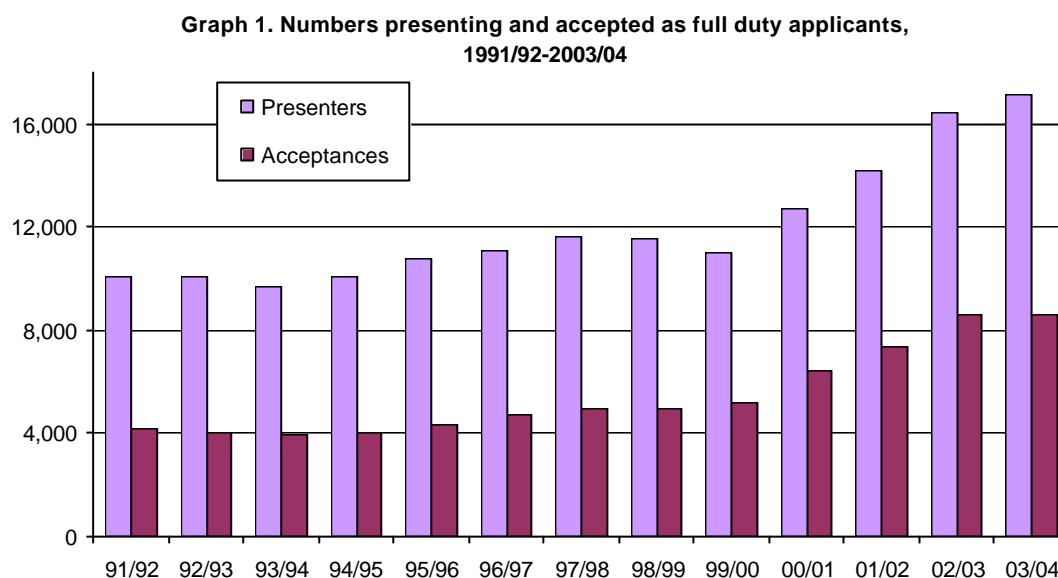
*"We're all human beings when it comes down to it at the end of the day ...
it shouldn't differ because you're homeless."¹⁵*

4. THE PROBLEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

How many people are homeless?

- 4.1 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive collects statistics on those who apply to it or to registered housing associations for assistance under the homelessness legislation. The Working Group deliberately used a wider definition of homelessness in order to encompass those whose homelessness is ‘hidden’ and may not appear in existing statistics.
- 4.2 However, information on the extent of hidden homelessness in Northern Ireland is, by nature, difficult to obtain. It is not known how many households experience homelessness without approaching either the Housing Executive, registered housing associations or voluntary sector agencies, instead resolving their housing problems independently by, for example, staying with family or friends.
- 4.3 Rural homelessness in particular may be hidden, with the result that, without information about levels of homelessness, agencies can experience difficulties in demonstrating the need for services.¹⁶
- 4.4 In consequence of the lack of accurate information on the hidden homelessness identified in the Working Group’s definition, this section draws on NIHE statistics in order to provide some information on current declared levels of homelessness. The analysis includes the most recent figures available (2003/04), but makes more extensive use of figures for 2002/03, as it has been possible to conduct a more detailed analysis of this year. A full analysis is given in **Appendix 5**.¹⁷
- 4.5 The statistics refer to ‘presenters’ and ‘full duty applicants’. The category ‘presenters’ includes all applicants for whom the Housing Executive conducted a homelessness assessment, whether or not the applicants were found to be homeless under the legislation. The category ‘full duty applicants’ refers to those applicants who were found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness within the next 28 days, to be eligible for assistance, to have a priority need and to have become homeless unintentionally (these terms are explained further in **section 7**).
- 4.6 From 1991 to 1995, an average of around 10,000 households per year presented to the NIHE as homeless. From 1995, this figure began to increase, and after the introduction of the Housing Selection Scheme in 2000, the number of presenting households rose substantially in 2001/02 and 2002/03. There was a very slight increase, to 17,000, in 2003/04.

- 4.7 A similar rise has taken place in the numbers who are accepted by the Housing Executive as full duty applicants. From 1991 to 1995, approximately 4,000 households were awarded full duty status per year. From 1995 the numbers began to increase, to over 8,500 in 2002/03 and 2003/04. The figures in **graph 1** refer to the number of *households* who presented as homeless, and were accepted as full duty applicants.



- 4.8 In many cases, households consist of more than one person. For example, while the number of households presenting as homeless in 2002/03 was 16,500, these households were made up of over 19,000 adults and 10,500 children (29,500 people in total).
- 4.9 The number of households who were awarded full duty status in the same year was 8,500. These households numbered over 10,000 adults and 7,000 children (17,000 people in total).
- 4.10 The number of people affected by homelessness in 2002/03 was therefore a minimum of 17,000 people (the total number of people in households accepted as full duty applicants). The Simon Community NI, using a formula based on the NIHE's figures and the average family size of NIHE presenters, estimates that the total number of people who became homeless or were threatened with homelessness in Northern Ireland in 2002/03 was around 22,500.¹⁸
- 4.11 It is likely that part of the increase in the homelessness figures in recent years is due to the introduction of the Common Waiting List and the new Housing Selection Scheme. The merging of the waiting lists of all the *social landlords** and the introduction of more comprehensive housing need assessments meant that

* See the Glossary of Terms.

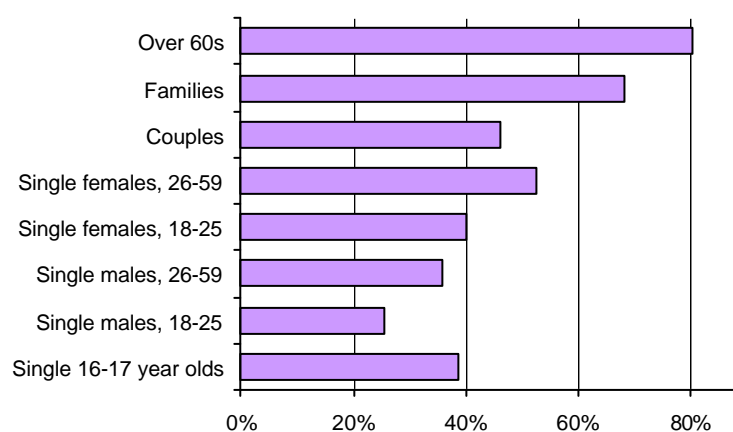
Housing Executive staff visited hundreds of applicants for the first time and revisited thousands of others, some of whose circumstances had changed. Where appropriate, these new and revisited applicants were assessed under the homelessness legislation.

- 4.12 In the year the new Scheme was introduced (2000/01), the number of households presenting increased substantially, and the number of full duty applicant households increased by one quarter. The greater number of assessments and reassessments picked up many cases of homelessness that were previously undetected, allowing a more accurate estimate of the full scale of homelessness.
- 4.13 It is also likely, however, that the rise is due in part to an overall increase in levels of homelessness. There were further increases in the numbers of presenters and full duty applicant households in the two years following the introduction of the Scheme. Last year, the number of presenting households increased at a much slower rate, and the number of households found to be full duty applicants remained the same.

Who is most at risk?

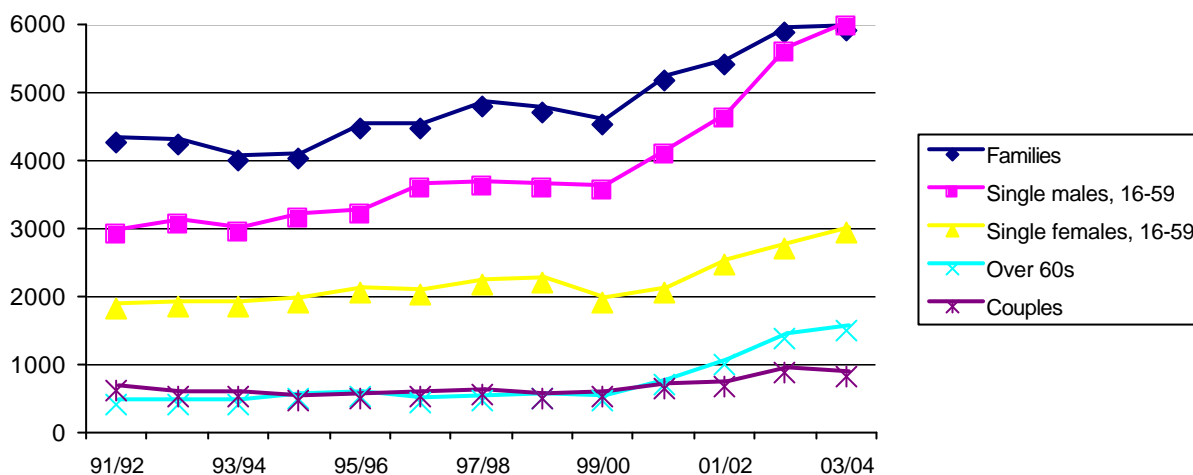
- 4.14 The most common household type to present as homeless in 2002/03 was families with dependent children, who constituted over a third of those presenting as homeless. Of these families, three-quarters were headed by a lone parent. The second most common household type to present as homeless was single males aged between 26 and 59 (a quarter of all presenters).
- 4.15 Some households, given the provisions for identifying those in priority need, are more likely to be assessed as full duty applicants. For example, more than four-fifths of the pensioner households who presented as homeless were assessed as full duty in 2002/03, compared to one quarter of single males aged 18-25 (**graph 2**).

Graph 2. Percentage of presenting households in each category accepted as full duty applicants (2002/03)



4.16 Between 1991/92 and 2003/04, the numbers presenting as homeless increased across every household type, though some household types increased at a faster rate. Presentations by pensioner and single male households increased at the fastest rates, while presentations by families increased at the slowest rate (graph 3).

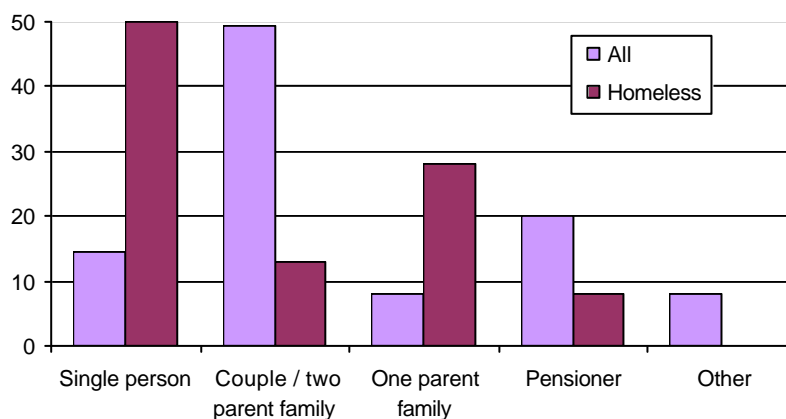
Graph 3. Homeless presenters by household type, 1991/92 to 2003/04



4.17 Comparing the percentage of households who presented as homeless in 2002/03 against the percentage of all households in the Northern Ireland population (shown in graph 4), it is clear that single people and lone parent families were over-represented among homeless presenters:

- Single person households made up one in seven of all Northern Ireland households, but half of all homeless presenters;
- One-parent families made up one in twelve of all households, but one in four of all homeless presenters;
- Couples and two-parent families made up almost half of all households, but just one in eight homeless presenters.¹⁹

Graph 4. All households (2001) compared with homeless presenters (2002/03) (%)



- 4.18 It is possible therefore to identify two household types that are structurally more likely to be at risk of homelessness: those consisting of a single person and those consisting of a lone parent family.

Why do people become homeless?

- 4.19 A number of factors can be identified which have a strong influence on the risk of homelessness. Research commissioned by the Scottish Executive has identified the structural factors that determine people's life chances (such as income, employment, access to housing and so on) and concluded that these underpin almost all pathways into homelessness. There are also a number of more individualised characteristics and life experiences that have a strong influence on pathways into homelessness.²⁰
- 4.20 The research identified the risk factors associated with homelessness and the immediate triggers which ultimately bring about homelessness. Risk factors may be structural, institutional, or concerned with family background or the individual, as shown in **figure 1**.

<p><u>Structural factors</u></p> <p>Shortage of affordable housing</p> <p>Low income and poverty</p>	<p><u>Individual factors</u></p> <p>Using drink or drugs at an early stage</p> <p>Getting involved with crime at an early stage</p> <p>Offending behaviour / experience of prison</p> <p>Lack of qualifications / basic literacy skills</p> <p>Persistent truancy or exclusion from school</p> <p>Young parenthood</p> <p>Lack of social support networks</p> <p>Debts, especially rent or mortgage arrears</p> <p>Causing nuisance to neighbours</p> <p>Drug or alcohol misuse</p> <p>Having poor physical or mental health, or learning disabilities</p> <p>A combination of mental health, drug and alcohol problems</p> <p>Experience of violence from inside or outside the home</p>
<p><u>Institutional factors</u></p> <p>Having been in care</p> <p>Having been in the armed forces</p>	
<p><u>Family background factors</u></p> <p>Experience of family homelessness in childhood</p> <p>Family breakdown and disputes</p> <p>Being in reconstituted families with step-parents</p> <p>Sexual or physical abuse in childhood or adolescence</p> <p>Experiencing premature death of parents or step-parents</p> <p>Having parents or step-parents with drug or alcohol problems</p>	

Figure 1. Risk factors for homelessness

- 4.21 Risk factors may co-exist. For example, children who have spent time in care may be more likely to have no educational qualifications, and therefore to be unemployed and at greater risk of homelessness. A targeted approach is required which addresses the needs of those with multiple risk factors, as well as those for whom homelessness or the threat of homelessness is a one-off, crisis event.

4.22 Triggers are the immediate events that lead to homeless episodes. Some of the most common trigger events are shown in **figure 2**.

Financial crisis/debt	Leaving the parental home in a crisis
Eviction from owned or rented home	Marital or relationship breakdown
Abandonment of owned or rented home because of financial or other problems (such as neighbourhood harassment or intimidation)	Widowhood
Householders no longer willing to accommodate a sharing household	Sharp deterioration in mental health or increase in alcohol or drug misuse (also exacerbated by homelessness)
	Discharge from the armed forces, or leaving prison

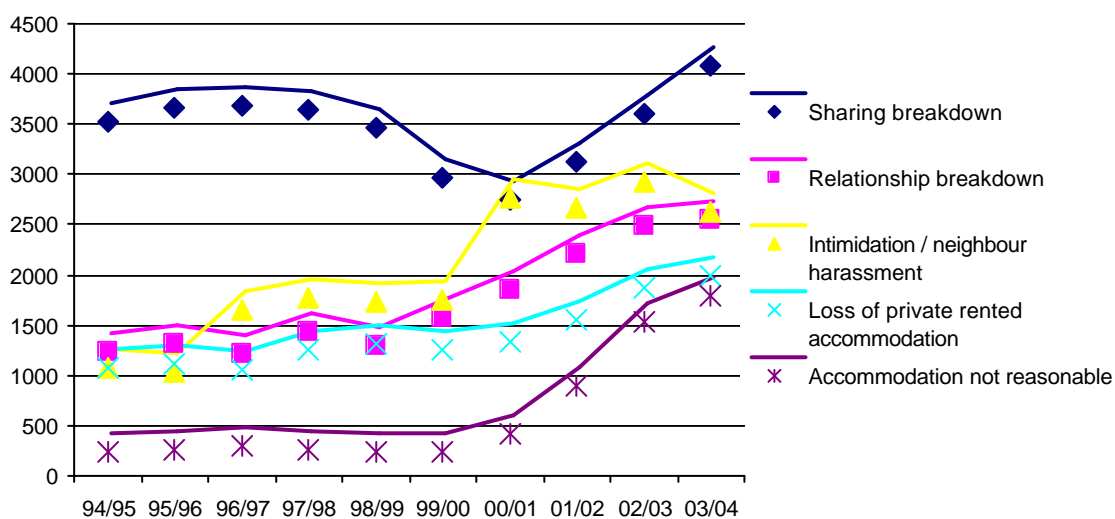
Figure 2. Trigger events leading to homelessness

4.23 The research states that these trigger factors are almost always combined with: an inability to find alternative affordable housing on time; and the operation of the social security system (particularly for young people).

4.24 Information on the events that lead to homelessness in Northern Ireland is collected by the Housing Executive, which records ‘reasons for homelessness’ as part of its assessment of people who present as homeless.

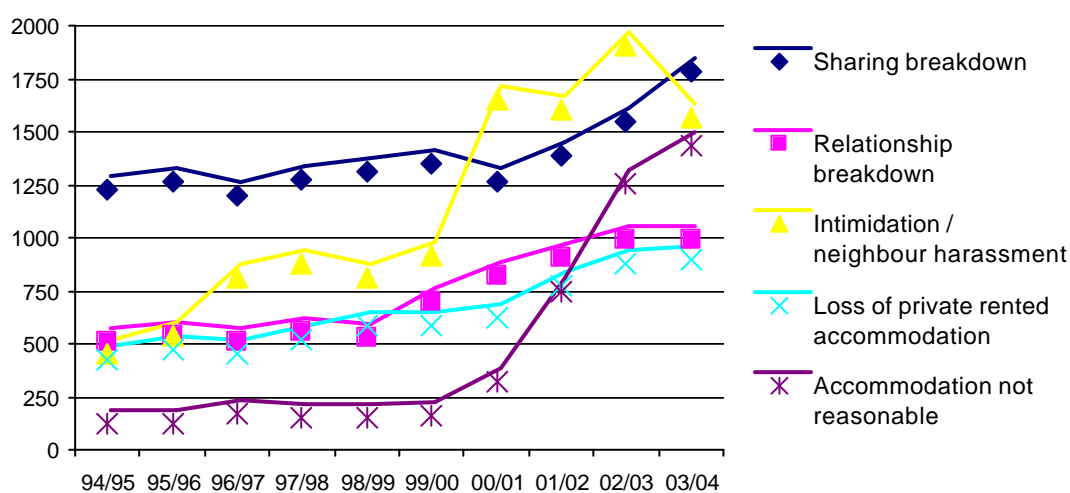
4.25 These figures illustrate the range of trigger events that can lead to homeless presentations and give an indication of the number of people experiencing these situations, but they do not necessarily describe the *causes* of homelessness. For example, there may be many reasons why a sharing breakdown or a family dispute results in homelessness.

Graph 5. Trigger events for homeless presenters, 1994/95 to 2003/04



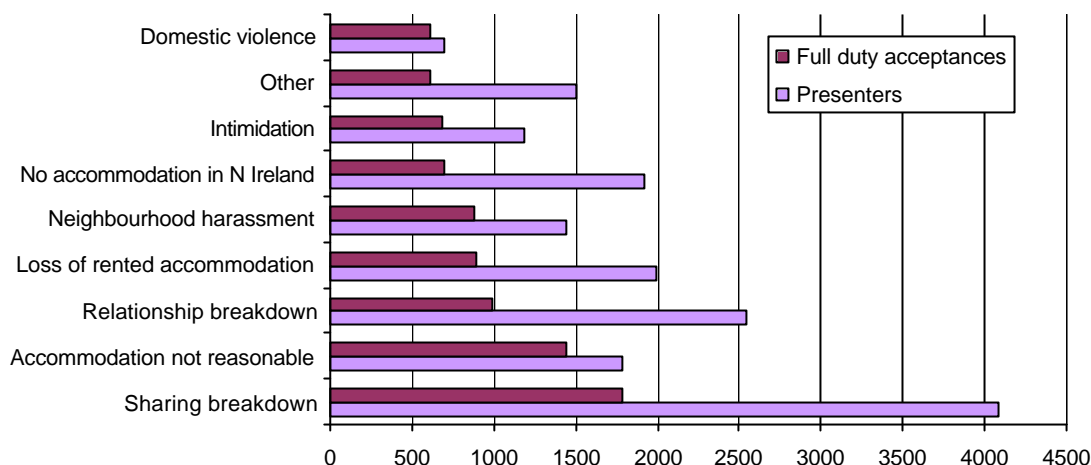
- 4.26 Trends in these trigger events can be identified in recent years (a few examples are shown in **graph 5**). Between 1994/95 and 2003/04, the number of presentations due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ increased sixfold. Presentations due to ‘relationship breakdown’ more than doubled and those due to ‘loss of private rented accommodation’ almost doubled. There were slower increases across the remaining trigger events. Presentations due to ‘intimidation’ fluctuated, while a new category of ‘neighbourhood harassment’, introduced in 1999/2000, steadily increased.
- 4.27 The increases in presentations are reflected to some extent in similar increases in full duty acceptances (as shown in **graph 6**). The most dramatic increase has been in the category ‘accommodation not reasonable’, which increased tenfold between 1994/95 and 2003/04, with the fastest increases occurring from 1999/2000 onwards. This is analysed further in **appendix 5**.
- 4.28 The numbers of full duty acceptances increased in almost every other category, most notably in ‘intimidation’ / ‘neighbourhood harassment’, though ‘intimidation’ fluctuated while ‘neighbourhood harassment’ steadily increased. There were slower increases across the remaining trigger events.

Graph 6. Trigger events for full duty applicants, 1994/95 to 2003/04



- 4.29 A more detailed examination of the most recent year for which figures are available (2003/04), shows that the most common reasons given by presenters were ‘sharing breakdown’ and ‘relationship breakdown’. The most common reasons among households who were accepted as full duty applicants were ‘sharing breakdown’ and ‘accommodation not reasonable’ (see **graph 7**).

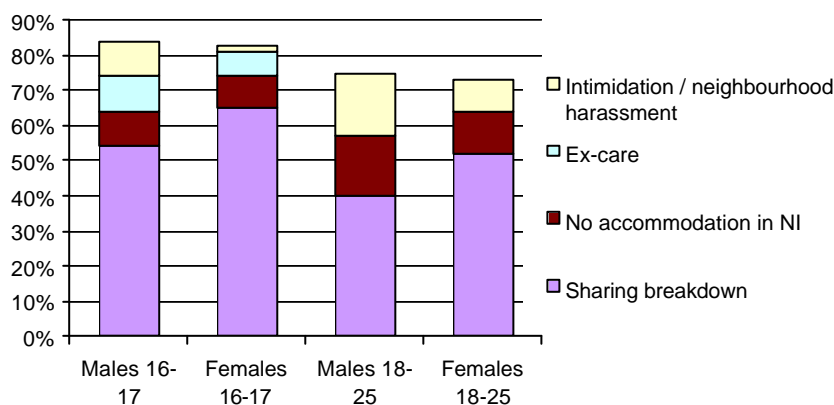
Graph 7. Trigger events for homelessness, 2003/04



4.30 Different household types tend to present as homeless for different reasons, reflecting the structural causes of homelessness. Thus the most common reasons, as outlined above, reflect the most common reasons among the households who are more likely to present, such as single people or lone parent households.

4.31 If the reasons for homelessness are analysed by household type, new patterns emerge. Among pensioner households, two in five presentations were due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’, reflecting the need for different types of accommodation as mobility and other needs change.

Graph 8. Young single-person households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)

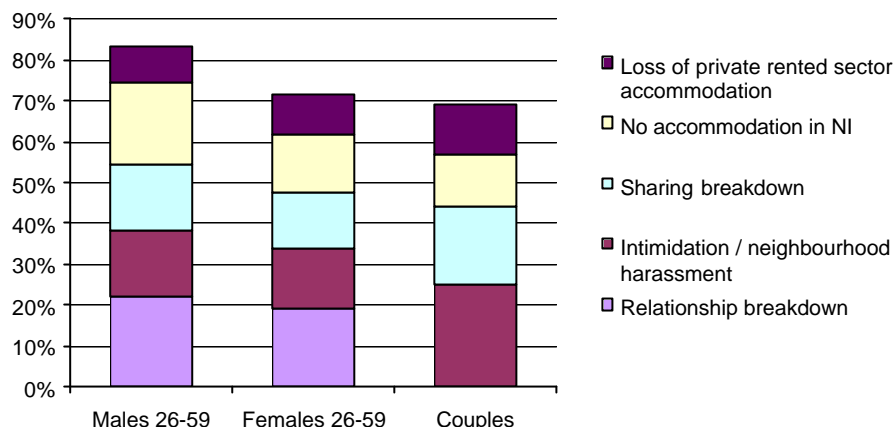


4.32 **Graph 8** shows young single-person households who presented as homeless in 2002/03. ‘Sharing breakdown’ was by far the most common trigger event cited.

4.33 **Graph 9** shows older single-person households and couple households who presented as homeless in 2002/03. Among single-person households, the most common trigger event was ‘relationship breakdown’. Among couple households,

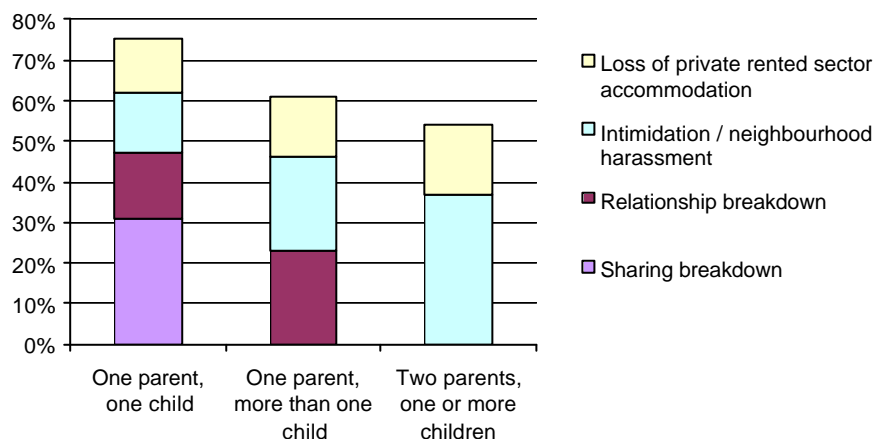
the most common trigger event was ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’.

Graph 9. Single 26-59 year olds and couple households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)



4.34 Across family household types, the triggers to homelessness were diverse, as shown in **graph 10**. Among households consisting of a lone parent and only one child, ‘sharing breakdown’ was the most commonly cited trigger event.

Graph 10. Family households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)



4.35 Among households consisting of a lone parent and more than one child, ‘relationship breakdown’ was the most commonly cited trigger, along with either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’. Among households consisting of two parents and one or more children, the most common factor was either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’.

4.36 This does not mean that couples and two-parent households are more likely to experience intimidation or neighbourhood harassment. Rather, it reflects the lower total number of homeless presentations from these groups, and their lower risk of

homelessness for other reasons. Of all presentations due to intimidation or neighbourhood harassment in 2002/03, the majority were either single 26-59 year olds or lone-parent households. More than a third of those whose homelessness was triggered by neighbourhood harassment were households headed by a lone parent.

- 4.37 The presence of different trends and trigger events for the various household types indicates the significance of structural causes of homelessness, and suggests that methods of resolving homelessness are required which recognise the impact of these structural causes.

How do people resettle after experiencing homelessness?

- 4.38 Research suggests that there are a number of routes out of homelessness, which depend on the household type and the reason for homelessness, though it is noted that these routes are strongly mediated by the statutory homelessness duties.²¹

“When you become homeless you have problems and no one is sorting them out. The problems escalate and you become depressed because of where you are – it’s a vicious circle.”²²

- 4.39 Some households, for example, single person households, may be able to resolve their homelessness without applying to the statutory or voluntary sector for assistance, or after applying unsuccessfully. However, others may need additional short or medium term support from voluntary or statutory organisations, for example if they have difficulties with addictions or mental health.
- 4.40 Some households will resolve homelessness through being accepted as *full duty applicants* and ultimately accessing *social housing*.^{*}
- 4.41 Some households, for example, young people or those with children who are fleeing abuse, may require temporary support from statutory or voluntary organisations before they access mainstream unsupported housing.

“I think that young people coming out of care should be placed in suitable accommodation, for example, with peers of their own age, semi-supervised and information, support and advice should be available ... and also emotional support.”²³

* See the Glossary of Terms.

4.42 People in households with longer histories of repeat and/or continuing homelessness may need resettlement by voluntary or statutory agencies into permanently supported accommodation in order to successfully resolve homelessness.

4.43 The ability to resolve homelessness is therefore affected by a number of factors:

- Financial situation;
- Access to a family or social support network;
- Information on housing options and relevant providers;
- Access to good quality advice and assistance;
- Access to suitable accommodation;
- Full duty applicant status; and
- Availability of specialist accommodation and support services in areas where people choose to live.

4.44 Therefore two approaches to tackling homelessness can be identified, which are addressed in the recommendations in **sections 6 and 7** of this document:

- Prevention of homelessness by targeting intervention at the known routes into homelessness, high risk groups and trigger events; and
- Promoting pathways out of homelessness.

5. REVIEW OF CURRENT SERVICES AVAILABLE

- 5.1 A number of measures are currently in place to address homelessness. The **Northern Ireland Housing Executive** has certain statutory responsibilities to those found to be homeless. These depend on the nature of each case, and can include providing advice and assistance, providing temporary accommodation for a reasonable period, arranging transport to temporary accommodation if necessary and securing suitable accommodation. Suitable accommodation includes both temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation, usually through the Housing Selection Scheme.
- 5.2 In addition, the Housing Executive is implementing its *Homelessness Strategy*. The Strategy sets out a new and comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness. It builds upon existing policies to identify a wide range of improvements that are currently being developed in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations.
- 5.3 A number of other policies and schemes, run by the NIHE and partner agencies and overseen by the Department for Social Development (DSD), are relevant to homelessness. These include:
- Supporting People, which provides housing support to enable vulnerable persons to live independent lives in the community; and
 - The review of the private rented sector, which aims to improve conditions in the sector so that it can be promoted as a supplement to social housing.²⁴
- 5.4 The **Department for Social Development's** *People and Place: A strategy for neighbourhood renewal* sets out a new approach to problems of multiple deprivation in urban areas. By delivering better co-ordinated public services and creating safer environments, DSD will aim to reduce inequalities within and between communities and more generally promote social inclusion. Such initiatives contribute to the prevention of homelessness, complemented by preventive initiatives provided by other agencies who work with specific client groups or individuals who are at risk.
- 5.5 Other Departments and agencies also have statutory duties relevant to homelessness. For example, **Health and Social Services (HSS) Trusts** have certain accommodation responsibilities to *children in need** (under the Children (NI) Order 1995). Under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, HSS Trusts will, in partnership with others, seek to improve the life chances of young people who are looked after by HSS Trusts as they make the transition from care to independent living.

* See Glossary of Terms.

- 5.6 In addition, a number of Government Departments and Agencies have identified the specific needs that homeless people may have in relation to access to health and social services, community safety, welfare benefits, employment and training, and education.
- 5.7 Within the Programme for Government, ‘Working for a Healthier People’ was identified as one of five overarching priorities. The *Investing for Health* strategy, led by the **Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety** (DHSSPS), set out to improve the health of the people of Northern Ireland and to reduce health inequalities. Homelessness was identified in the strategy as among the causes of poor health and health inequalities, and it was noted that positive engagement with individuals and communities is required to address these issues, in addition to effective partnership working between Departments, other public bodies and the voluntary and community sectors.
- 5.8 The DHSSPS has a number of policies, programmes and services which impact upon homelessness, or which relate to the needs that some groups of homeless people may have. For example, some people who are homeless may have experienced domestic violence, they may have mental health or substance misuse issues, or they may be elderly or disabled and have specific health and care requirements.
- 5.9 The impact of homelessness on people using health and social services has been reflected in a number of recent strategies and policy initiatives developed by the DHSSPS. For example, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Office, the DHSSPS is leading an interdepartmental working group that has set out a new strategy for dealing with domestic violence, *Tackling Violence at Home: The Government’s Proposals on Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*.
- 5.10 The Department’s *Promoting Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan* gives an ongoing commitment to further develop policies and programmes to promote mental health, taking account of the particular needs of vulnerable clients, including homeless people. The independent Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, initiated by DHSSPS, is currently examining how best to provide services to people with specific mental health needs or a learning disability, and will cover relevant social issues, including housing. The *Drug Strategy for Northern Ireland* and the *Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm* are being progressed under a joint implementation model, which includes activities targeting homeless people specifically. In addition, the Department’s position paper on Community Nursing (November 2003) provides a framework that will enable nurses to more effectively contribute to the specific needs of homeless people and the new Oral Health Strategy will address the needs of socially excluded people, including people who are homeless.

- 5.11 The Department's mental health policies and guidance include consultative guidance on discharge from psychiatric hospitals. The Department also recently issued guidance on substitute prescribing, the aim of which is to help stabilise the often chaotic lifestyles of opiate drug misusers. In recognition of the fact that some individuals may not be registered with a GP, for reasons which include homelessness, the guidance allows for the individual to self-refer to the secondary care service.
- 5.12 There is also guidance on the provision of services in community settings for older people and other client groups. Guidance in relation to the discharge of older people from hospital, and quality standards established for Assessment and Care Management, have been developed in support of the community care policy. Also, the 'Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership' initiative is designed to respond to community need with particular emphasis on social exclusion, including homeless people.
- 5.13 The **Northern Ireland Office** (NIO) has published its community safety strategy, *Creating a safer Northern Ireland*, which aims to create the conditions which promote an inclusive partnership-based approach in developing community safety initiatives between relevant agencies, voluntary groups, the private sector and local communities. Through the Community Safety Unit, it also co-ordinates the 'Be Safe' initiative and provides funding to a number of support programmes which would benefit homeless people, including Victim Support and Women's Aid. In addition, Substance Misuse Treatment projects, funded by NIO under the Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Campaign, exist in each of the three main prisons, which include 'through-care' or follow-up on release. Work in these projects would include help with housing.
- 5.14 The **Probation Board for Northern Ireland** aims to minimise homelessness among offenders and to improve offender access to mainstream accommodation through its *Accommodation Strategy for Offenders*. The **Northern Ireland Prison Service** recently completed a *Strategic Review of Resettlement Services*, which aims to address the risk factors associated with offending, including issues of homelessness, accommodation and community.
- 5.15 In addition to its payment of welfare benefits, the **Social Security Agency** undertakes work with certain groups of people, such as care leavers, to assist them with the costs involved in acquiring accommodation. For example, through the Social Fund, Crisis Loans can be paid to cover advance rent payments and Community Care Grants can be paid to help with the costs of starting a home. Young persons' liaison officers are available in Social Security Offices to advise and assist younger customers, particularly 16-17 year olds, to ensure that their claims are processed as soon as possible.

- 5.16 The **Department for Employment and Learning** (DEL) has, within the context of the Report of the Northern Ireland Executive’s Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment, published in December 2002, set out an Employability Model within which it will seek to identify and address the labour market needs and the barriers to employment of its clients under four broad headings: Personal Attributes; Personal Circumstances; Managing the Labour Market; and Structural Aspects. Within this model homelessness was recognised as a restriction to a person’s employability.
- 5.17 With the progressive introduction of a new work-focused approach to the benefit claiming process in Jobs and Benefits Offices as part of the Welfare Reform Programme, DEL personal advisers will help people who are homeless access the available services and programmes which will help them become more employable and find work. The development of strong links with other statutory agencies and with the voluntary sector is an important part of this process. The new partnership approach to employability, which supports the Welfare Reform Programme, is being piloted through Targeted Initiatives in West Belfast, the Greater Shankill, Londonderry and Strabane. £14m has been allocated over three years to support the pilots.
- 5.18 Homeless people claiming Jobseekers’ Allowance (JSA) are required, when they become eligible, to join New Deal as a condition of receipt of payment of JSA. Provision exists however for early entry to the programme of homeless people who so choose. New Deal Personal Advisers can provide support and make referrals to appropriate agencies.
- 5.19 The **Department of Education’s** (DE) School Improvement Programme tackles a number of the risk factors for homelessness mentioned in **section 4**. The Programme aims to make lasting and concrete improvements and is concerned with tackling low achievement and improvement for all in all types of schools. It includes: the School Support Programme, which provides support to low and underachieving schools; the ‘Group 1’ Schools initiative, which provides more intensive support; and the Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy.
- 5.20 The DE has also implemented a Behaviour Strategy, to address truancy and expulsion from schools, and a programme for Education Otherwise Than At School, which targets disaffected young people for whom mainstream education is not an option.
- 5.21 The **Department for Regional Development’s** Regional Development Strategy aims to encourage the development of balanced communities, while its Regional Transportation Strategy aims to improve public transport services, infrastructure and communication methods in order to actively contribute to social inclusion.
- 5.22 The **voluntary sector** plays an important role in tackling homelessness and threatened homelessness in Northern Ireland. It delivers a wide range of functions

including: acting as an advocate for homeless people; identifying needs and issues; campaigning; undertaking research and consultation; providing information and advice on housing issues and homelessness; developing new policy approaches; promoting equality of opportunity and human rights; and directly providing accommodation and support services.

- 5.23 **Housing associations** form part of the voluntary sector and they are the main developers of new social housing for rent in Northern Ireland. They deliver affordable rented housing to complement that which is managed by the NIHE. Many specialise in particular aspects such as meeting the needs of senior citizens, single persons and those requiring more intensive support. The housing association movement has pioneered advances such as sheltered housing, foyers (combining accommodation and training programmes for young people at risk of homelessness), group housing for members of the Irish travelling community and equity sharing tenure through the NI Co-ownership Housing Association.
- 5.24 The voluntary sector also adds value to the delivery of services, for example through its specialist knowledge, experience and skills, and its involvement of people in service delivery, whether as users or self-help autonomous groups. The sector can offer independence from existing and past structures/models of service, access to the wider community and a degree of flexibility and freedom from institutional pressures.²⁵
- 5.25 Voluntary and statutory sector organisations currently work in partnership in a range of contexts to develop and improve the services available to people who are homeless. Proposals that are currently being implemented include:
- ‘www.housingadviceNI.org’, a Northern Ireland website containing practical information for the public on homelessness and housing issues (developed by Housing Rights Service in partnership with Shelter and supported by NIHE);
 - Community Housing Advice Project, a comprehensive package of advice, training and support services on housing and homelessness for frontline advice agencies across Northern Ireland (provided by Housing Rights Service in partnership with Citizens Advice and Advice NI, funded by European Regional Development Fund under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme 3.2, DSD, the NIHE and the Community Fund);
 - A rural housing strategy (in development by the NIHE and based on research carried out by the Council for the Homeless); and
 - A *multiple needs** strategy (in development by the NIHE and based on research carried out by the Council for the Homeless).

* See Glossary of Terms.

Focus group comments

5.26 In November and December 2003, the Working Group held a number of focus groups with advice agencies, temporary accommodation providers and homeless people themselves regarding how services work at present and how they might be improved. The focus groups considered questions across six areas: housing, health and social services, money and benefit issues, education, employment, and criminal justice and community safety. In each area the respondents were asked to identify: potential preventive measures; methods of improving access to services; and methods of improving service delivery. A selection of the responses is given below.

Housing

- 5.27 **Prevention:** The unaffordability of housing was identified as a factor that could cause homelessness, and therefore should be targeted in a preventive strategy. Some respondents referred to problems with the administration of Housing Benefit, which could lead to homelessness. A number felt that delays in the payment of Housing Benefit could lead to homelessness. Others mentioned that, where Housing Benefit levels are not reflecting market rents and tenants on welfare benefits are required to meet rent shortfalls, it is more likely that tenants will fall into arrears and become homeless as a result. This may also affect health and well being, as people may go without food or heating in order to meet the shortfall.
- 5.28 **Access:** Affordability was also reported as a factor that affects access to accommodation. Some respondents noted that requirements for deposits or rent in advance can mean that people are either unable to secure accommodation or incur other debts in order to meet accommodation costs. The outcome can be that low-income tenants cannot gain access to accommodation because it is not affordable.
- 5.29 Access to housing was also an issue where applicants for social housing are deemed to be ineligible for assistance. Respondents highlighted policies for the recovery of rent arrears and dealing with anti-social behaviour as requiring careful management to avoid conflicting with policies to prevent homelessness.
- 5.30 **Delivery of services:** Some respondents referred to the supply of housing, particularly in the *social rented sector*,* regarding the impact of house sales and the effectiveness of projections for the future need for social housing. Concern was expressed that the number of homes becoming available for letting in the social rented sector is reducing because many more homes are being sold to sitting tenants than are being built. It was felt that the geographical distribution of housing, housing shortages in some areas and an imbalance in the supply and demand for housing could also increase the risk of homelessness.

* See the Glossary of Terms.

Health and Social Services

- 5.31 **Prevention:** Respondents suggested that early intervention, responsiveness (receiving and acting on advice from other professionals) and a flexible system of support would help to prevent homelessness.
- 5.32 **Access:** It was suggested that better access to specialist types of support for health and psychological issues would be useful, given that conditions such as loneliness, isolation and depression are exacerbated by homelessness or the threat of homelessness.
- 5.33 **Delivery of services:** Respondents (and a number of HSS Trusts contacted by the Working Group) mentioned difficulties in service delivery. Some residents in temporary accommodation felt that they were treated differently by service providers when it was known that they were hostel dwellers, and some reported difficulty getting registered with a GP when moving to a new area.

Money

- 5.34 **Prevention:** Most respondents focused upon the need for: support systems so that good quality advice and information from an independent source is available at an early stage; debt counselling that is easily available and non-threatening; and a mediation service with the private rented sector.
- 5.35 **Access:** A number of respondents referred to difficulties with providing identification in order to access financial services and welfare benefits. Some felt that access was particularly difficult for those with literacy or numeracy issues ('There is still a tendency to assume that everyone can read and write'). One respondent noted that young people in particular are likely to have limited sources of income (for example, their wage levels tend to be lower), limited access to finance from the family home (particularly if their homelessness is triggered by sharing or relationship breakdown) and limited possessions; they are also less likely to have had the chance to build up savings or to acquire budgeting skills.
- 5.36 **Delivery of services:** Respondents' suggestions for improvements to existing services included an 'immediate response' system for homeless people, particularly those with children, to fast track their benefit payments.

Case study 1: J is a lone parent with three children. She was advised that her rent was controlled by the Rent (NI) Order 1978 and the maximum the landlord could charge was £1 per week. The landlord disputed this and eventually proved otherwise. J's Housing Benefit claim was backdated to the start of the tenancy but because there was a significant shortfall between the amount being charged and the level of benefit payable, she had already accrued substantial arrears and the landlord was not willing to accept a repayment agreement. J's landlord asked her to pay a lump sum of £750 to clear her rent arrears or be evicted. J didn't have the money to clear the arrears so she left and presented as homeless. She is awaiting the outcome of her homeless assessment but has been advised that she is likely to be found to be intentionally homeless because she left her home as a consequence of rent arrears.²⁶

Education and training

- 5.37 **Prevention:** a large number of respondents recommended curriculum changes in schools, to emphasise citizenship and life skills, including budgeting, parenting skills and skills for independent living, as well as information about homelessness.
- 5.38 **Access:** one respondent recommended central co-ordination of access to training services, as at present access is driven by individual hostels.
- 5.39 **Delivery of services:** a wide range of suggestions were made in favour of making service delivery more flexible and easier to understand, in order to encourage individuals to enter education or training.

Employment

- 5.40 **Prevention:** a number of respondents mentioned efforts by employers to assist employees, for example by bringing financial advice services to the workplace when changes occurred that were likely to create the risk of homelessness (e.g. redundancy or cuts in overtime opportunities).
- 5.41 **Access** to employment was identified as a problem. New Deal was not felt by some respondents to be suitable for homeless people, as their vulnerability and higher level of need is not taken properly into account. Some respondents noted that in England and Wales a number of services exist to support young homeless people in finding work. In Northern Ireland, voluntary sector organisations support their residents into training and employment.
- 5.42 **Delivery of services:** a number of respondents commented that good practice in employment schemes for homeless people should be identified and promoted among employers. Many respondents raised the issue of negative stereotyping: 'People and employers often react adversely to you when they know you are homeless'.

Case study 2: P signed a lease with a private landlord for one year. A few months into the lease he was made redundant unexpectedly. P applied for Housing Benefit but his landlord refused to sign the 'Use and Occupation' form to prove that he was living there, telling P that he didn't take 'DHSS'. The Housing Executive notified P that his claim for Housing Benefit could not be processed until the landlord signed the form. As he is unable to pay the rent, P is now under serious threat of losing his accommodation.

Criminal justice and community safety

- 5.43 **Prevention:** early intervention in a number of forms was recommended, with a focus on tackling the reasons why people offend in order to prevent the risk of homelessness at a later date.

- 5.44 **Access:** the vulnerability of many homeless people was emphasised, particularly where they have been victims of domestic violence or abuse. Poverty, social attitudes (in that society often has little regard for their well-being) and the communal nature of most temporary accommodation were mentioned as factors which may hinder homeless people in getting the support they need and leave them more vulnerable to crime.
- 5.45 **Delivery of services:** a number of proposals were made for service delivery, including conflict resolution services between neighbours and amendments to existing guidance as ‘ex-prisoners are too often found to be intentionally homeless.’
- 5.46 **In the following sections a number of specific proposals are put forward, but if you have comments on the responses outlined above, or indeed any other related issues, please send us your views.**

6. PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

6.1 The Promoting Social Inclusion initiative involves Government Departments working together to tackle social exclusion and to undertake positive initiatives to improve and enhance the life circumstances of the most deprived and marginalized people in our community. Departments, agencies and non-Departmental public bodies such as the Housing Executive have already begun a number of joint initiatives, outlined in the Housing Executive's *Homelessness Strategy*, to address the effects of homelessness.

6.2 To build upon this work, the Working Group has made a number of recommendations for the prevention of homelessness, or the improvement of services effectively to address homelessness, which are set out in this section. We would welcome views on these proposals.

Prevention

6.3 In the past, resources dedicated to tackling homelessness tended to focus on crisis responses. Recent years have seen a new approach, focusing particularly on the prevention of homelessness and on the difficulties that homeless people face, such as poor health, social disadvantage or poverty, as much as their accommodation needs. Tackling homelessness is as much about helping people to rebuild relationships with family, address health or care and support needs, stay in education, or enter training or employment, as it is about providing accommodation. Prevention is therefore a key feature of the Working Group's approach.

6.4 Prevention of homelessness can be defined as 'activities that enable a household to remain in their current home, where appropriate, or that provide options to enable a planned and timely move and help to sustain independent living'.²⁷

6.5 It is inevitable that, in circumstances such as fire or other emergency, homelessness will be a crisis event. In many circumstances, however, it should be possible to identify the risk of homelessness in advance and intervene to avert a crisis. Early intervention requires that services target people who are at risk of homelessness according to known structural and other factors (as shown in **figure 1**), but who may not yet have housing problems and who, with effective intervention, may not become homeless. For example, the provision of support at critical points, such as the initial transition to independent living, the breakdown of a relationship or the onset of illness, can be effective in preventing homelessness.

6.6 The Working Group has identified five contexts in which the prevention of homelessness might take place. A flowchart illustrating these contexts is provided in **Appendix 6**. The five contexts involve prevention aimed at:

- a. identifying the structural causes of homelessness and developing strategic responses to tackle these underlying causes;
- b. targeting groups/individuals who are identified as being at risk of homelessness due to structural causes; and
- c. working with individual households to either
 - (i) pre-empt a personal crisis which is likely to lead to homelessness at a later date;
 - (ii) avert a personal crisis which may lead to homelessness; or
 - (iii) reduce the number of households who experience repeat homelessness.

6.7 Effective prevention requires ongoing co-ordinated action to create a joined up approach at both a strategic (policy) and operational (service delivery) level. Examples of good practice in policy and service delivery are given below.

Good practice model 1: Co-ordination of strategic aims and service delivery

In 2001, the Scottish Executive issued guidance to NHS Boards which placed a new requirement on Health Boards to produce Health and Homelessness Action Plans. These Plans required Boards to set out the action that they will take to address the needs of homeless people in local areas, and were planned to enable them to dovetail with local authority homelessness strategies.

To support the homelessness work of the Health Boards, a Health and Homelessness Co-ordinator was appointed by the Scottish Executive to co-ordinate information at a national level, to support Health Boards in producing the Action Plans and to identify models of good practice and new approaches to partnership working. A Health and Homelessness Steering Group, comprised of Scottish Executive, Health, local authority and voluntary sector representatives, was also appointed to oversee the implementation of the new arrangements. The Steering Group also plays an important part in monitoring the delivery of the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force recommendations, where they relate to the health services.

The focus has been on improving services by identifying effective interventions and mainstreaming activities, while new funding at a strategic level has been provided for the post of Co-ordinator and one assistant. At a service delivery level, where Health Board areas cannot afford or substantiate health services for homeless people, pragmatic approaches have been developed which offer health services to homeless people, travellers and other marginalized groups.²⁸

Good practice model 2: Partnership working in service delivery

Leicester City Council's Homelessness Strategy sets out a clear vision for its homelessness services, including: a range of initiatives to prevent homelessness; successful multi-agency partnerships; and evidence of positive outcomes. Key strengths of its strategy include firm political support and a wide range of innovative partnerships, including with police, probation, the National Asylum Support Service, social services, Business in the Community and the voluntary sector. There are very strong relationships with health agencies, including a dedicated doctor service for homeless people and specialist psychiatric support for children and adolescents who have experienced homelessness. In addition, a wide range of techniques is used to consult with different groups, including questionnaires, interviews and discussions. The Council's homelessness strategy and action plan aims to ensure that all organisations, within all sectors whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people in the district, are identified and involved in the strategy.²⁹

- 6.8 The Housing Executive, in partnership with other statutory bodies and the voluntary sector, is currently developing a primary preventive strategy for homelessness. Meeting housing need is a fundamental part of the solution to homelessness, but housing services alone are not equipped or empowered to deliver the full range of services that may be required for effective prevention.
- 6.9 The successful implementation of preventive initiatives calls for the co-operation and goodwill of a wide range of service providers, to ensure that relevant services are identified and made available to those in need. Delivering health and social services, education and welfare benefits to people who are at risk of homelessness, ensuring that they can live in safety, and providing them with access to training or employment where appropriate, require services to be provided for them in ways that meet their specific needs.
- 6.10 The Working Group acknowledges that the responsibility for driving forward prevention of homelessness should rest with the Department for Social Development. However, a partnership approach is required and therefore we invite a principle of agreement from other Departments, District Councils, and other public, private and voluntary sector bodies to work with us, in order to successfully implement the preventive measures identified elsewhere in this document.
- 6.11 The Working Group also encourages other public bodies to ensure that, in the development of policies, programmes and strategies, they do not undertake measures that may contribute to homelessness.

Recommendation 1:

The Department for Social Development should continue to assume lead responsibility for the prevention of homelessness. A principle of agreement to the implementation of preventive measures is invited from other Departments, District Councils and other public, private and voluntary sector bodies.

Question 1: How can co-ordinated action best be achieved at a strategic level?

Question 2: How can co-ordinated action best be achieved at an operational level?

Question 3: How can public, private and voluntary sector bodies most effectively co-operate in the implementation of measures to prevent homelessness?

- 6.12 **Section 4** outlined two approaches to tackling homelessness: (a) prevention of homelessness by targeting intervention at routes in to homelessness; and (b) promotion of pathways out. A number of risk factors, trigger factors and protecting factors were identified. **Figure 3** expands upon these. They are discussed in this section under the headings of housing, health and social services, finances, employability, education, and criminal justice and community safety.
- 6.13 The risks, triggers and protecting factors that are social in origin are not discussed in detail here, but it is acknowledged that certain risk factors (such as family breakdown and disputes, experiencing premature death of parents or step-parents, and lack of a social support network), or trigger events (relationship or sharing breakdown, widowhood), could be addressed by service providers through mediation, conflict resolution, mentoring, community development or other schemes that could in turn provide protecting factors such as access to a family or social support network.
- 6.14 It should also be noted that, where possible, services should be delivered in ways that enable homeless people to use mainstream services. Where this is not practical, or where mainstream services cannot be made accessible to people who are homeless, then there may be a need for specialist provision for this group. Specialist services are useful where there is a higher concentration of homeless people and where they can be closely linked to mainstream services, to ensure that people are not further marginalized and are able to re-join mainstream services as soon as it is appropriate.³⁰

<p>HOUSING FACTORS</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>Shortage of affordable housing</p> <p>Experience of family homelessness in childhood</p> <p>Debts, especially rent or mortgage arrears</p> <p>Triggers</p> <p>Eviction from owned or rented home</p> <p>Abandonment of owned or rented home because of financial problems</p> <p>Protecting factors</p> <p>Information on housing options and relevant providers</p> <p>Access to good quality advice and assistance</p> <p>Initial tenancy support services</p> <p>Flexible tenure, e.g. by staircasing down into co-ownership rather than losing an owner-occupied home</p> <p>Mortgage rescue services</p> <p>Access to suitable accommodation</p> <p>Availability of specialist accommodation and support services in areas where people choose to live</p> <p>Full duty applicant status</p>	<p>HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES FACTORS</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>Having been in care</p> <p>Sexual or physical abuse in childhood or adolescence</p> <p>Having parents or step-parents with drug or alcohol problems</p> <p>Using drink or drugs at an early stage</p> <p>Young parenthood</p> <p>Drug or alcohol misuse</p> <p>Having poor mental or physical health, or learning disabilities</p> <p>A combination of mental health, drug and alcohol problems</p> <p>Triggers</p> <p>Leaving the parental home in a crisis</p> <p>Sharp deterioration in mental health or increase in alcohol or drug misuse (also exacerbated by homelessness)</p> <p>Protecting factors</p> <p>Planned leaving and after care</p> <p>Health promotion and Drug and Alcohol strategies</p> <p>Advice services</p> <p>Availability of targeted services</p>
<p>CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FACTORS</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>Getting involved with crime at an early stage</p> <p>Offending behaviour / experience of prison</p> <p>Anti-social behaviour or nuisance</p> <p>Experience of violence from inside or outside the home</p> <p>Triggers</p> <p>Leaving prison</p> <p>Abandonment of owned or rented home because of problems such as neighbourhood harassment or intimidation</p> <p>Emergency situations and community interventions</p> <p>Protecting factors</p> <p>Crime reduction and prevention initiatives</p> <p>Tackling anti-social behaviour</p> <p>Advice and information on committal to prison</p> <p>Prevention of accumulation of arrears whilst in prison</p> <p>Advice and assistance before and on release</p> <p>Provision of specialist accommodation on release, where appropriate</p>	<p>FINANCIAL AND WELFARE BENEFIT FACTORS</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>Low income and poverty</p> <p>Low uptake of welfare benefits</p> <p>Housing Benefit administration issues</p> <p>Triggers</p> <p>Financial crisis / debt</p> <p>Protecting factors</p> <p>Access to advice and support</p> <p>Access to relevant welfare benefits</p> <p>Financial situation</p> <p>EDUCATION FACTORS</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>Lack of qualifications / basic literary skills</p> <p>Persistent truancy or exclusion from school</p> <p>Protecting factors</p> <p>Provision of education and information</p> <p>Tackling low achievement</p> <p>Tackling truancy, expulsion and disaffection from mainstream education</p>

Figure 3. Risks, triggers and protecting factors for homelessness

Housing

Prevention

- 6.15 Proposals are made in **section 7** for a number of amendments to homelessness legislation, which will extend the priority need categories and enhance the current provision of advice and information, among other things. This section addresses some of the risk factors, triggers and protecting factors relating to homelessness that are identified in **figure 3**.
- 6.16 Lack of affordable housing is a structural risk factor that has implications for levels of homelessness. Financial problems, such as rent or mortgage arrears, also have implications, at an individual level, for the risk of homelessness. Effective intervention can help to prevent homelessness by identifying financial difficulties before eviction or the accommodation is abandoned. Implementing schemes to prevent homelessness is likely to bring additional costs for housing providers, though it may be possible to offset these against the further costs created by failed tenancies and subsequent homeless presentations.
- 6.17 One means by which prevention may be achieved is by addressing instances where tenants fall into arrears. Normal housing management procedures need to be effectively applied – prompt identification of arrears, early discussion with the tenant and advice on income maximisation.³¹ In severe cases, it is unlikely that tenants fall into arrears without also incurring other debts. Effective resolution requires a holistic approach to individuals' financial difficulties, and therefore referral to independent debt advice agencies may be the most appropriate means of preventing homelessness for such tenants in the long term. Social housing providers should implement existing guidance on good practice, and should also consider referring serious cases of arrears to debt advice agencies or debt counselling services, where appropriate.

Good practice model 3: Arrears management

Housing Rights Service is working with Fold Housing Association to provide an independent debt counselling service for tenants in rent arrears. Fold actively promotes the service to tenants who have in excess of £300 arrears and who do not have a repayment arrangement, or have failed to maintain a former arrangement, or wish to review its terms. With the tenant's consent, Fold can refer their case directly to Housing Rights Service, or the client can self-refer. Within five working days the client is interviewed and once a formal repayment schedule has been devised, the advisor makes a formal offer on behalf of the client to Fold. There is an agreement between Housing Rights Service and Fold that all reasonable offers should be accepted. The initiative commenced in October 2003 and will run initially for one year.

- 6.18 Social housing providers may also find that targeted support for vulnerable tenants, particularly those experiencing difficulty maintaining tenancies, may be achieved by providing pre-tenancy training, or counselling to assist with the maintenance of the tenancy. It is recommended that consideration should be given to the introduction of such schemes, in collaboration with relevant partners.

6.19 The Working Group also recommends that, in order to ensure that eviction or abandonment of a property is, as far as possible, a last resort, existing mediation and conflict resolution services should be expanded for tenants and landlords in both the social and private rented sectors.

Service delivery

6.20 As part of its remit, the Working Group reviewed existing research. It was considered that the recommendations in the Council for the Homeless NI/NIHE research *Gateways and Gatekeepers: Housing options and support for homeless people with a disability* (2000) should be commended for their proposals for:

- effective monitoring of temporary accommodation;
- further monitoring of the impact of housing policies on disabled applicants;
- recording and monitoring to determine the amount and availability of suitable accommodation within social housing stock; and
- methods of making the best use of adapted accommodation.³²

6.21 It is recommended that these proposals be revisited by social housing providers and other relevant organisations in order to further improve services for people with disabilities.

6.22 It is also recommended that priority should be given to ensuring that single people and young people with support needs are adequately provided for in terms of temporary and permanent accommodation. In line with UK Government recommendations, it should be recognised that all young people who are homeless are, by definition, vulnerable to some extent.³³ Accommodation should be developed which is suitable for their needs, which enables support and guidance to be provided and which will prepare them for independent living.

Recommendation 2:

Social housing providers should implement existing guidance on good practice, and should also consider referring serious cases of arrears to debt advice agencies or debt counselling services, where appropriate.

Recommendation 3:

Social housing providers should consider the need for targeted support for vulnerable tenants, particularly those experiencing difficulty maintaining tenancies, by providing access to pre-tenancy training or counselling to assist with the maintenance of the tenancy.

Recommendation 4:

Mediation and conflict resolution services should be expanded for tenants and landlords in both the social and private rented sectors.

Recommendation 5:

The proposals in the Council for the Homeless NI/NIHE research *Gateways and Gatekeepers: Housing options and support for homeless people with a disability (2000)* should be revisited by social housing providers and other relevant organisations in order to further improve services for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 6:

Priority should be given to ensuring that single people and young people with support needs are adequately provided for in terms of temporary and permanent accommodation. In line with UK Government recommendations, it should be recognised that all young people who are homeless are, by definition, vulnerable to some extent. Accommodation should be developed which is suitable for their needs, which enables support and guidance to be provided and which will prepare them for independent living.

Question 4: How can homelessness be most effectively prevented by social and private sector housing suppliers?

Question 5: Would the following measures be effective in preventing homelessness, and if so, how should they be operated and funded:

- debt advice or counselling for tenants in arrears;**
- pre-tenancy training or tenancy support;**
- mediation and conflict resolution services?**

Question 6: What improvements can be made in making accommodation accessible and suitable for people with disabilities?

Question 7: What forms of temporary accommodation are most appropriate for young single people who are homeless? How can accommodation be provided in ways that will prevent the further social exclusion of this group?

Health and social services

- 6.23 The Health and Personal Social Services (HPSS) provide a number of universal services, in that at some time all of us will need them and we are all entitled to receive them. Being homeless reduces neither the need nor the entitlement for services. Indeed, in some cases the need may be exacerbated as a result of an individual's homelessness. Furthermore, some services provided by the HPSS are specifically concerned with groups who are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Prevention

- 6.24 There are a number of risk factors for homelessness that may be identified or addressed by the health and social services. Many of these, such as young parenthood, the effects of spending time in care, mental health problems and substance misuse issues have been addressed in recent years as priorities in themselves. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will seek, as part of the development of a strategy for children and young people in need, to ensure that arrangements are in place to manage the transition from residential and foster care to independent living in ways which best meet the needs of this vulnerable group.
- 6.25 People who are at risk of homelessness may have specific health or care needs that, if unmet, increase their likelihood of becoming homeless. Once homeless it can be harder to access treatment and support, creating a cycle that requires further intervention to break. To ensure that the social and financial benefits of preventing homelessness are understood, the Working Group recommends that awareness be raised within the health and social services of opportunities to prevent homelessness. Delivering improved preventive services could include raising awareness of the risk factors and trigger events in people's health or social circumstances that could lead to homelessness or rough sleeping. The Working Group recommends that such steps should be considered in partnership with relevant bodies, including the Housing Executive.

Service delivery

- 6.26 In terms of service delivery, it is understood that people who are homeless tend to be a 'hard to reach' group, as well as one that is at increased risk of physical and mental health problems. In the course of its research, the Working Group consulted with Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, many of whom identified barriers in delivering services to people who are homeless.
- 6.27 However, it is acknowledged that health and social services can be a critical factor in assisting resettlement. There are many examples of good practice in the successful provision of health care and support to people who are homeless.

- 6.28 The Working Group recognises that there are a number of options by which methods of service delivery could be made more accessible to people who are homeless. Improving services could involve modifying existing services, or developing new ones, in order to improve access to appropriate treatment, care and support. Maintaining access to services could involve focusing on developing continuous services for individuals that are not based on organisational boundaries, so that people receive meaningful and consistent support.
- 6.29 The key principles behind delivering improved health and social care to homeless people include:
- establishing partnerships with relevant agencies and developing shared health and support strategies across sectors, which involve all relevant service providers in health, social services and housing, as well as service users. The views of service users can be critical in determining how to tailor services to more effectively meet their needs;
 - developing early intervention strategies, which cover the health and social care factors leading to homelessness and recognise that health and care needs can be a contributor to homelessness, a consequence, and a vicious cycle of both;
 - there may be a need to create targeted services where these are essential to meet people's specific needs. But mainstreaming health and social care needs should also be prioritised: mainstream services should be examined to ensure that they can meet the needs of homeless people and play a part in preventing homelessness, through early identification;
 - rehousing and resettlement policies should take account of health and care issues; and
 - consideration should be given to how to improve information sharing and training, how to evaluate and disseminate good practice, and methods of monitoring progress.³⁴
- 6.30 It is acknowledged that resources are a key issue in considerations of service delivery. For this reason, the focus on early intervention to prevent health and well-being problems before they become more complex, and ultimately more expensive to manage and treat, will be more cost effective. This can be achieved by providing services that are responsive to individual needs as opposed to crisis intervention services. Procedures to address the cause of problems and not just the symptoms can benefit both the individual and the service provider, as well as saving money.³⁵
- 6.31 Partnership working should focus on achieving shared outcomes in addressing the health and care needs of homeless and vulnerable people, for example by achieving outcomes that demonstrate:

- marked improvements in the health and well-being of homeless people;
- reductions in homelessness caused by ill health or social factors such as family breakdown;
- reductions in poor health or loss of well-being caused by homelessness;
- reduced public expenditure on health and homelessness; and
- reduced repeat homelessness and increased sustainability of tenure through relevant support.³⁶

Good practice model 4: Cross-sector partnership working

The Homeless Support Team was established as a project of the Council for the Homeless (NI) in Belfast in response to a survey conducted by the Health and Social Care Unit, the results of which were published in 1996 as *Don't Look Away*.³⁷ The study identified high numbers of people with mental health problems who were homeless and temporarily resident with one of the Belfast hostels.

The Team comprises mental health social workers, an addictions nurse, a support worker and a secondee from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. Strategically located within the voluntary sector in central Belfast, the Team offers support to all hostels in Belfast and works with individual residents referred to it. Training and support is provided for staff in hostels working with residents with mental health or addiction problems. The Team has also developed close working links with statutory services, particularly in the field of mental health, and speedy referrals can be made to local psychiatric teams. The project offers an example of good practice in cross-sector partnership working: it is run by Extern and funded by the NIHE, North and West Belfast HSS Trust and South and East Belfast HSS Trust, while the Council for the Homeless (NI) chairs the Team's steering group.³⁸

Good practice model 5: Doorstep delivery of services

Healthcare for the Single Homeless is a dedicated mainstream service provided by North and West Belfast HSS Trust. It is a nurse-led initiative that operates among an identified group of single homeless people living in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping in North and West Belfast.

The service brings doorstep delivery of healthcare and provides: one-to-one clinic sessions; specialist clinic sessions (podiatry, dental, dietetic and ophthalmic); screening and immunisation; health education and promotion sessions; and hostel staff training. The service provides a holistic approach to health and uses multi-disciplinary/multi-agency working. Health promotion and education is a key element of the programme addressing the psychosocial and physical health needs of its clients and looks at the dangers of health-compromising behaviour and lifestyle change that may help break the cycle of homelessness.³⁹

- 6.32 The Working Group recommends that existing models of good practice should be considered for roll out across Northern Ireland, at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homelessness in each Trust area. Homeless people should be identified as being at increased risk of mental and physical ill health, and services should be developed to address that level of risk.

- 6.33 There is at present limited accommodation for rough sleepers, and little provision for homeless people with alcohol and drug problems. Specialist accommodation and support is an appropriate means of meeting the needs of this group. For example, wet centres, which allow people to consume alcohol on the premises, can help to avert street drinking and allow more targeted help to be provided for street drinkers.⁴⁰
- 6.34 A range of mechanisms may be appropriate in relation to drug and alcohol issues, such as open clinics (where no appointments are necessary), outreach workers based in homeless hostels or specific drop-in centres. Two projects are currently funded through the Drug and Alcohol Campaign that attempt to meet the health and hygiene needs of street drinkers, many of whom are homeless and many of whom have other substance misuse or mental health problems. Both projects have the potential to engage clients who do not usually access treatment services.
- 6.35 The Working Group recommends that relevant public and voluntary sector organisations should continue to work in partnership to provide specialist accommodation and services to rough sleepers, and to identify resources to specifically target this group, proportionate to the level of need in Northern Ireland.
- 6.36 It may be appropriate to implement other methods of enabling access for people who are homeless, such as public/private partnerships with transport agencies or with community or faith-based groups, to enable homeless persons wishing to access services with a means of travelling to facilities.

Recommendation 7:

Awareness should be raised within the health and social services of opportunities to prevent homelessness.

Recommendation 8:

Existing models of good practice should be considered for roll out across Northern Ireland, at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homelessness in each Trust area. Homeless people should be identified as being at increased risk of mental and physical ill health, and services should be developed to address that level of risk.

Recommendation 9:

Relevant public and voluntary sector organisations should continue to work in partnership to provide specialist accommodation and services to rough sleepers, and to identify resources to specifically target this group, proportionate to the level of need in Northern Ireland.

Question 8: What role can health and social services play in preventing homelessness?

Question 9: How could the prevention of homelessness be most effectively achieved within the health and social services?

Question 10: How can health and social services be most effectively made available to people who are homeless, including children, young people, families and rough sleepers?

Question 11: Who should be involved in the identification of the need for, and delivery of, these services?

Question 12: What forms of specialist provision would be most effective in supporting and accommodating rough sleepers? Who should provide these?

Tackling financial disadvantage

Prevention

- 6.37 Risk factors for homelessness in respect of financial services and welfare benefits include, as identified above, low income and poverty. Triggers to homelessness include financial crisis or debt. It is acknowledged that a secure financial situation can protect against the risk of homelessness.
- 6.38 As outlined earlier in this section, timely advice and intervention when households fall into rent arrears may be one means of addressing the financial issues which lead to loss of accommodation. Advice services and debt counselling can be effective in preventing homelessness, particularly if service providers are able to refer households to these services.⁴¹
- 6.39 Financial institutions also have a role to play in preventing the debt that can lead to homelessness. For example, bank accounts, particularly current accounts, are a gateway to other financial services. People who lack access to these are unable to avail of discounts on payments via direct debit, or access to cheaper credit, meaning that those who are already financially excluded may have to pay more for goods and services. There are also issues around responsible lending by financial institutions.
- 6.40 The Working Group welcomes the recent proposals to transform New Targeting Social Need into a wider anti-poverty strategy, with targets for tackling financial exclusion by increasing the uptake of financial entitlements, including benefits and tax credits, and by reducing levels of high interest debt among low-income groups.⁴² It is hoped that this will in turn assist in the prevention of homelessness.

Service delivery

- 6.41 The Working Group supports the principle that people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness should have equality of access to financial services. There are examples of the promotion of financial inclusion by community groups, which could be implemented at local levels, or of hostels negotiating with banks for financial services for their residents.⁴³
- 6.42 The Working Group also recognises existing interdepartmental and agency working aimed at providing a more cohesive approach to effective service delivery in the payment of welfare benefits. It is recommended that practical and effective examples of such partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors are more widely shared and built upon. An Inter-Agency Forum could be established to cover anti-poverty issues (including homelessness) and this could be complemented by working groups at an operational level.

Good practice model 6: Local cross-sector liaison

At a local level in Northern Ireland, liaison arrangements exist between representatives from the Social Security Agency's Customer Service Officers / Social Security Representatives and local Simon Community staff. Meetings take place on a regular basis to discuss caseloads and any issues that may need to be addressed. In one local facility, the administrator has obtained permission from residents to provide the SSA with personal information in relation to benefit claims. SSA officers also liaise with staff from Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Positive Action and Women's Aid. In areas where no formal liaison exists with the voluntary sector, nevertheless good working relationships exist and contact is made between named personnel in the organisations whenever the need arises.

Recommendation 10:

In relation to the payment of welfare benefits, it is recommended that practical and effective examples of partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors should be more widely shared and built upon, for example through an Inter-Agency Forum covering anti-poverty issues, including homelessness.

Question 13: What role can the welfare benefits system play in helping to prevent homelessness?

Question 14: How can we ensure the most effective provision of benefit payments to people who are homeless?

Question 15: How can we best ensure that people who are homeless have access to other financial services?

Question 16: How can responsible lending, particularly where low-income groups are concerned, best be promoted?

Employability

Prevention

- 6.43 Unemployment is a key risk factor for homelessness, and early intervention can be an effective means of identifying and addressing the difficulties that may lead to homelessness. There are a number of examples of employers bringing information and advice services on site, or encouraging the use of such services, when circumstances change. Unemployment, redundancy or other factors that affect income levels, such as long-term sick leave or loss of regular overtime, can impact upon employees' ability to meet accommodation and other costs. A number of methods – information seminars, advice surgeries, access to debt counselling – can be effective in promoting the management of debt and, where relevant, applications for benefits. Employers should be encouraged to be pro-active in involving advice services or signposting employees to services in such situations.

Good practice model 7: Early intervention to promote awareness

In 2003, Northern Ireland's Citizens' Advice Bureaux worked with employees who were affected by the closure of Desmonds factories. Staff from Cookstown CAB ran an information session on benefits and debt, followed by one-to-one sessions advising employees on their individual circumstances. The advisers were welcomed to the factory and employees felt more informed about the options open to them after leaving Desmonds. Everyone was provided with a leaflet giving information about how to access the Bureau if they had any queries in the future. Fermanagh CAB also provided information and follow-up advice surgeries to clients affected by factory closures.⁴⁴

Service delivery

- 6.44 Unemployment is not only a risk factor for homelessness, but also often a consequence of it. Becoming homeless can be an extremely stressful and disorientating experience, during which it is unlikely that employability will be a high priority.
- 6.45 However, training or employment can be a crucial factor in facilitating resettlement, and for this reason it is important that services exist which are adequately funded and which will engage with the specific needs that homeless people may have in looking for work.
- 6.46 While people who are homeless are likely to have specific needs in relation to getting into employment, they do not all have identical needs which can be addressed by any one new initiative or programme. At present homeless people can avail of early entry to the New Deal programme, giving them access to trained advisers who can assist them in their job search. However, some respondents in the

focus group exercises were of the view that, because of the disruption that homelessness can create, New Deal may not be suitable for homeless people as their vulnerability and higher level of need is not taken properly into account. For example, housing crises may disrupt their ability to attend programmes, or they may not always be able to see the programme through to completion at the first attempt.

- 6.47 The wider problem of negative perceptions of homeless people also means that it can be difficult for them to access employment. There is a need to take a realistic view of what can be achieved given community attitudes and for meaningful efforts to challenge existing stereotypes, both within the community as a whole and within the business community specifically. It is recognised that examples of good practice exist in helping homeless people find employment, and the Working Group recommends that these be actively promoted among employers.

Recommendation 11:

Employers should be encouraged to be pro-active in involving advice services or signposting employees to advice services in instances of unemployment or long-term sick leave.

Recommendation 12:

Examples of good practice in helping homeless people find employment should be actively promoted among employers.

Question 17: How can employers assist in preventing homelessness?

Question 18: How can business and community attitudes to homelessness be most effectively challenged?

Question 19: How effective is New Deal for people who are homeless?

Question 20: What measures, if any, should be introduced in order to assist people who are homeless in obtaining employment?

Question 21: How should measures to assist homeless people into employment be funded?

Education

Prevention

- 6.48 Education services may be in a position to identify risk factors that can lead to social exclusion and thereby to homelessness, such as persistent truancy, exclusion from school, and lack of qualifications or basic literacy skills. The Working Group is aware that the Department of Education has initiatives in place to tackle these problems and it would be expected that as progress is made on these issues, one positive spin-off would be a reduction in the extent to which children and young people are vulnerable to homelessness.
- 6.49 Education is important in helping to form the attitudes of young people. Part of the proposed aim of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum is to help young people make informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives, as contributors to society and as contributors to the economy and environment.
- 6.50 A targeted approach to groups who are at risk is recommended, in order to address the particular issues that can lead to homelessness and social exclusion. While the Working Group is aware of the pressures on curricular time in schools, it feels that consideration should be given to providing education on homelessness, leaving home and how to access advice services, to children and young people who can be identified as being at risk.

Good practice model 8: Education on homelessness and leaving home

The Simon Community NI has produced a CD-ROM resource, *outhouse*, designed for use within the Northern Ireland curriculum. The CD aims to develop the basic life skills that young people need to become independent, and has been issued free of charge to every post-primary school and many youth clubs and community groups across Northern Ireland. Simon also operates a peer education group, *outspoken*, in which young people who have experienced homelessness lead interactive workshops on homelessness issues and developing independent life skills.

Service delivery

- 6.51 Ensuring appropriate provision for children's education when they and their families are placed in temporary accommodation is a priority for education services. Access to, and continuity of, education are particularly important when children are experiencing the stress of homelessness. Minimising the disruption to children's education should therefore be a key concern when households with school-age children are placed in temporary accommodation.
- 6.52 The Working Group supports the recommendation made by the Simon Community in its research study, *Homeless Families, Homeless Children*, that where families in temporary accommodation are paying taxi fares to allow their children to remain at the school they attended before the family became homeless, the education authorities should be encouraged to assist in funding these transport costs.⁴⁵

Recommendation 13:

Consideration should be given to providing education on homelessness, leaving home and how to access advice services, to children and young people who can be identified as being at risk.

Recommendation 14:

Where families in temporary accommodation are paying taxi fares to allow their children to remain at the school they attended before the family became homeless, the education authorities should be encouraged to assist in funding these transport costs.

Question 22: Are there any further measures that education services could take to help prevent homelessness in the families of school-age children?

Question 23: Should education services target young people at risk with information on preventing homelessness? If so, how could this be done most effectively?

Question 24: What role could education services take in helping young people to make a successful transition to independent living?

Question 25: How should such measures be funded?

Question 26: How can we improve access to and continuity of education for homeless children and young people?

Criminal justice and community safety

6.53 While housing issues have a direct impact upon levels of homelessness, what is also important in Northern Ireland is the type of community in which people choose to live. In many areas housing is predominantly of one community or another ('community' in this context may be defined in terms of religious belief or political opinion). This means that people from within these communities who are seeking housing may face restrictions on where it is reasonable for them to settle, or they may actively choose to settle only in certain areas. People who perceive that they belong to neither of the main community traditions within Northern Ireland may also find that they face restrictions on where it is reasonable for them to settle.

- 6.54 Intimidation led to an average of 1,400 homeless presentations a year between 1994/95 and 2003/04, one in ten of all homeless presenters.⁴⁶ While homelessness is an acute outcome of community identity issues, it is nonetheless the case that community identity has an impact upon many people's housing choices.
- 6.55 This can cause difficulties in accessing suitable housing. 'Hotspots' of very high demand for housing exist in certain areas and obtaining permanent re-housing in these areas can take considerably longer than the average period for re-housing. Because community background can contribute to the length of time taken to resettle those who are homeless, it is both a direct and indirect cause of homelessness for many people.
- 6.56 Neighbourhood harassment is also increasingly a factor that can cause homelessness. Over the last three years, one in eleven homeless presentations to the NIHE were due to neighbourhood harassment. Clearly it is unacceptable that the behaviour of a minority can make life intolerable for some households who wish to live in peace and harmony with their neighbours. New measures have been introduced in Northern Ireland to tackle anti-social behaviour, both specifically in relation to housing and more generally, and it is hoped that the impact of these will be to reduce the number of people who are made homeless as a result of neighbourhood harassment or intimidation. It will be important for full advantage to be taken of these measures so that they are applied robustly and effectively. It is of course important not to overlook the responsibilities of those wishing to avail of housing services. People who engage in anti-social behaviour need to be aware that such behaviour will not be tolerated and may well have the effect of disqualifying them from assistance by statutory housing service providers.
- 6.57 Housing has become more segregated in recent decades: currently less than 10% of social housing is integrated. While the proportion of ethnic minorities who present as homeless as a result of intimidation or neighbourhood harassment is similar to the proportion in the total population, there is nonetheless a higher rate of racial incidents in Northern Ireland, compared to England and Wales.⁴⁷ In addition, racist harassment may be supported, if informally, by elements within the community, which can in turn add to the difficulties of safely re-housing victims.
- 6.58 The Working Group supports the aims outlined in *A Shared Future*:
- To eliminate sectarianism and racism and to enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation;
 - To reduce conflict at interface areas;
 - To support the development of integrated/shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together;
 - To encourage communication, tolerance and trust in areas where communities are living apart;
 - To shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow; and

- To promote respect, encouragement and celebration of different cultures, faiths and traditions.⁴⁸

6.59 The Working Group also supports the NIHE's commitment to facilitate and encourage integrated housing for people of all community backgrounds and ethnicities as far as this is practicable, desirable and safe, and to respect the rights of people who choose to live in single-identity neighbourhoods. The wider issue of changing societal attitudes is one for all public bodies and elected representatives, and again highlights the need for civic leadership and responsibility referred to earlier in this document.

Question 27: What further steps could be taken to prevent homelessness through intimidation or neighbourhood harassment?

Question 28: What role could Government take in assisting people to resettle after homelessness, whether in segregated or integrated neighbourhoods?

Question 29: Are there any other community safety measures that could be taken to address homelessness?

7. PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO LEGISLATION

- 7.1 The Working Group has made a number of proposals for changes to legislation relating to homelessness. The current legal definition of homelessness is given in the Housing (NI) Order 1988, as amended by the Housing (NI) Order 2003. The definition is given in full in **Appendix 7**. The Working Group does not propose any changes to this definition.
- 7.2 The law states that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a duty to provide temporary and/or permanent accommodation for certain groups of homeless persons, depending on an assessment of each person's case.
- 7.3 First, the person must be **homeless** according to the statutory definition, i.e. they have no accommodation available for their occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. A person will not be treated as having accommodation unless it would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy it.
- 7.4 Second, the person must be **eligible**. Those who are not eligible for assistance include certain people from abroad, and people (or members of their household) who are unsuitable to be tenants because of their unacceptable behaviour. 'Unacceptable behaviour' means any behaviour that would entitle the NIHE to a possession order on grounds of anti-social behaviour if the person were a NIHE tenant. It does not matter whether or not the person actually was a NIHE tenant at the time of the unacceptable behaviour. Where there is evidence of behaviour that would have entitled the NIHE to a possession order, the NIHE may deem a person unsuitable to be a tenant, and therefore ineligible for assistance.
- 7.5 Third, the person must have a **priority need** for accommodation. A person is found to be in priority need if they, or a member of their household who normally lives with them, are:
- pregnant;
 - a *dependent child**;
 - vulnerable due to old age, mental illness or handicap, physical disability or other special reason;
 - homeless as a result of an emergency, such as fire or flood;
 - subject to violence or at risk of violent pursuit, such as victims of intimidation or domestic violence; or
 - a young person aged 16 to 21 who can show that they are at risk of financial or sexual exploitation.

* See Glossary of Terms.

- 7.6 Finally, the NIHE assesses whether the applicant is **intentionally** homeless. This means that the applicant has deliberately done something, or failed to do something, which results in them becoming homeless. For example, if a person fails to pay their rent or mortgage and as a result is evicted, they could be found to be intentionally homeless.
- 7.7 If the applicant is homeless, eligible for assistance, has a priority need and is **not** found to be intentionally homeless, they are considered to have **full duty applicant** status and the NIHE must secure suitable accommodation for them.
- 7.8 If the applicant is found to have a priority need, but to be ineligible for assistance or to have made themselves intentionally homeless, the NIHE must provide temporary accommodation for a reasonable period to enable the applicant to find alternative permanent accommodation, provide advice and assistance on finding accommodation, arrange to store personal possessions if required and arrange transport to temporary accommodation if necessary.
- 7.9 For those applicants who are not found to be in priority need, the NIHE has a duty to provide them with written notification of the decision and reasons for it, as well as advice and assistance to help the applicant obtain accommodation for him or herself.
- 7.10 In law, a person is **threatened with homelessness** if it is likely that they will become homeless within 28 days. Where a person is threatened with homelessness, the NIHE must take reasonable steps to secure that accommodation does not cease to be available for their occupation.

Advice and information

- 7.11 Legislation in England, Scotland and Wales requires that local housing authorities shall secure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to anyone in their district. Article 6(4) of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 requires that the Housing Executive shall establish such housing information and advisory services ‘as it considers desirable’.
- 7.12 The Working Group considers that there should be a statutory requirement for the Housing Executive to secure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in Northern Ireland.
- 7.13 Requiring the Housing Executive to ‘secure that advice and information is available’ is not the same as requiring the Housing Executive to provide such advice and information. It could be provided by another agency on the NIHE’s behalf, for example. But the NIHE would have to ensure that it is available.

Recommendation 15:

There should be a statutory requirement for the NIHE to secure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in Northern Ireland.

Question 30: Do you agree that there should be a statutory requirement for the Housing Executive to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to anyone?

Question 31: If so, what kind of organisation would be the most appropriate provider of this advice?

Question 32: How could the quality of this advice be assured?

The priority need categories

- 7.14 Regarding the effectiveness of the existing *priority need** categories, the Working Group believes that there should be a change to the categories as they affect young people.
- 7.15 At present, under the Children (NI) Order 1995, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts have a duty to provide accommodation for 16 to 17 year olds whose welfare is likely to be prejudiced without accommodation.
- 7.16 Health and Social Services Boards will also have certain duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 to 16 to 21 year olds who have been in their care. The Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 outlines the circumstances in which these duties are owed to:
- 16-17 year olds who are either '*eligible children*' or '*relevant children*'*;
 - 18-21 year olds who are either '*former relevant children*' or '*persons qualifying for advice and assistance*'*.
- 7.17 HSS Boards and Trusts have accommodation duties as defined by the Act to 16-17 year olds who qualify as eligible or relevant children. There are also certain duties to 18-21 year olds, and in some circumstances, 18-23 year olds.
- 7.18 HSS Boards and Trusts have a range of duties in respect of 'former relevant children' (18-21 year olds), including the duty to provide assistance by

* See Glossary of Terms.

contributing to expenses incurred in living near a place where the former relevant child is employed or in receipt of education or training.

- 7.19 There are also limited duties to persons qualifying for advice and assistance (18-21 year olds), in that the HSS Board/Trusts may give assistance by contributing to expenses incurred in living near a place where the person is employed. Persons who qualified for advice and assistance while they were under the age of 21 may also receive assistance from an authority while they are under the age of 24, in the form of contributions to expenses incurred in living near a place where the person is receiving education or training, or in the form of a grant to enable the person to meet expenses connected with education or training.
- 7.20 Youth in itself is not at present a qualifying category for priority need under the homelessness legislation in Northern Ireland. Article 5(1)(f) of the Housing (NI) Order 1988 provides that a ‘young person’ (i.e. a person over compulsory school age but under 21) has priority need for accommodation if he/she satisfies the Housing Executive that he/she is at risk of sexual or financial exploitation. There is no specific provision in Northern Ireland’s homelessness legislation relating to care leavers.
- 7.21 In England and Wales, all homeless 16 and 17 year olds are deemed to be in priority need. In Scotland, homeless 16 and 17 year olds are treated as in priority need if they are particularly vulnerable. In addition, guidelines in England, Scotland and Wales specify that care leavers aged 18 to 21 should be treated as being in priority need.
- 7.22 Taking account of social services’ accommodation responsibilities to *children in need** and care leavers, as outlined in paragraphs 7.15 to 7.19, it is proposed that the law should be amended to allow that all other 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless should have priority need status, without any requirement to prove vulnerability.
- 7.23 Under the NIHE’s Housing Selection Scheme rules, 16-17 year olds are eligible for the Scheme, without the need for a guarantor, providing certain exceptional circumstances apply (such as leaving care, being a child in need, or other specified reasons). It may also be desirable for the NIHE to refer 16 and 17 year old homeless presenters, with their agreement, to HSS Trusts as children in need, as these young people may benefit from other services provided by the Trust.
- 7.24 In addition, and again taking into account social services’ responsibilities as outlined in paragraphs 7.16 to 7.19, it is proposed that the law should be amended to allow that all 18 to 21 year olds who, under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, are ‘*former relevant children*’ or ‘*persons qualifying for advice and assistance*’*, and who are homeless, should be accorded priority need status.

* See Glossary of Terms.

Providing these categories of young people with priority need status will facilitate a joined-up response from the NIHE and health and social services. Applying the same terminology will enable the NIHE to work closely with the health and social services to provide children and young people who are care leavers with support appropriate to their needs.

- 7.25 If homeless 16 and 17 year olds were awarded priority need status, the priority need category of ‘young persons at risk’ should be amended to refer to 18 to 21 year olds.

Recommendation 16:

Taking account of social services’ accommodation responsibilities to children in need and care leavers, the law should be amended to allow that all other 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless should have priority need status, without any requirement to prove vulnerability.

Recommendation 17:

The law should be amended to ensure that all 18-21 year olds who are homeless and who, under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, are found to be ‘former relevant children’ or ‘persons qualifying for advice and assistance’, should be accorded priority need status.

Recommendation 18:

The priority need category of ‘young persons at risk’ should be amended to refer to 18 to 21 year olds, rather than 16 to 21 year olds as at present.

Question 33: Are the proposals for a change to the priority need categories sufficient?

Question 34: Should any other groups be considered for priority need status?

Guidance

- 7.26 The guidance issued to NIHE staff regarding homelessness decisions is to be reviewed as part of the implementation of the *Homelessness Strategy*. The Working Group, in considering wider questions regarding homelessness, proposed a number of items for inclusion in the revised guidance, as follows.

- 7.27 The guidance should include agreed codes of co-operation and good practice between staff in the Housing Executive, registered housing associations and Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts.
- 7.28 The guidance should incorporate references to the issues raised by the Assembly's Social Development Committee in relation to the definition of homelessness. The Social Development Committee recommended that reference should be made to those living in temporary accommodation, or in derelict, overcrowded or unfit housing. The Housing Executive guidance should outline under what circumstances a property is 'unreasonable' to reside in, with reference to physical conditions, overcrowding and type of accommodation. The guidance should also address when a property is 'unreasonable' according to the needs of the household living there.
- 7.29 The guidance should make it clear that advice and information to help prevent homelessness should be provided to persons needing it even if they are not within 28 days of becoming homeless. For example, where a person is being released from an institution on a fixed date, then a homelessness assessment should not be delayed until within 28 days of that date.
- 7.30 The guidance should acknowledge that homeless care leavers aged 21 and over may be vulnerable, and hence in priority need, as a result of their time in care. In determining vulnerability, factors such as the length of time in care, the length of time since leaving care and the availability of support networks such as family, friends or mentors should be taken into account.
- 7.31 The guidance should emphasise that where a person has been recently discharged from an institution, including prison, consideration should be given to whether they merit priority need status as a vulnerable person under the 'other special reason' category.
- 7.32 The guidance should ensure that each ex-offender's case is considered on its merits and there is no automatic use of the 'intentionally homeless' or 'ineligible for assistance' provisions to exclude an ex-offender from accessing accommodation. Regard should be had to the *Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* in England and Wales, which states that housing authorities should base decisions on the investigations carried out in each case and 'must not adopt general policies which seek to pre-define circumstances that do or do not amount to intentional homelessness or threatened homelessness (for example, intentional homelessness should not be assumed in cases where an application is made following a period in custody).'⁴⁹
- 7.33 The guidance should include advice on the use of temporary accommodation generally and in particular the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

Recommendation 19:

Guidance issued to NIHE staff regarding homelessness decisions should include:

- Codes of co-operation and good practice;
- Guidance on when a property is ‘unreasonable’ to reside in;
- Guidance on prevention of homelessness when people are not within 28 days of becoming homeless;
- Guidance on vulnerability, acknowledging that:
 - homeless care leavers aged 21 and over may be vulnerable, and hence in priority need, as a result of their time in care; and
 - persons recently discharged from prison who are homeless and vulnerable should be considered for priority need status;
- Guidance on the use of the intentionality and eligibility provisions, to ensure that each case is considered on its merits, particularly applications from ex-offenders who are homeless, and that there is no automatic use of these provisions to exclude this group from accessing accommodation; and
- Advice on the use of temporary accommodation and in particular Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

Question 35: Do you have any comments on the issues recommended for inclusion in the guidance?

Question 36: Are there any other issues that should be recommended for inclusion?

Right to review and appeal

- 7.34 At present, if an applicant disagrees with a decision made by the Housing Executive regarding their entitlement to assistance under the homelessness legislation, they can request a review of the decision. The Housing Executive currently operates this review process on a voluntary basis and the review is conducted internally by another officer within the Housing Executive.
- 7.35 In England, Scotland and Wales, the right to a review has been placed on a statutory basis. There is also provision in England and Wales for a statutory right of appeal to the county court on a point of law.
- 7.36 In England and Wales, the Housing Act 1996 gives applicants the right to request a review of any decision as to:

- eligibility for assistance;
- the duty owed to him or her as a person found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- notification of another authority;
- whether the conditions are met for the referral of his or her case;
- the duty owed to an applicant whose case is referred; and
- the suitability of housing offered under the duty owed.

7.37 The Homelessness Act 2002 strengthened these provisions by amending the 1996 Act to provide that:

- the main homelessness duty cannot be brought to an end unless the applicant has been informed of his or her right to request a review of the suitability of the accommodation offered; and
- that an applicant offered temporary or permanent accommodation may request a review of the suitability of that accommodation whether or not he or she has accepted the offer.

7.38 In Scotland, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 provides that applicants have the right to review of any decision as to:

- the duty owed to the applicant;
- notification of another authority;
- any determination regarding whether the conditions for referral are satisfied; and
- where accommodation is secured, any decision as to whether the provision of that accommodation discharges the authority's duty to the applicant.

7.39 There is no statutory basis for review of a decision, or appeals, in relation to the homelessness legislation in Northern Ireland. It is proposed that the right to a review should be placed on a statutory basis, with a subsequent right of appeal to the county court.

Recommendation 20:

The right to a review of decisions made by the NIHE regarding entitlement to assistance under the homelessness legislation should be placed on a statutory basis, with a subsequent right of appeal to the county court.

Question 37: Should the right to a review of a homelessness decision be placed on a statutory basis?

Question 38: Should the right of appeal of a homelessness decision to the county court be placed on a statutory basis?

Multi-agency working

- 7.40 The Housing (NI) Order 1988 requires certain bodies to co-operate with the Housing Executive in the exercise of its functions. A Health and Social Services Board is required to exercise any of its functions if requested by the Housing Executive; the Probation Board for Northern Ireland is required to provide information and advice in relation to a case if requested by the Housing Executive; and registered housing associations are required to render such assistance as is reasonable if requested by the Housing Executive. In addition, under the Children (NI) Order (1995), the NIHE is required to assist HSS Boards when they request assistance, providing the request is compatible with the NIHE's statutory or other duties.
- 7.41 There is considerable support within Government Departments at present for a multi-agency approach to addressing social problems, including homelessness. While legislation is one means of achieving such an approach, it is also possible for co-operation on a multi-agency basis to be established without there being a legal requirement in place for this work.
- 7.42 The Working Group has considered the possibility that the Housing (NI) Order 1988 should be amended to require Health and Social Services Trusts (rather than Boards), Education and Library Boards, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and registered housing associations, if requested by the Housing Executive, to provide the Housing Executive with such assistance, information or advice as is reasonable in any particular case, subject to Data Protection requirements and the duty of confidentiality. The group did not reach a firm conclusion on the issue, recognising that legislation to promote co-operation should be a last resort and indeed is unnecessary if strong administrative partnership arrangements can be put in place and operate effectively. The group wishes to test the issue in consultation.

Recommendation 21:

Consideration should be given to the most effective means of ensuring a multi-agency approach to preventing and responding to homelessness.

Question 39: How can we best ensure effective multi-agency working?

Question 40: Should existing legislation be amended in order to create a legal requirement for multi-agency work to address homelessness?

Question 41: If the legislation should be amended, which agencies should be required to co-operate in this work? In what way?

A homelessness strategy

- 7.43 While the Housing Executive has already produced a *Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan*, which it is currently implementing, there is no statutory requirement for it to do so. In England, Scotland and Wales, legislation places a statutory requirement upon local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy every five years. This statutory requirement is necessary in England, Scotland and Wales due to the different structure of responsibility for housing there.
- 7.44 Nevertheless, placing the requirement for a homelessness strategy on a statutory basis may be an appropriate means to ensure that homelessness continues to be a Government priority and to benefit from a multi-agency approach, reflecting also the importance placed on addressing homelessness by the Assembly's Social Development Committee and the Public Accounts Committee.
- 7.45 In England and Wales, the legislation requires that homelessness strategies should be formulated for:
- Preventing homelessness;
 - Securing that sufficient accommodation is available for those who are homeless or may become homeless; and
 - Securing the provision of statutory services for people who are or may become homeless, or those who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.
- 7.46 It is proposed that there should be a statutory requirement for the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy, formulated as outlined in paragraph **7.45**, to prevent and alleviate homelessness, every five years.
- 7.47 The legislation in England and Wales also requires a social services authority for the district of a local housing authority to *give such assistance in connection with the development* of a homelessness strategy as the housing authority may reasonably require. It also requires a local housing authority and social services authority to *take the homelessness strategy into account* in the exercise of their functions.
- 7.48 If a statutory requirement is to be placed on the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy, it may be appropriate to place a requirement, similar to that in the legislation for England and Wales, for Health and Social Services Boards/Trusts and registered housing associations to *participate in the development* of the strategy.
- 7.49 A statutory duty could also be placed on other bodies to *take the homelessness strategy into account* in the exercise of their functions. These other bodies might include Health and Social Services Boards/Trusts, Education and Library Boards, registered housing associations, the NI Prison Service, the Probation Board for NI,

the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning, and other agencies of the Department for Social Development, particularly the Social Security Agency.

- 7.50 However, many of these bodies already voluntarily take the Housing Executive's *Homelessness Strategy* into account, without the requirement for legislation. Structures such as interdepartmental or inter-agency fora may be an efficient means of ensuring partnership working. Legislation should only be considered if it is essential in order to achieve effective co-ordinated services.
- 7.51 Unlike the proposals for joint working in the context of the Housing Executive's existing functions (proposed in paragraphs 7.40 to 7.42), the proposals above are specific to the development and subsequent implementation of the proposed five-year homelessness strategies.

Recommendation 22:

There should be a statutory requirement for the NIHE to produce a homelessness strategy, for preventing and alleviating homelessness, every five years.

Recommendation 23:

Consideration should be given to the most effective means of ensuring a multi-agency approach to the development and implementation of the homelessness strategy.

Question 42: Should a statutory requirement be placed on the NIHE to produce a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness every five years?

Question 43: Should other bodies be required to participate in the development of the strategy, and if so, which ones?

Question 44: Should other bodies be required to take the strategy into account, and if so, which ones?

Question 45: Is there a need for legislation where other bodies are concerned, or could multi-agency working be carried out effectively without a statutory requirement in place?

Question 46: Are there any other legislative issues that should be addressed?

8. EQUALITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - between men and women generally;
 - between persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - between persons with dependants and persons without.
- 8.2 In addition, public authorities are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
- 8.3 The Department for Social Development is fully committed to complying with this statutory duty and has set out in our Equality Scheme how we will fulfil those obligations. The Department's Mission Statement, "Together, tackling disadvantage, building communities" highlights our commitment to work with others to best achieve this objective.
- 8.4 A copy of the Equality Scheme is available at www.dsdni.gov.uk Hard copies are also available from the Department's Corporate Policy and Planning Branch, Lighthouse Building, 1 Cromac Place, Gasworks Business Park, Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2JB (tel: 028 9082 9502).
- 8.5 While poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional issues that cross all Section 75 equality categories, recent research has indicated that certain Section 75 groups are more likely to face poverty and social exclusion, particularly those with caring responsibilities.
- 8.6 Research has shown that women are more likely to face poverty than men, particularly in households where they are the single parent or have caring responsibilities. Households with one or more disabled members are more likely to be in poverty than those households with no one with a disability.
- 8.7 With this in mind, all new policies or programmes developed as a result of this strategy will be subjected to screening and, if necessary, full impact assessment to ensure that Section 75 is mainstreamed from the outset of any new initiatives. Responsibility for screening/impact assessing will rest with the responsible Department/Agency.

- 8.8 The Working Group is aware that all of the section 75 categories listed in paragraph 8.1 are reflected within the homeless population. In the course of the Group's work, homeless people and their representatives have given their opinions in focus group consultations and there has been involvement throughout from voluntary sector representatives.
- 8.9 We welcome the acknowledgement in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's *Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland* that both front line staff and those receiving public services have an invaluable role to play in formulating and shaping policy direction, and providing feedback on how effectively policy objectives are met in terms of meeting the needs of service users.
- 8.10 We acknowledge that there may be difficulties in involving homeless people in consultation, but nonetheless it is important to engage directly with the whole range of people who are homeless. In particular, it would be useful to establish structures for feedback that can be revisited on a regular basis, to facilitate the evaluation of services. This could encompass methods of prevention in addition to issues of service delivery to those who are homeless.
- 8.11 The Department's Section 75 obligations have been carefully considered in the development of the Working Group's recommendations. The DSD would welcome comments on any potential adverse implications for equality of opportunity in relation to the Section 75 groups listed in paragraph 8.1, arising from the proposals in this consultation paper.
- 8.12 The consideration of these equality issues and any more raised in consultation will be taken into account prior to final decisions being made by Ministers. This will be fully reflected in the final strategy.**

Question 47: Do you consider that any of the recommendations in this document will have a positive equality impact on groups within any of these nine categories? If so, what is it?

Question 48: Do you consider that any of the recommendations in this document will have an adverse equality impact on groups within any of these nine categories? If so, what is it and how might we mitigate this adverse impact?

Question 49: Taking account of existing legislation, are there alternative approaches that would achieve the policy objectives set out in this paper in a more equality-friendly way? If so, what are they?

Question 50: Will any of the recommendations potentially affect the promotion of good community relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? If so, how?

Question 51: Are there any specific issues that should be considered for homeless people who are also members of any of the nine categories?

Question 52: How can Government most effectively engage with service users who are homeless when developing and evaluating policy?

Question 53: Do you have any other comments on the equality impact of these recommendations?

9. HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONSULTATION

9.1 This consultation paper seeks views on the proposals contained in this document, so that a final strategy can be drawn up once the consultation exercise is complete. Specific points on which comments are sought are set out throughout the main text. Responses to these questions will be helpful in refining the proposals. However, the questions should not be considered definitive and views are welcomed on any or all elements of the document.

9.2 **We would like you to tell us:**

- **what you think about the proposals. You might want to comment on all the proposals or just a few;**
- **how helpful the proposals would be and which are the most important; and**
- **any additional proposals you may have.**

9.3 Every question is numbered. It would help us to consider your comments if, when discussing particular questions, you could quote the relevant numbers.

9.4 You can make your comments in writing, on tape or in other formats. Please send them to:

**PSI Working Group on Homelessness
Housing Division
Department for Social Development
Andras House
60 Great Victoria Street
Belfast BT2 7BB**

Fax: (028) 90 910085

9.5 Alternatively, responses can be emailed to **psihomelessness@dsvni.gov.uk**

9.6 It would be helpful if you could express your points as concisely as possible – you may wish, for example, to use short notes or bullet points.

9.7 Please tell us your name and address at the beginning. If you are commenting on behalf of an organisation, please tell us its name and what it does. If you have consulted other people or organisations about this report, please let us know.

Closing date

9.8 **Please send your comments to us by 4 February 2005.**

Confidentiality

9.9 If you wish any of your views to be kept confidential, please tell us. If you do not tell us your comments are confidential, they may be mentioned in reports or other documents, published by the Government or placed in the libraries of the Houses of Parliament or of the Northern Ireland Assembly. If you are replying by email, we will assume that your comments are not confidential and therefore override any confidentiality disclaimer that is generated by your organisation's IT system, unless you specifically include a request to the contrary in the main text of your submission to us. Where confidential comments are submitted, they should be accompanied by a summary that excludes the confidential parts and can be published.

After we receive your comments

9.10 We will let you know that we have received your comments. However, it will not be possible for us to reply in detail. All the report recommendations and all the views that people have expressed will be carefully considered.

Further information and copies of this document

9.11 This document is available in hard copy or on the internet at:
www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultation-zone/Forum.asp

9.12 If the report is not available in a format which suits your needs, please let us know and we will make alternative arrangements.

9.13 If you have questions about the consultation or if you would like more copies of the report, please contact the secretariat to the PSI Working Group on (028) 90 910073. Minutes and other papers of the Working Group are also available on request or on the internet at: **[http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing/Social - Inclusion.asp](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing/Social-Inclusion.asp)**

9.14 Thank you for reading this report. We look forward to knowing your views.

APPENDIX 1. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The relevant paragraph number is given in brackets after each recommendation.

1. The Department for Social Development should continue to assume lead responsibility for the prevention of homelessness. A principle of agreement to the implementation of preventive measures is invited from other Departments, District Councils and other public, private and voluntary sector bodies. (6.10)
2. Social housing providers should implement existing guidance on good practice, and should also consider referring serious cases of arrears to debt advice agencies or debt counselling services, where appropriate. (6.17)
3. Social housing providers should consider the need for targeted support for vulnerable tenants, particularly those experiencing difficulty maintaining tenancies, by providing access to pre-tenancy training or counselling to assist with the maintenance of the tenancy. (6.18)
4. Mediation and conflict resolution services should be expanded for tenants and landlords in both the social and private rented sectors. (6.19)
5. The proposals in the Council for the Homeless NI/NIHE research *Gateways and Gatekeepers: Housing options and support for homeless people with a disability* (2000) should be revisited by social housing providers and other relevant organisations in order to further improve services for people with disabilities. (6.20-6.21)
6. Priority should be given to ensuring that single people and young people with support needs are adequately provided for in terms of temporary and permanent accommodation. In line with UK Government recommendations, it should be recognised that all young people who are homeless are, by definition, vulnerable to some extent. Accommodation should be developed which is suitable for their needs, which enables support and guidance to be provided and which will prepare them for independent living. (6.22)
7. Awareness should be raised within the health and social services of opportunities to prevent homelessness. (6.25)
8. Existing models of good practice should be considered for roll out across Northern Ireland, at a level proportionate to the incidence and risk of homelessness in each Trust area. Homeless people should be identified as being at increased risk of mental and physical ill health, and services should be developed to address that level of risk. (6.32)

9. Relevant public and voluntary sector organisations should continue to work in partnership to provide specialist accommodation and services to rough sleepers, and to identify resources to specifically target this group, proportionate to the level of need in Northern Ireland. (6.35)
10. In relation to the payment of welfare benefits, it is recommended that practical and effective examples of partnerships and interfaces between the statutory and voluntary sectors should be more widely shared and built upon, for example through an Inter-Agency Forum covering anti-poverty issues, including homelessness. (6.42)
11. Employers should be encouraged to be pro-active in involving advice services or signposting employees to advice services in instances of unemployment or long-term sick leave. (6.43)
12. Examples of good practice in helping homeless people find employment should be actively promoted among employers. (6.47)
13. Consideration should be given to providing education on homelessness, leaving home and how to access advice services, to children and young people who can be identified as being at risk. (6.50)
14. Where families in temporary accommodation are paying taxi fares to allow their children to remain at the school they attended before the family became homeless, the education authorities should be encouraged to assist in funding these transport costs. (6.52)
15. There should be a statutory requirement for the NIHE to secure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in Northern Ireland. (7.12)
16. Taking account of social services' accommodation responsibilities to children in need and care leavers, the law should be amended to allow that all other 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless should have priority need status, without any requirement to prove vulnerability. (7.22)
17. The law should be amended to ensure that all 18-21 year olds who are homeless and who, under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002, are found to be 'former relevant children' or 'persons qualifying for advice and assistance', should be accorded priority need status. (7.24)
18. The priority need category of 'young persons at risk' should be amended to refer to 18 to 21 year olds. (7.25)
19. Guidance issued to NIHE staff regarding homelessness decisions should include:
 - Codes of co-operation and good practice;
 - Guidance on when a property is 'unreasonable' to reside in;

Guidance on prevention of homelessness when people are not within 28 days of becoming homeless;

Guidance on vulnerability, acknowledging that:

- homeless care leavers aged 21 and over may be vulnerable, and hence in priority need, as a result of their time in care; and
- persons recently discharged from prison who are homeless and vulnerable should be considered for priority need status;

Guidance on the use of the intentionality and eligibility provisions, to ensure that each case is considered on its merits, particularly applications from ex-offenders who are homeless, and that there is no automatic use of these provisions to exclude this group from accessing accommodation; and

Advice on the use of temporary accommodation and in particular Bed and Breakfast accommodation. (7.26-7.33)

20. The right to a review of decisions made by the NIHE regarding entitlement to assistance under the homelessness legislation should be placed on a statutory basis, with a subsequent right of appeal to the county court. (7.39)
21. Consideration should be given to the most effective means of ensuring a multi-agency approach to preventing and responding to homelessness. (7.42)
22. There should be a statutory requirement for the NIHE to produce a homelessness strategy, for preventing and alleviating homelessness, every five years. (7.46)
23. Consideration should be given to the most effective means of ensuring a multi-agency approach to the development and implementation of the homelessness strategy. (7.48-7.50)

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF QUESTIONS

Paragraphs 6.3 – 6.11:

1. How can co-ordinated action best be achieved at a strategic level?
2. How can co-ordinated action best be achieved at an operational level?
3. How can public, private and voluntary sector bodies most effectively co-operate in the implementation of measures to prevent homelessness?

Paragraphs 6.15 – 6.22:

4. How can homelessness be most effectively prevented by social and private sector housing suppliers?
5. Would the following measures be effective in preventing homelessness, and if so, how should they be operated and funded:
 - debt advice or counselling for tenants in arrears;
 - pre-tenancy training or tenancy support;
 - mediation and conflict resolution services?
6. What improvements can be made in making accommodation accessible and suitable for people with disabilities?
7. What forms of temporary accommodation are most appropriate for young single people who are homeless? How can accommodation be provided in ways that will prevent the further social exclusion of this group?

Paragraphs 6.24 - 6.36:

8. What role can health and social services play in preventing homelessness?
9. How could the prevention of homelessness be most effectively achieved within the health and social services?
10. How can health and social services be most effectively made available to people who are homeless, including children, young people, families and rough sleepers?
11. Who should be involved in the identification of the need for, and delivery of, these services?
12. What forms of specialist provision would be most effective in supporting and accommodating rough sleepers? Who should provide these?

Paragraphs 6.37 - 6.42:

13. What role can the welfare benefits system play in helping to prevent homelessness?
14. How can we ensure the most effective provision of benefit payments to people who are homeless?
15. How can we best ensure that people who are homeless have access to other financial services?
16. How can responsible lending, particularly where low-income groups are concerned, best be promoted?

Paragraphs 6.43 - 6.47:

17. How can employers assist in preventing homelessness?
18. How can business and community attitudes to homelessness be most effectively challenged?
19. How effective is New Deal for people who are homeless?
20. What measures, if any, should be introduced in order to assist people who are homeless in obtaining employment?
21. How should measures to assist homeless people into employment be funded?

Paragraphs 6.48 - 6.52:

22. Are there any further measures that education services could take to help prevent homelessness in the families of school-age children?
23. Should education services target young people at risk with information on preventing homelessness? If so, how could this be done most effectively?
24. What role could education services take in helping young people to make a successful transition to independent living?
25. How should such measures be funded?
26. How can we improve access to and continuity of education for homeless children and young people?

Paragraphs 6.53 - 6.59:

27. What further steps could be taken to prevent homelessness through intimidation or neighbourhood harassment?

28. What role could Government take in assisting people to resettle after homelessness, whether in segregated or integrated neighbourhoods?
29. Are there any other community safety measures that could be taken to address homelessness?

Paragraphs 7.11 – 7.13:

30. Do you agree that there should be a statutory requirement for the Housing Executive to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to anyone?
31. If so, what kind of organisation would be the most appropriate provider of this advice?
32. How could the quality of this advice be assured?

Paragraphs 7.14 – 7.25:

33. Are the proposals for a change to the priority need categories sufficient?
34. Should any other groups be considered for priority need status?

Paragraphs 7.26 – 7.33:

35. Do you have any comments on the issues recommended for inclusion in the guidance?
36. Are there any other issues that should be recommended for inclusion?

Paragraphs 7.34 – 7.39:

37. Should the right to a review of a homelessness decision be placed on a statutory basis?
38. Should the right of appeal of a homelessness decision to the county court be placed on a statutory basis?

Paragraphs 7.40 – 7.42:

39. How can we best ensure effective multi-agency working?
40. Should existing legislation be amended in order to create a legal requirement for multi-agency work to address homelessness?
41. If the legislation should be amended, which agencies should be required to co-operate in this work? In what way?

Paragraphs 7.43 – 7.51:

42. Should a statutory requirement be placed on the NIHE to produce a strategy for preventing and alleviating homelessness every five years?
43. Should other bodies be required to participate in the development of the strategy, and if so, which ones?
44. Should other bodies be required to take the strategy into account, and if so, which ones?
45. Is there a need for legislation where other bodies are concerned, or could multi-agency working be carried out effectively without a statutory requirement in place?
46. Are there any other legislative issues that should be addressed?

Paragraphs 8.1 – 8.12:

47. Do you consider that any of the recommendations in this document will have a positive equality impact on groups within any of these nine categories? If so, what is it?
48. Do you consider that any of the recommendations in this document will have an adverse equality impact on groups within any of these nine categories? If so, what is it and how might we mitigate this adverse impact?
49. Taking account of existing legislation, are there alternative approaches that would achieve the policy objectives set out in this paper in a more equality-friendly way? If so, what are they?
50. Will any of the recommendations potentially affect the promotion of good community relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? If so, how?
51. Are there any specific issues that should be considered for homeless people who are also members of any of the nine categories?
52. How can Government most effectively engage with service users who are homeless when developing and evaluating policy?
53. Do you have any other comments on the equality impact of these recommendations?

APPENDIX 3. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORKING GROUP

1. Scope and objectives

- 1.1 The lack of a regular, stable home environment puts people at risk of social exclusion and brings difficulties in accessing other services. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has the responsibility for developing policies and legislation to deal with the accommodation needs of homeless people. Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has certain statutory duties towards homeless people, and, in meeting its obligations, it engages with a number of other statutory and voluntary agencies.
- 1.2 The Northern Ireland Assembly's Executive agreed that consultation on future priorities to be tackled under the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN should take place in 2001. Responses to the consultation showed that homeless people were considered to be the most deprived/marginalized group.
- 1.3 Within the context of the Promoting Social Inclusion element of New TSN, a Working Group will consider how Government Departments, Agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies can best work together to ensure firstly, that the risk of homelessness is reduced and secondly, that the full range of appropriate services is available to those who do find themselves homeless, so that they can make the choices required to play a full part in society.
- 1.4 The outcomes of recent reviews by both the Housing Executive and the Assembly's DSD Committee provide a basis on which to improve existing arrangements for dealing with the needs of the homeless. The Working Group will seek to build further upon the recommendations from these reviews. It will consider factors which cause people to become homeless and at risk of social exclusion and develop a co-ordinated strategy through which relevant agencies will work together to tackle them.
- 1.5 The Working Group will present Ministers with a draft policy and a co-ordinated strategy document for public consultation, setting out clearly defined recommendations as to what preventive and other measures are required, by whom, and within what timescales, and what other mechanisms need to be put in place to evaluate effectiveness and ensure progress. This policy and strategy document will be subject to screening from a Section 75 Equality perspective.

2. Timescales

- 2.1 Work will begin during 2003. A draft Policy and Strategy document will be delivered within one year of the establishment of the Working Group. A final report will be provided to Ministers within 2 years of the initiation of the work.

3. Working Group and Sub-Groups

- 3.1 The Working Group will be led by a Senior Official in DSD, and will comprise representatives from Departments, the wider Public Sector, the Voluntary Sector and people directly concerned with the issues affecting the homeless. Sub-Groups may be established, the remit, membership and Chairmanship of which will be determined by the Working Group.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 The Working Group will:

- i. Use existing research and other evidence, and the advice of the homeless and their representatives, to develop an understanding of, and analyse, the causes of homelessness and the difficulties experienced by the homeless;
- ii. Consider the roles and responsibilities of all statutory, public and voluntary sector bodies in relation to the homeless, including the effectiveness of any existing policies, programmes and structures, with a view to identifying elements which work well and should be developed and those where things could be done differently;
- iii. Identify and examine options for the way forward (this may include examining models of good practice which exist elsewhere), including preventive measures; and
- iv. Make recommendations to Ministers as to what requires to be done, by whom and within what timescale, including performance measures to be put in place to ensure progress and monitor effectiveness.

5. Monitoring and Reporting

- 5.1 Terms of Reference, Action Plans and Performance Targets have been agreed by the Working Group. The Working Group will report to the Equality and Social Needs Steering Group in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on progress against agreed targets on a regular basis, and will be responsible for preparing a final report to Ministers. Specific targets will be included in new TSN Action Plans and progress will be reported on a regular basis.

6. Membership

Mr Derek Baker	Department for Social Development (Chair)
Mr Andrew Adams	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Mr Adrian Arbuthnot	Department for Employment and Learning (to April 2004)
Mr John Bourke	Probation Board for Northern Ireland (from April 2004)
Mr Gerry Coates	First Housing Aid and Support Services
Ms Heather Cousins	Northern Ireland Office (to July 2003)
Mr David Crothers	Department for Social Development
Mr Ward Erwin	Northern Ireland Office (from July 2003)
Ms Harriet Ferguson	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Mr Leslie Frew	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Mr Brendan Fulton	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Mr Michael Graham	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Ms Janet Hunter	Housing Rights Service
Ms Patricia McAuley	Department for Employment and Learning (from April 2004)
Ms Valerie McConnell	Southern Health and Social Services Board
Dr Chris Morris	Department for Social Development (ex-officio)
Mr Pat Newe	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Ms Carol O'Bryan	Simon Community Northern Ireland
Mr Maurice Rooney	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Ms Ricky Rowledge	Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland
Mr Terry Smyth	Department of Education
Mr Chris Williamson	Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
Dr Heloise Brown	Department for Social Development (Secretary)

APPENDIX 4. WORKING DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS AS ADOPTED BY THE GROUP

For the purposes of the Working Group's review,⁵⁰ homelessness is defined as:

- 1. Persons defined in current legislation as homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness.**
- 2. Those persons experiencing one or more of the following situations, even if these situations are not covered by the legislation:**
 - 2.1 Roofless:** Those persons without shelter of any kind. This includes people who are sleeping rough, victims of fire and flood, and newly arrived immigrants.
 - 2.2** People who are sleeping rough includes:
 - i. people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air, for example on the streets, in doorways, in parks, in bus shelters; and
 - ii. people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation, for example barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, tents, makeshift shelters.
 - 2.3 Houseless:** Those persons living in emergency and temporary accommodation provided for homeless people. Examples of such accommodation are night shelters, hostels and refuges.
 - 2.4** Households residing in accommodation, such as Bed and Breakfast premises, which is **unsuitable as long-stay accommodation** because they have nowhere else to stay.
 - 2.5 Insecure accommodation:** Those persons in accommodation that is insecure in reality rather than simply, or necessarily, held on an impermanent tenure. This group includes:
 - i. persons with no legal rights or permission to remain in accommodation, such as squatters or young people asked to leave the family home; and
 - ii. persons with only a short-term permission to stay, such as those moving around friends' and relatives' houses with no stable base.
 - 2.6 Involuntary sharing of housing in unreasonable circumstances:** Those persons who are involuntarily sharing accommodation with another household on a long-term basis in housing circumstances deemed to be unreasonable.

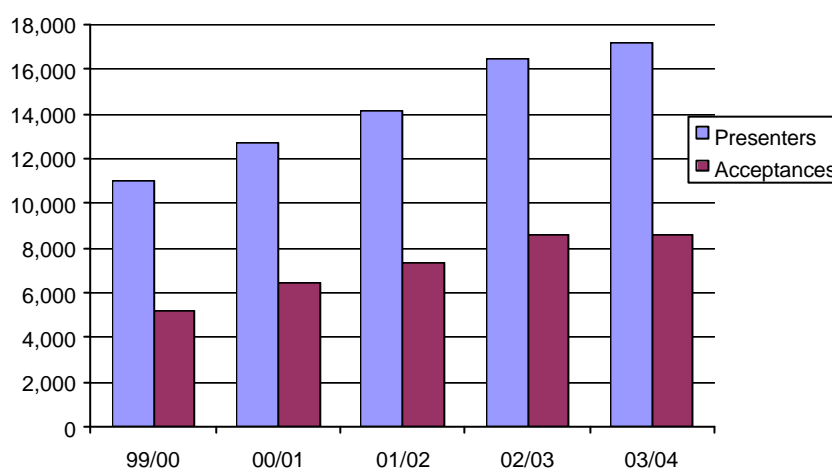
2.7 **Threatened with homelessness:** Those persons who are threatened with homelessness, as defined here. This group includes:

- i. persons staying in hospitals, police custody, prisons, other institutions or supported schemes and due for release with no accommodation;
- ii. persons facing possession proceedings, within three months of the end of short term/limited tenancy, or under threat of legal or illegal eviction; and
- iii. persons required to leave current accommodation due to relationship breakdown.

APPENDIX 5. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF HOMELESSNESS

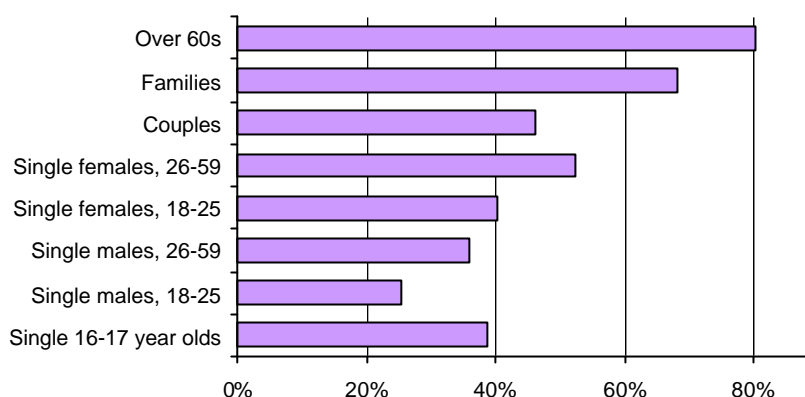
1. This appendix expands, where relevant, on the statistical analysis presented in **section 4**.
2. Graph 1 in section 4 showed the numbers presenting as homeless and accepted as full duty applicants between 1991/92 and 2003/04. Below, **graph 5.1** shows a detail from the same graph, of the increase between 1999/2000 and 2003/04. In the year the Housing Selection Scheme was introduced (2000/01), the number of households presenting increased by 15% and full duty applicant households increased by 24%. In the subsequent two years, there were further increases. The rate of increase between 1999/2000 and 2002/03 was therefore a 49% increase in presenters and a 65% increase in full duty applicants. In 2003/04, the number of presenters increased at a slower rate (4%), while the number of full duty applicants remained the same.

Graph 5.1 Numbers presenting and accepted as full duty applicants, 1999/2000 to 2003/04



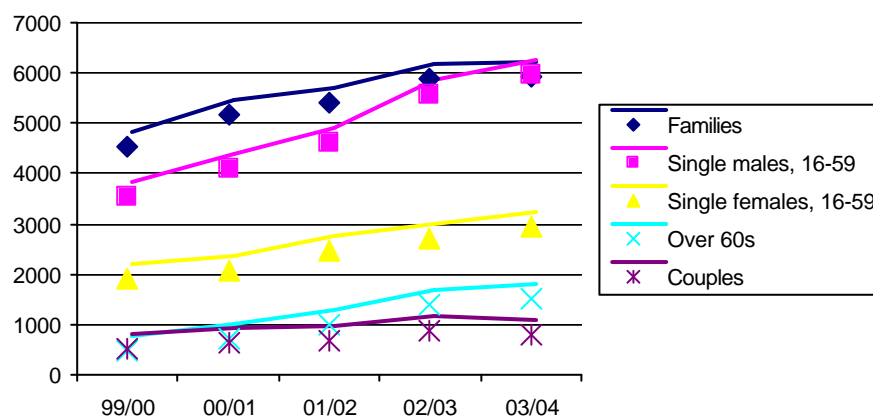
3. The most common household type to present as homeless in 2002/03 was families with dependent children, who constituted 36% of those presenting as homeless. Families who presented as homeless were more likely to be headed by one parent (28%) than two (8%). The second most common household type to present as homeless was single males aged between 26 and 59 (22% of all presenters), followed by single males aged 18-25 (10%) and pensioner households (8%).
4. Households that were most likely to be assessed as full duty applicants in 2002/03 were: pensioner households (80% of which were assessed as full duty); families (68%); and single females aged 26 to 59 (52%). Those least likely to be assessed as full duty were: single males aged 18 to 25 (26%); single males aged 26 to 59 (36%); and single 16-17 year olds (38%) (**graph 5.2**).

Graph 5.2. Percentage of presenting households in each category accepted as full duty applicants (2002/03)



5. During the 1990s there were slow increases in the numbers presenting as homeless across each household type. From 1999/2000 onwards, increases have been more pronounced, and some household types have increased at a much faster rate than others (**graph 5.3**). Throughout the 1990s, presentations by pensioner households were, on average, below 500 per year. In 2000/01, the numbers began to increase, reaching 1,500 presentations per year in 2003/04 – a rise of 200%, or three times the average of the 1990s.

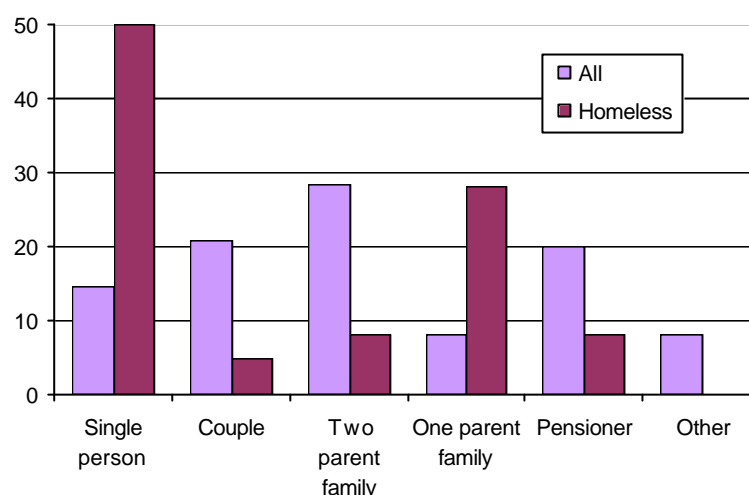
Graph 5.3 Homeless presenters by household type, 1999/2000 to 2003/04



6. Presentations by single males have also increased substantially, rising by 68% between 1999/2000 and 2003/04. Presentations by single females and couples increased by 55%, while the slowest rate of increase was among families (30%).
7. Comparing the households who presented as homeless in 2002/03 with the general population in Northern Ireland in 2001 shows that single person and lone parent households were over-represented among homeless presenters, while couples and two-parent families were under-represented (**graph 5.4**).

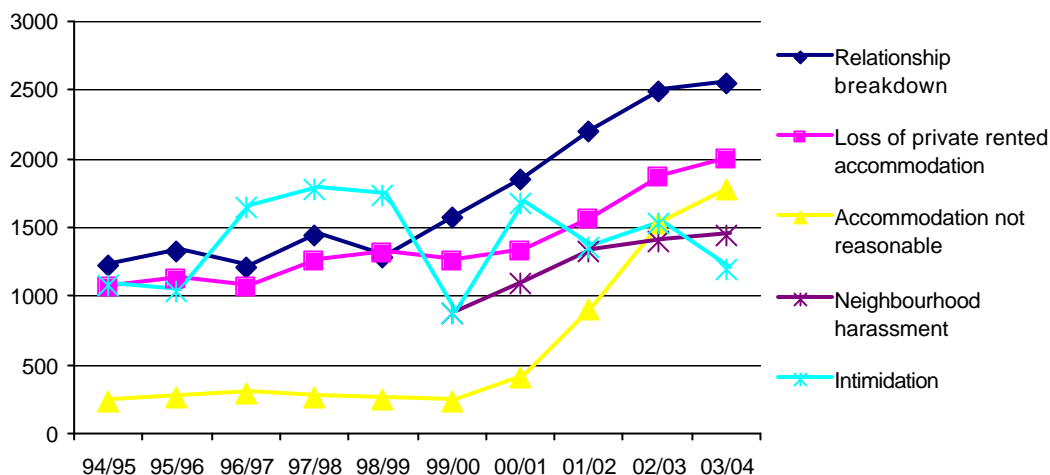
- Single person households made up 14% of all households but 50% of homeless presenters;
- One-parent families made up 8% of all households but 28% of homeless presenters;
- Two-parent families made up 28% of all households but 8% of homeless presenters; and
- Couples made up 21% of all households but 5% of homeless presenters.

Graph 5.4. All households (2001) compared with homeless presenters (2002/03) (%)



8. The events that trigger a homeless presentation have also changed in recent years, with a number of trends emerging. 'Sharing breakdown' has consistently been by far the most common trigger event, given by over 4,000 presenters (24% of the total) in 2003/04. The numbers presenting for this reason declined in the late 1990s, but have steadily increased since 2000/01, and are now higher than the peak in the mid-1990s.
9. **Graph 5.5** shows trends in a number of other trigger events. The total number of presentations increased by 70% between 1994/95 and 2003/04, but a number of the trigger events increased at a faster rate. For example, the number of presentations due to 'relationship breakdown' increased by over 100% and those due to 'loss of private rented sector accommodation' by 85%. Presentations due to 'neighbourhood harassment' increased by 65% between 1999/2000, when the category was introduced, and 2003/04.
10. The most marked trend, however, is the increase in the numbers presenting due to 'accommodation not reasonable'. The number of households citing this reason increased by over 600% between 1994/95 and 2003/04, accounting for 10% of all presenters last year.

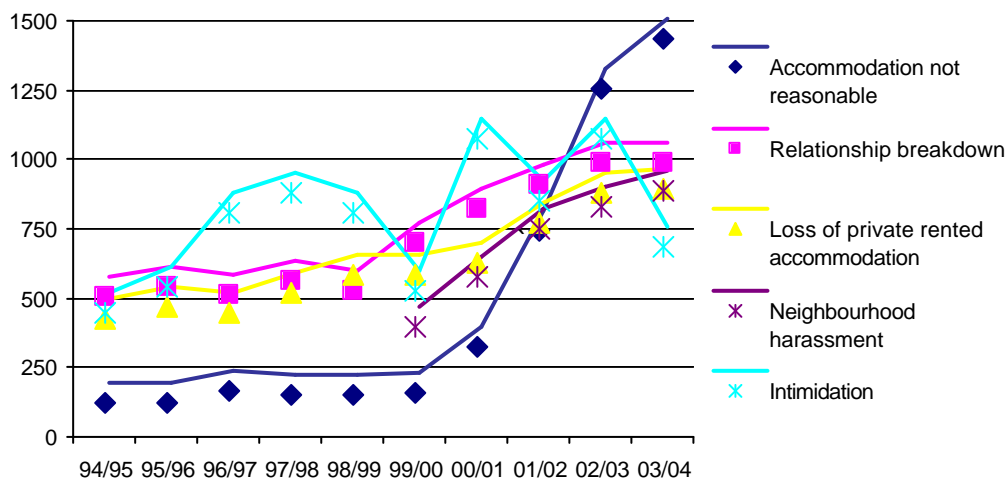
Graph 5.5. Trigger events for homeless presenters, 1994/95 to 2003/04



11. The increases in presentations are reflected to some extent in similar increases in full duty acceptances. ‘Sharing breakdown’ was again by far the most common trigger event, given by nearly 1,800 full duty applicants (21% of the total) in 2003/04. The numbers accepted for this reason remained steady throughout the 1990s, and began to rise in 2000/01.

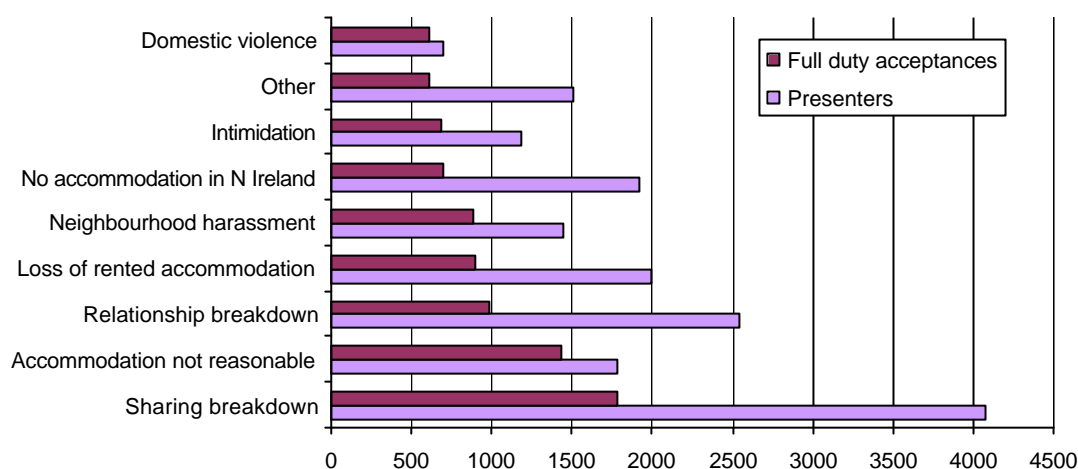
12. **Graph 5.6** shows trends in a number of other trigger events. The total number of full duty acceptances increased by 114% between 1994/95 and 2003/04, but two of the acceptance reasons increased at a faster rate. The most marked trend was in the numbers accepted due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’, which increased by more than 1,000% (i.e. tenfold) between 1994/95 and 2003/04, accounting for 17% of all acceptances last year. Acceptances due to ‘neighbourhood harassment’ also increased at a faster rate than the overall increase in acceptances: by 125% between 1999/2000, when the category was introduced, and 2003/04. Acceptances due to ‘loss of private rented accommodation’ and ‘relationship breakdown’ doubled.

Graph 5.6. Trigger events for full duty applicants, 1994/95 to 2003/04



13. The number of households who presented and were accepted according to each reason in 2003/04 is shown in **graph 5.7**. The most common reasons given by presenters were ‘sharing breakdown’ (24%) and ‘relationship breakdown’ (15%). However, the most common reasons among households who were accepted as full duty applicants were ‘sharing breakdown’ (21%) and ‘accommodation not reasonable’ (17%). A total of 18% of those who were accepted as full duty applicants were homeless due to either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’.

Graph 5.7. Trigger events for homelessness, 2003/04

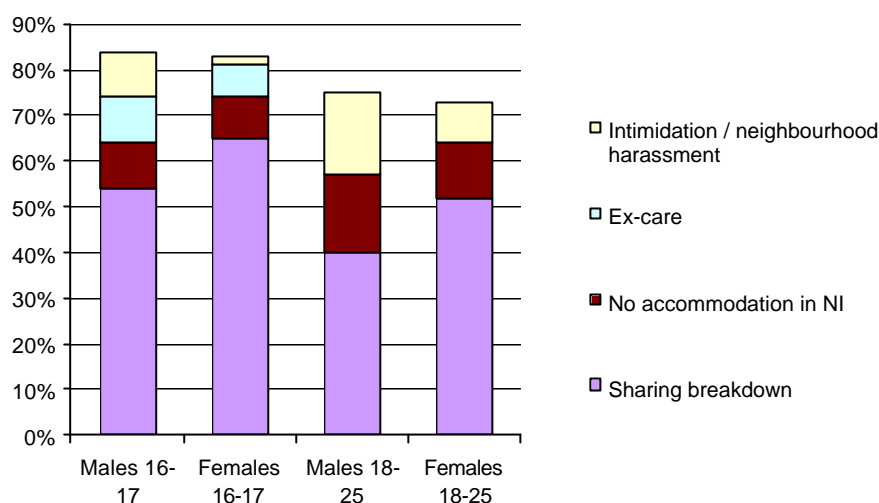


14. The number of households presenting due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ suggests that around one sixth of those who are accepted as homeless are inappropriately housed, rather than having no accommodation at all. Where accommodation is not ‘reasonable’, it may mean that the accommodation is not suitable for anyone to live in it, or it may mean that members of a household have specific health or mobility needs, which the accommodation does not meet.
15. Those who presented due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ in 2002/03 had the following characteristics:
- **Household type:** they were most likely to be pensioner households (41%), single persons aged 26-59 (19%) or lone parent households (19%). Of the pensioner households, almost half were single females (47%), one quarter were married couples (24%) and one-sixth were single men (16%).
 - **Age:** 30% of the applicants due to this trigger event were over 70, and 22% were over 75. Of the pensioner households specifically, three-quarters of applicants were 70 or over (72%) and the majority were over 75 (54%).
 - **Tenure:** 38% of households applying under ‘accommodation not reasonable’ were in NIHE accommodation, 21% were in the owner-occupied sector, 21% in private rented and 3% in housing association accommodation. This means that NIHE

tenants and owner-occupiers are over-represented (these groups make up 16% and 9% of all homeless presenters, respectively). Recent evidence has found the highest rates of unfitness in the private rented sector, suggesting that accommodation which is ‘unreasonable’ to live in is not, on the whole, unfit or unsuitable for habitation, but is more likely to be simply inappropriate for the needs of the persons living there.⁵¹

- **Priority status:** 84% of households who presented due to ‘accommodation not reasonable’ were awarded full duty status, while 13% were found to be ‘not homeless’. Compared with all homeless presenters, those presenting for this reason are more likely to be accepted as full duty applicants (84% compared to 57% of all presenters). Of those who are full duty cases, they are also more likely to be threatened with homelessness (43% compared to 30% of all full duty applicants), rather than currently homeless.
 - **Reason for priority status:** among those awarded full duty status, 31% were vulnerable due to physical disability and 30% due to old age, while 19% were in priority need because the household included dependent children. Compared to all full duty acceptances, this shows an under-representation of households with dependent children (40% of all full duty acceptances) and an over-representation of the other reasons. Among all acceptances, only 10% were found to be vulnerable due to physical disability and 9% due to old age.
 - **Rehousing:** of those who had been rehoused at the time the statistics were collected, 57% were rehoused by the NIHE, 42% by housing associations and 1% in the private sector. Among all homeless presenters, 24% were rehoused by the NIHE and 7% by housing associations.
16. Different household types tend to present as homeless for different reasons, and thus the most common reasons across all homeless presenters reflect the most common reasons among the households who are more likely to present, such as single people or lone parent households. If the reasons for homelessness are analysed by household type, new patterns emerge.
17. **Graph 5.8** shows young single-person households who presented as homeless in 2002/03. Among 16-17 year olds, 54% of males and 65% of females presented due to ‘sharing breakdown’. Other common trigger events were having ‘no accommodation in Northern Ireland’ (10% and 9% respectively), leaving care (10% and 7%) and either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’ (10% and 2%).
18. Among 18-25 year olds, 40% of males and 52% of females presented due to ‘sharing breakdown’. Other common trigger events were having ‘no accommodation in Northern Ireland’ (17% and 12% respectively), and either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’ (18% and 9%).

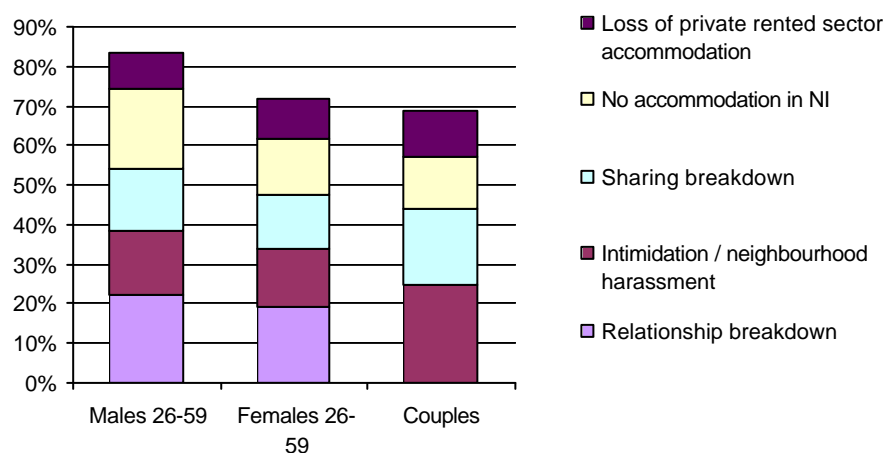
Graph 5.8. Young single-person households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)



19. **Graph 5.9** shows older single-person households and couple households who presented as homeless in 2002/03. Among single-person households aged 26-59, the trigger event given most often was ‘relationship breakdown’ (22% of males and 19% of females), followed by ‘no accommodation in Northern Ireland’ (20% and 14% respectively) and either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’ (16% and 15%). Other common triggers were ‘sharing breakdown’ (16% of males and 14% of females) and ‘loss of private rented sector accommodation’ (9% and 10% respectively).

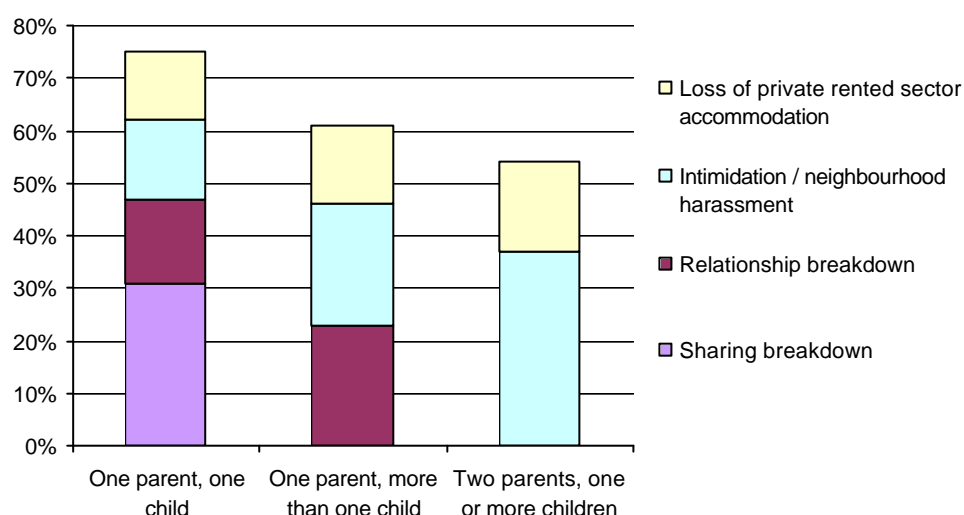
20. Among couple households, the most common trigger event given was either ‘intimidation’ or ‘neighbourhood harassment’ (25%), followed by ‘sharing breakdown’ (19%), though ‘no accommodation in Northern Ireland’ (13%) and ‘loss of private rented sector accommodation’ (12%) were also common triggers.

Graph 5.9. Single 26-59 year olds and couple households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)



21. Pensioner households were most likely to present due to 'accommodation not reasonable' (43%), reflecting the need for different types of accommodation as mobility and other needs change. The second most common trigger among this group was either 'intimidation' or 'neighbourhood harassment' (12%), followed by 'no accommodation in Northern Ireland' (11%).
22. Across family household types, the triggers to homelessness are diverse. Figures for 2002/03 are given in **graph 5.10**. Among households consisting of a lone parent and one child, 'sharing breakdown' was the most commonly cited trigger event (31%), followed by 'relationship breakdown' (16%), 'intimidation' or 'neighbourhood harassment' (15%) and 'loss of private rented accommodation' (13%).

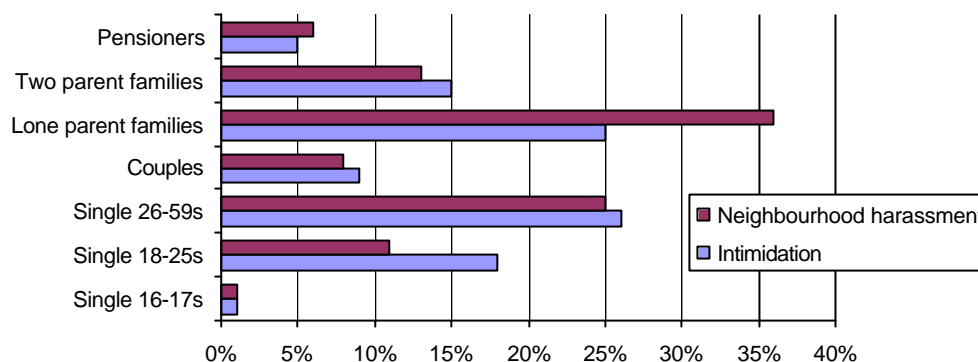
Graph 5.10. Family households presenting as homeless, by reason (2002/03)



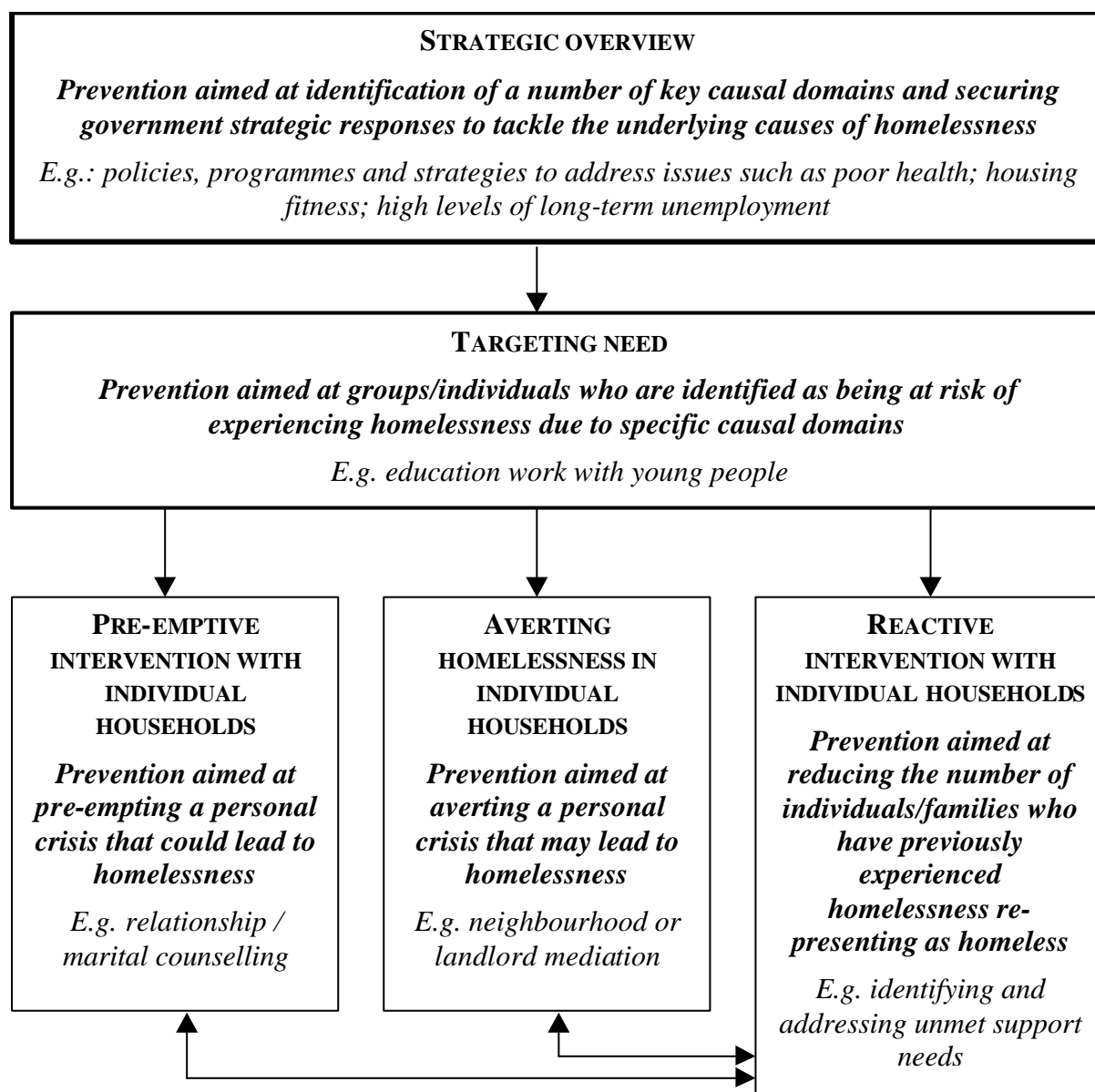
23. Among households consisting of a lone parent and more than one child, 'relationship breakdown' was the most commonly cited trigger (23%), along with 'intimidation' or 'neighbourhood harassment' (23%), while the third most common trigger was 'loss of private rented accommodation' (15%).
24. Among households consisting of two parents and one or more children, the most common factor was 'intimidation' or 'neighbourhood harassment' (37%), followed by 'loss of private rented accommodation' (17%) and 'accommodation not reasonable' (11%).
25. The higher occurrence of intimidation or neighbourhood harassment among couples and two parent households reflects the lower total number of homeless presentations from these groups, and their lower risk of homelessness for other reasons. Of all presentations due to intimidation in 2002/03, the majority were single 26-59 year olds (26%) or lone parent households (25%). Only 15% and 9% of presentations were two parent families and couple households respectively (**graph 5.11**).

26. The situation is similar for presentations due to neighbourhood harassment, though lone parent families are more likely to be affected. In 2002/03, 36% of neighbourhood harassment presentations were from this group, and 25% were single 26-59 year olds. Only 13% of neighbourhood harassment presentations were two parent families, and 8% were couple households.

Graph 5.11. Presentations due to intimidation or neighbourhood harassment, by household type (2002/03)



APPENDIX 6. PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES



APPENDIX 7. THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Articles 3 and 4 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 as amended by the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

“Homelessness and threatened homelessness

3.-(1) A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

(2) A person shall be treated as having no accommodation if there is no accommodation which he, together with any other person who normally resides with him as a member of his family or in circumstances in which it is reasonable for that person to reside with him

–

- (a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court, or
- (b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or
- (c) occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.

(4) Regard may be had, in determining whether it would be reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation, to the general circumstances prevailing in relation to housing in Northern Ireland.

(5) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but –

- (a) he cannot secure entry to it, or
- (b) it is probable that occupation of it will lead to violence from some other person residing in it or to threats of violence from some other person residing in it and likely to carry out the threats, or
- (c) it consists of a movable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted to place it and to reside in it.

(6) A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days from the day on which he gives written notice to the Executive that he is threatened with homelessness.

Meaning of accommodation available for occupation

4. For the purposes of this Part accommodation shall be regarded as available for a person’s occupation only if it is available for occupation both by him and by any other person who might reasonably be expected to reside with him; and references to securing accommodation for a person’s occupation shall be construed accordingly.”

APPENDIX 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

I. Anderson and D. Tulloch, *Pathways Through Homelessness: A Review of the Research Evidence* (Scottish Homes/the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force, 2000).

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Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness: A Homelessness Directorate Advice Note to Local Authorities* (April 2003).

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Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Development Department Research Programme, *Research Findings no. 131: 'Routes out of Homelessness'* (2002).

Simon Community NI, *Public Perception of Homelessness in Northern Ireland: Who do the Public think are Homeless?* (1996).

Simon Community NI, *From Care to the Community: Young People and their Accommodation Solutions* (2000).

Simon Community NI and Northern Health and Social Services Board, *Young People and Homelessness in the NHSSB Area* (1997).

Simon Community NI and Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Councils, *Opening the Door to Health: Access to Primary Healthcare Services for Single Homeless People in Northern Ireland* (2000).

Simon Community NI, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Western Health and Social Services Board and Foyle Health and Social Services Trust, *Homeless Families, Homeless Children: Homelessness among families in the Western HSSB Area* (2001).

The evidence considered by the PSI Working Group on Homelessness is available on request from the contact point in **section 9**, or on the Department's website at [www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing/Social -Inclusion.asp](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/housing/Social-Inclusion.asp)

APPENDIX 9. REFERENCES

- ¹ J. McCrum, *Multiple Needs: Homeless People with high support needs* (Council for the Homeless NI, 2003), p. 3.
- ² OFMDFM, *Promoting Social Inclusion: Consultation on Future Priorities* (2001).
- ³ OFMDFM, *Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy: New TSN - the way forward* (2004).
- ⁴ Homeless respondent in Simon Community NI, *Public Perception of Homelessness in Northern Ireland: Who do the Public think are Homeless?* (1996), p. 17.
- ⁵ Omnibus survey conducted in February 1996 with a representative sample of 1,000 Northern Irish people, by Research and Evaluation Services on behalf of the Simon Community NI. Simon Community NI, *Public Perception of Homelessness in Northern Ireland*, p. 12.
- ⁶ Homeless respondent in Simon Community NI and Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Councils, *Opening the Door to Health: Access to Primary Healthcare Services for Single Homeless People in Northern Ireland* (2000), p. 12.
- ⁷ Health professional in Simon Community NI, *Opening the Door to Health*, p. 37.
- ⁸ Simon Community NI contribution to PSI Working Group's focus groups, December 2003; Crisis Press Release, 17 September 2002, at <http://www.crisis.org.uk> (based on interviews with 150 homeless people across the UK).
- ⁹ OFMDFM, *A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland* (2003) at <http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/>
- ¹⁰ J. Darby and C. Knox, 'A Shared Future': *A Consultation Paper on Improving Relations in Northern Ireland* (2004), p. 34.
- ¹¹ P. Hillyard, G. Kelly, E. McLaughlin, D. Patsios and M. Tomlinson, *Bare Necessities: Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland* (Democratic Dialogue, 2003).
- ¹² General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, *Short Changed: Financial exclusion in Northern Ireland* (2002), p. 4.
- ¹³ Simon Community NI, NIHE, Western HSS Board and Foyle HSS Trust, *Homeless Families, Homeless Children: Homelessness among families in the Western HSSB Area* (2001), p. 60.
- ¹⁴ M. Daly, "Regimes of Social Policy in Europe and the Patterning of Homelessness" in D. Avramov (ed.), *Coping with Homelessness: Issues to be Tackled and Best Practice in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999), p. 319.
- ¹⁵ Homeless respondent in Simon Community NI, *Public Perception of Homelessness in Northern Ireland*, p. 21.
- ¹⁶ J. McCrum, *Rural Homelessness: Advice, accommodation and support options for homeless people living in rural Northern Ireland* (Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland, 2004); see also, within the British context, The Countryside Agency, *Preventing Homelessness in the Countryside: What works?* (2002).

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- ¹⁷ The analysis is based on published figures provided by the NIHE, and an analysis by DSD's Statistics and Research Branch of the NIHE's homelessness database for 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. The total number of cases on this database was 24,175, consisting of 8,398 cases that were on the NIHE's database before 1 April 2002 and 15,777 new cases between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003. Of the total number of cases, 15,253 were deleted and 8,922 were still active cases at 30 September 2003. As the statistics are taken from the live caseload, the exact numbers of applicants in each category will not correlate exactly with published figures for the same dates.
- ¹⁸ Simon Community NI, *Addressing Homelessness* (2003), using NIHE figures.
- ¹⁹ NIHE figures compared with Census 2001 data (NISRA). The 8% of all households identified here as 'other' consisted of multiple adult households, including lone parent households where all children were non-dependent (5%), student households (0.3%) and other households (3%). Multiple adult households made up less than 1% of homeless presenters to the NIHE in 2002/03.
- ²⁰ A pathway through homelessness refers to "the route an individual or household takes into homelessness, their experience of homelessness and their route out of homelessness into secure housing." I. Anderson and D. Tulloch, *Pathways Through Homelessness: A Review of the Research Evidence* (Scottish Homes/the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force, 2000); see also G. Randall and S. Brown, *Prevention is Better than Cure* (Crisis, 1999).
- ²¹ Anderson and Tulloch, *Pathways Through Homelessness*; Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, *Development Department Research Programme, Research Findings no. 131, 'Routes out of Homelessness'* (2002).
- ²² Homeless respondent in Simon Community NI, *Opening the Door to Health*, p. 12.
- ²³ Care leaver in Simon Community NI, *From Care to the Community: Young People and their Accommodation Solutions* (2000), Briefing Paper 4, p. 5.
- ²⁴ Other policies and schemes which may be of benefit to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness include: the Houses in Multiple Occupation strategy; the traveller accommodation policy; the Co-ownership scheme; the House Sales Scheme; the Scheme for Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings; the Scheme for Emergency House Repairs; the Housing Selection Scheme and the Emergency Grants Scheme.
- ²⁵ DSD, *Pathways for Change: A position paper by the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector* (2003).
- ²⁶ Case studies supplied by the Housing Rights Service.
- ²⁷ ODPM, *Achieving Positive Outcomes on Homelessness: A Homelessness Directorate Advice Note to Local Authorities* (April 2003), p. 8.
- ²⁸ Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force, *Helping Homeless People: An Action Plan for Prevention and Effective Response* (2001), para. 98; interview with S. Irving by F. Boyle, *Home In: Magazine of the Council for the Homeless NI* (2003), pp. 4-5.

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- ²⁹ ODPM, *Report of the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils* (2003), pp. 140-141; Leicester City Council, *Homelessness Strategy 2003-2008* (2003), p. 2.
- ³⁰ ODPM, *Addressing the health needs of rough sleepers* (2002), p. 8.
- ³¹ Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, *A Guide to Rent Arrears and Recovery Procedures for Registered Housing Associations* (2000), ch. 2. See also Department of the Environment, *The Tenants' Guarantee* (1992).
- ³² Council for the Homeless NI and NIHE, *Gateways and Gatekeepers: Housing Options and Support for Homeless People with a Disability* (2000).
- ³³ ODPM, *Preventing Tomorrow's Rough Sleepers* (2000), p. 31.
- ³⁴ ODPM, *Addressing the health needs of rough sleepers* (2002), p. 10.
- ³⁵ ODPM, *Addressing the health needs of rough sleepers* (2002), p. 9.
- ³⁶ ODPM, *Achieving Positive Shared Outcomes in Health and Homelessness* (2002).
- ³⁷ S. McGilloway and M. Donnelly, *Don't Look Away: Homelessness and Mental Health in Belfast* (Council for the Homeless NI, Eastern HSS Board, Extern, NIHE, North and West Belfast HSS Trust and South and East Belfast HSS Trust, 1996).
- ³⁸ J. McCrum, *Multiple Needs: Homeless people with high support needs*, p. 20.
- ³⁹ Information provided by North and West Belfast HSS Trust in August 2003.
- ⁴⁰ ODPM, *Homelessness Statistics, March 2004, and Addressing the Health Needs of Homeless People* (2004), p. 18.
- ⁴¹ ODPM / Social Exclusion Unit, *Action on Debt: An Introduction* (2004).
- ⁴² OFMDFM, *Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy: New TSN – the way forward*.
- ⁴³ See for example 'Community Banking in Edinburgh' in General Consumer Council for NI, *Short Changed: Financial exclusion in Northern Ireland* (2002), p. 12.
- ⁴⁴ Citizens Advice, *Advice: Quarterly News from Citizens' Advice* (Summer 2003), p. 4.
- ⁴⁵ Simon Community NI et al, *Homeless Families, Homeless Children*, p. 65.
- ⁴⁶ NIHE figures.
- ⁴⁷ NIHE figures; OFMDFM, *A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland*.
- ⁴⁸ OFMDFM, *A Shared Future: Improving Relations in Northern Ireland*.
- ⁴⁹ ODPM/Department of Health, *Homelessness: Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (July 2002), ch. 7.
- ⁵⁰ Adapted from the definition developed by the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Task Force, at www.scotland.gov.uk/homelessness/reports.asp
- ⁵¹ NIHE, *House Condition Survey 2001* (2003).