

AGENDA ITEM: 5 Page nos. 7 – 9

Meeting	Cabinet Resources Committee
Date	4 November 2004
Subject	OJEU tendering of housing advice contract
Report of	Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Community Safety
Summary	To seek expression of interest for the provision of housing advice and information for individuals threatened with homelessness

Officer Contributors	Samantha Waugh (Housing Advice Project manager)
Status (public or exempt)	Public with separate exempt section
Wards affected	All
Enclosures	Barnet Housing Advice Review (Summary) Homeless Strategy Summary Update <i>Circulated separately</i>
For decision by	Cabinet Resources Committee
Function of	Executive
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in (if appropriate)	N/A

Contact for further information: Samantha Waugh (ext 4254)

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That approval be given to invite competitive tenders for the provision of housing advice and information about homelessness**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 The most recent BHAC contract was awarded on the 17th of May 2000. The funding level was subsequently modified on the 4th of April 2001 to increase funding following a report to the cabinet resources committee. The service has since been carried forward on the basis of the details agreed in the contract.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Ensuring the provision of high quality independent housing advice is a key corner stone of helping to prevent and reduce homelessness

This contributes directly to the key housing objective in the corporate plan of 'providing alternatives to homelessness'.

It also supports the corporate priority of supporting the vulnerable in our community.

Finally, proceeding through the OJEU process enables maximum scope for market testing and acquiring contractual value.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 The success of the borough's homelessness strategy is largely dependent upon the seamless transition of advice provision from BHAC to an alternative contractor.
- 4.2 Failure to comply with OJEU rules regarding tendering would place the council at risk of breaching European legislation regarding competitive tendering
- 4.3 Failure to award the contract to an appropriate provider would jeopardise the level of service provision across the borough's wards.

5. FINANCIAL, STAFFING, ICT AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The contract will be funded from the general fund to the maximum value of the existing BHAC grant (see exempt report for details)
- 5.2 Separate negotiations are underway regarding the rental of the Barnet Housing Aid Centre premises. At present BHAC share the use of the building with another voluntary sector agency, Homeless Action in Barnet, and there is a need to clarify and demarcate rental costs between the two parties. A member of the valuation team has been allocated to review this situation whilst ensuring that any changes in arrangement will not jeopardise either agencies future service provision.
- 5.3 As a result of the Barnet Housing Advice Review (see below), the BHAC tenancy relations post will come in-house to Barnet Housing Needs and Resources and the management of this post will not be included in the future tender.

6. COMMENTS, IF ANY, OF THE COUNCIL'S STATUTORY OFFICERS (Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer)

6.1 None

7. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

7.1 A grant has been made to the voluntary organisation Barnet Housing Aid Centre (BHAC) for a number of years to discharge the Council's statutory advice and assistance duty under part V11 of the Housing Act 1996. This contract is due to expire at the start of the 2005 financial year.

7.2 In April 2004, an independent consultant completed a review of housing advice in Barnet, which made concrete proposals and recommendations for improving housing advice in the borough. The review found that there were weaknesses in housing advice services in Barnet in general and in BHAC in particular.

7.3 Following the review and an internal BHAC review, it was agreed that BHAC should merge with a larger organisation with a track record of excellence. At present BHAC and Threshold Housing Advice are undergoing merger proceedings, which are due to be completed between January and March 2005.

7.4 As a result of these developments it is necessary to re-tender the contract for housing advice services in the borough to ensure value for money and compliance with European and corporate procurement requirements. The findings of the review of advice services will be used in developing the contract specification and eventual contract for tender.

7.5 It is proposed that the new contract will run for three years from the start of the 2005 financial year in order to allow for sufficient business planning on the contractor's part and will be awarded up to the maximum value of up to existing BHAC grant plus RPI.

8. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Barnet Housing Advice Review

8.2 Homeless Strategy Summer 2004 Summary Update

MO: SWS

BT: JO

London Borough of Barnet

Cabinet Resources Committee

4 November 2004

Enclosure to Item 5

***London Borough of Barnet
Review of housing advice services
Summary report***

**Leila Baker
June 2004**

1. Introduction

This review of housing advice services commissioned by the London Borough of Barnet was carried out in April and May 2004. The results are intended to assist with and back up implementation of the council's strategic housing advice objectives. As things stand, LB Barnet has taken the decision to establish an in house advice service; to review its long standing service level agreement with BHAC; and to develop a borough wide model of housing advice provision that will drive up standards and emphasise housing options and prevention aspects of advice work.

The London Borough of Barnet is in many respects a prosperous and attractive part of the city, but escalating house prices and severe shortages in affordable housing mean that those on low incomes are unable to find a home without help. High rents in the private sector mean that those who are unable to access social housing will find it hard to secure suitable accommodation. In the West of the borough there are areas of severe deprivation whereas the East is more affluent, although here too there are pockets of deprivation. Separate underground train lines run north through the East and West of the borough with no connecting service. Bus routes do cross the borough, so that 331, for example, chose a site at the intersection of several bus routes.

A range of interventions is needed to address these complex problems. One form of intervention is the delivery of excellent housing advice and information. The 2002 Homelessness Act introduced a strengthened housing advice duty requiring local authorities to provide good quality and appropriate housing advice to a widened range of households. The Act also signalled a shift in policy away from exclusively rights based advice towards more comprehensive advice and information services designed to prevent homelessness arising where possible.

Barnet Homeseekers received an Audit Commission inspection in 2001 and a Best Value review (that concluded in 2002). Some of their findings are echoed in this report, for example, the need to improve customer care and partnership working (particularly with BHAC) and the problems with physical access to the service including reception areas.

The review comprised four main elements. They are: visits and interviews with a sample of seven advice agencies); a 'call for information' sent out to over 120 organisations asking for their views on local housing advice services; and a mystery shopping exercise to assess quality of advice). Finally, a small review of alternative models of housing advice are brought together. The main report concludes with an overview of the key findings and recommendations for moving forward. More details about how the review was carried out can be found in each section and in Appendix A of the main report.

It was beyond the scope of the review to examine agency funding in detail. However, broad recommendations about distribution of resources are made where appropriate.

2. Overview

Summary of current position

The London Borough of Barnet has made a firm corporate commitment to develop and improve housing advice across the borough. This means placing greater emphasis on prevention of homelessness through advice and related services as well as raising the standard of rights based advice. There is solid support for expanding early intervention and prevention work. There may be less awareness of the urgent need to raise the quality and accuracy of advice. However, support through a combination of outreach and training is likely to be welcome if developed in partnership with advice agencies.

Across the sector there is a strong commitment to addressing housing need, treating clients well and implementing the borough's four strategic housing advice objectives. As things stand, however, the local housing advice sector lacks drive and leadership. Barnet Homeseekers and BHAC, either of which might lead the sector, are both perceived as offering a poor quality service and lacking 'vision'. Furthermore, they are believed to have a poor working relationship with one another as well as with other local advice agencies.

One of these organisations will need to take the lead if long term objectives are to be achieved. Neither can move forward until they have begun to address their own service failures. The starting point must be to set and reach targets for improving the quality of customer care and accuracy of advice. They also need to identify a small number of immediate changes that will improve the way they work with one another and other advice agencies. Some suggestions are listed in the recommendations. Any positive changes to the services need to be well publicised.

While these short term measures should help foster good will and demonstrate that Barnet Homeseekers is addressing its own service weaknesses, the long term need is to develop a model of provision across the borough that provides high quality advice to all. This review puts forward a model comprising three elements (and set out in full in the Recommendations in Section 8 of the main report). BHAC's continuing role as sole provider of specialist housing advice is dependent on securing a partner or parent organisation with a track record in excellent housing advice to manage the service and drive up standards. The three elements are:

- **Barnet Homeseekers: Leading on prevention**

Barnet Homeseekers' new housing advice service will discharge the advice and assistance duty to non priority homeless households, lead on prevention

including providing some housing options services and offer some general housing advice.

- **Barnet Housing Advice Centre*: Independent specialist advice**

Barnet Housing Advice Centre will offer independent, high quality and specialist housing advice.

- *General advice agencies: Basic advice/excellent referrals*

General advice and support agencies will provide basic housing advice and make appropriate referrals to BH and BHAC where specialist advice is needed or if the case is urgent.

Main findings of the review

The housing advice sector

Provision of housing advice is mainly through general advice and support services, with one specialist housing advice centre, BHAC. The East of the borough has more services including all specialist housing organisations despite the West being the more deprived area.

Quality of housing advice

A mystery shopping exercise revealed serious weaknesses across all housing advice services both in terms of accuracy of advice and quality of customer care. These findings are backed up by responses in agency interviews and the call for information. Telephone advice appeared to be treated as less important than face to face advice.

Implementing LB Barnet's four strategic housing advice objectives

All agencies are keen to see these implemented but many have reservations about the ability of Barnet Homeseekers to lead this work (see above). Agencies perceive a gap between the genuine commitment to change among senior officers and the day to day working practices of front line staff. They are also concerned that there may not be sufficient funds to back up the strategy.

Are services accessible, relevant and available to specific groups

The review has identified four groups whose needs are not adequately addressed by existing housing advice services. They are: people living in the West of the borough, especially in the most severely deprived areas where early intervention and prevention services are also needed; low income and working households living in or seeking private rented housing and unlikely to access social housing; young people, particularly 16 and 17 year olds; and people whose first language is not English. These groups were highlighted in different ways throughout the review. Advice to someone experiencing domestic violence was extremely poor in the mystery shopping exercise although this was not mentioned elsewhere. The review has yielded very little information either way on ex-offenders, ex-service personnel and people with disabilities. Access for Asian

and Asian British households would be worth exploring further in partnership with local community organisations.

Most agencies open during office hours, close at lunch time and operate a small number of evening sessions, usually for legal advice. There is very little outreach work bringing housing advice to groups not accessing services. Little use is made of translation and interpreting services, although most organisations have diverse staff groups who offer a range of languages between them.

3. Key findings

This section sets out the key findings of the review..

Provision of housing advice

- There are 12 centres in the London Borough of Barnet offering some kind of housing advice service. These are delivered by eight organisations of which two are statutory (Barnet Homeseekers, 331) and the rest voluntary or independent.
- They are located across the borough with seven in the East of the borough and five in the West. All three organisations that specialise in housing or homelessness are located in the East. BHAC is the only agency in the borough that specialises in the provision of housing advice.
- Four client groups are thought to be missing out on advice: people in the West of the borough; young people; non priority households living on low incomes and renting privately; and people for whom English is a second language. Although most agencies make excellent use of their staff and volunteer languages (suggesting that they recruit ethnically diverse teams), there is virtually no use of the formal translation and interpreting services to back this up.
- On average about half of all clients are white with a fifth being Black or Black British. The proportion of Asian or Asian British clients varies more but is a little above or below 10 per cent. Comparison with the national census figures reveals that agencies are seeing far fewer white households and many more Black or Black British households than are resident in the borough. The proportions of Asian and Asian British households are closer to the borough's overall population.
- The key housing issues appear to be relationship breakdown whether between partners or parents and children and sometimes involving violence; and having to move when a tenancy comes to an end in the private rented sector.

About the advice services

- Typically, agencies in Barnet open 4.5 days a week during office hours and close for at least an hour at lunchtime. There is a small amount of evening

opening for specialist advice sessions but no provision for evening drop in or calls.

- The advice agencies offer a range of services in addition to housing advice. They include: legal advice sessions; outreach advice for specific groups; homelessness prevention services.
- All agencies are to some degree dependent on temporary paid or unpaid staff. BHAC and BH, in particular need to address staff retention issues including pay scales that compare unfavourably with other boroughs.
- The CLS Quality Mark is the only common method for measuring quality of advice. All but one of the agencies in the sample collect some kind of client feedback on their service.
- There is no mechanism for gathering client information from all advice agencies. However, some common information is collected and this could be collated as a first step towards cross borough monitoring.

Results of the call for information

- Nearly two thirds of respondents believe that the existing network of housing advice services is not accessible, relevant or available to their clients/members. Their main criticisms are uneven geographical distribution and poor quality of services.
- All of the agencies or groups that responded get asked for housing advice and three quarters of them see one or more of the client groups that have been identified as not being well served by existing housing advice services.
- Over 80 per cent of agencies and groups are keen to refer clients to appropriate agencies. They are sometimes prevented from doing so by a lack of information or lack of confidence in those other services. Any improvements to the existing housing advice services will need to be well publicised.

Results of the mystery shopping exercise

- Over two thirds of all 26 shops carried out by trained housing advisers performed poor or very poorly for accuracy of advice and information. Only 23 per cent were recorded as good or very good. These results are consistent across all agencies.
- About half of all shops rated poor or very poor for providing comprehensive advice. It is probable that only a fifth of advice would have been effective and appropriate if these were real cases.
- Less than a fifth of all 42 shoppers were given information about the housing register or about making a homelessness application. Homeseekers was most likely to give out the information but least likely to get it right – with three out of four cases said to be neither accurate nor appropriate.
- Between 70 to 75 per cent of shoppers rated services as adequate or good/very good for providing clear information; being easy to find or get through to over the phone and for advisers being friendly and interested. These results do conceal some variation. EFAS and Sangam both rate highly

for being easy to get through to, whereas shoppers highlighted Barnet Homeseekers, Hendon CAB and 331 Young People's Centre as difficult to access by phone.

- The shopper seeking advice about renting privately fared best (3 good scores), while the woman experiencing domestic violence received the worst advice (all poor or very poor). Overall, the shoppers with the domestic violence scenario reported very poor experiences.
- Where a shopper was referred to or signposted to another agency, 60 per cent said that they were given full details of how to approach that service.
- Roughly equal thirds of all shoppers rated the overall service they received very/good, adequate or poor/very poor.
- Although the majority of agencies were said to be easy to get through to, well over a third (38 per cent) scored poor/very poor when asked how easy it was to speak to someone who could help them. Nearly half of shoppers described this aspect of the service as good or very good.
- Three quarters of shoppers rated advisers at pass level or above for being friendly and interested. This is a reasonable performance.
- The slight majority (55 per cent) felt that they did not have enough time and space to explain their problem. This aspect of the service was either poor or inconsistent across the sector.

4. Recommendations

The recommendations set out below are intended as a guide to defining a comprehensive model of housing advice and raising standards across the sector. It is essential that the agencies involved spend time reaching a common understanding of these recommendations and addressing any points of disagreement. While these long term changes are being discussed, it is suggested that Barnet Homeseekers implement a small number of short term changes to their own service.

A new model of housing advice in Barnet

The proposed model of housing advice seeks to make the best use of existing services while addressing some of the key problems identified in the review, namely, uneven geographical distribution of services; poor quality of advice; and weak partnerships particularly between BHAC and Barnet Homeseekers. The model should help define more clearly the role of each agency.

The **table overleaf** summarises the proposed model and is designed to be discussed and amended as the sector reaches agreement on the way forward. The housing advice sector has been split in three, with each category taking on a separate role.

All agencies delivering housing advice should be invited to participate fully in the Advice Forum, help set targets for implementation of the model and agree joint training programmes to support the work.

Category 1: Barnet Homeseekers: Leading on prevention

LB Barnet wishes to see an expansion of prevention and early intervention work in the borough and also needs to discharge its statutory duty to provide advice and assistance to non priority homeless households. Barnet Homeseekers is not currently providing a high quality service in terms of advice or customer care. The borough needs to be realistic about what can be achieved in the expansion of housing advice services when basic service failures also need to be addressed.

The review has produced a list of short term changes (see list below) that would begin to improve the service. Barnet Homeseekers needs to have implemented these and to have a clear programme of work to raise standards before making more radical changes are possible.

In the long term, Barnet Homeseekers' advice service would concentrate on leading the prevention agenda, discharging its advice and assistance duty, maintain and expand its work on the private rented sector including bringing the Tenancy Relations Officer post back in house; and establishing a young people's service.

All staff would need to be trained to deliver accurate basic housing advice, make appropriate referrals and identify and correctly refer on urgent or emergency cases.

Special issues:

- *Reorganisation within the borough will mean that the Customer Services posts will be replaced. It is essential that staff understand that this will be a different type of service requiring greater expertise. The training, support and supervision needs of reception staff need to be addressed as part of this.*

Category 2: BHAC: Independent specialist housing advice.

BHAC is the only independent specialist housing advice agency in the borough and this review indicates that there is an ongoing need for that kind of organisation. It is recommended that BHAC continue to operate under the same name. But it is urged that an organisation with an excellent reputation and solid expertise in the delivery of specialist housing advice be recruited as partner or parent agency to drive up standards. Quality targets should be set with a fixed deadline for delivery. It may be worth considering a name change at a later date.

BHAC would provide specialist advice across the board including challenging homelessness decisions, advising council and housing association tenants and finding ways to target low income working people. They will provide a second tier of advice to general advice agencies as well as providing training and outreach services. Under this model, they would not take on any new prevention or options work until they have achieved a considerable improvement in the quality of

housing advice. The post of Tenancy Relations Officer would return to be based with Barnet Homeseekers.

Category 3: General advice agencies: Basic advice/excellent referrals

Agencies providing basic housing advice have an important role to play. At present, however, some advice is inaccurate, referrals are not always appropriate and in some instances urgent needs are not being picked up.

Under the proposed model, general advice and support agencies would continue to provide basic housing advice, would make referrals and would have a procedure for identifying urgent housing needs and dealing with these appropriately.

It is recommended that the LB Barnet consider allocating some funds to general advice agencies on condition of participating in the Advice Forum and working with other advice providers to drive up standards.

Special issues:

- *In the future, there will be local housing offices on all regeneration estates. These offices are/will receive requests for housing advice. This role should be acknowledged and staff offered the same training and information as those working in general advice and support agencies. This will help address the lack of services in the West of the borough.*
- *The Sangam Centre appears to provide a good appointments service but advisers are often unable to come to the phone for people who ring for advice. Sangam would benefit from training to ensure that people in urgent housing need are identified and referred on immediately and appropriately. If this could be addressed, it is recommended that LB Barnet consider making a funding allocation to the Sangam Advice Centre.*
- *East Finchley Advice Centre has seen a significant drop in funding recently. The service is well regarded and located away from other services. The agency has a strong volunteer base, although the quality of service is uneven and seems to depend on which volunteer is advising. If EFAS agrees to review volunteer recruitment and training, participate in the development of the model, including training to drive up quality of advice, then it is recommended that a more generous allocation of funding is granted.*

Short term recommendations to Barnet Homeseekers

Within one month

- Draw up a user friendly organisational map for all advice agencies
- Give a direct line number to all agencies delivering housing advice
- Collate and circulate information about all advice agencies (see Appendix B of the main report)

- Set dates for individual officers or teams (as appropriate) to visit all advice agencies to explain their work and hear about the agency's work.
- Set date for BHAC and Barnet Homeseekers frontline staff to meet
- Set date for internal discussion involving frontline and senior officers
- Install a freephone between Barnet Homeseekers and BHAC for clients
- Make good all broken equipment in Barnet Homeseekers reception area
- Clean and reequip the children's play corner and family interview room or get rid of them.

Within three months

- All planned events above to have been completed
- Hold one off training session with all existing reception and telephone advice staff to raise standard of basic advice, referrals and ensure that urgent or emergency cases are being identified. During this training, tackle appropriate language and customer courtesy.
- Contact all advice agencies to find out whether access has been easier since having correct direct line numbers.
- Working with 331, agree procedure for homelessness assessments that will reduce staff and client time spent waiting in Barnet House. This may mean training a homelessness assessment officer to work with young people so that they can undertake outreach sessions at 331 centres. These plans must be developed in partnership with 331.

Long term recommendations for the new model

- Work towards less lunch time closures and more out of hours services.
- Identify local language needs and brief staff on use of language services
- Work towards common client monitoring
- Devise training programmes with all three categories of advice provider and ensure that these cover skills based and knowledge based training
- Review staff pay levels
- Discuss with advice agencies how to coordinate housing advice volunteers¹
- Devise clear list of tasks for the members of the Advice Forum
- Plan how and when BHAC and Homeseekers staff will achieve CLS Level 2
- Identify shadowing and secondment opportunities between agencies
- Ensure that all BHAC staff have induction with Homeseekers and vice versa
- Build in regular consultation with users and staff of advice agencies.

Groups whose needs are not being served

With members of the Homelessness Forum, Advice Forum and other relevant departments and organisations, examine ways to better meet the housing advice needs of low income working people; 16/17 year olds; those living in West

¹ Volunteers may be used by statutory as well as non statutory services. There is a well established procedure for recruiting, training and supervising volunteers in the local PCT which is used by 331 and is said to work well. BVSC can also screen applicants.

Barnet; and people with English as a second language. Also review what advice is given to women who mention violence in the home when they seek advice.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the agencies that participated in the research and to staff in the LB Camden and RB Kensington and Chelsea who provided information about their services. Thanks also to all those who worked on the mystery shopping exercise.

The mystery shopping exercise was conducted in partnership with Shelter's Performance and Quality Team.

List of abbreviations used in the report

BHAC	Barnet Housing Advice Centre
BH	Barnet Homeseekers
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
EFAS	East Finchley Advice Service
HAB	Homeless Action in Barnet
331	331 Young People's Centre

Building on Success

In addition to the three core objectives that we continue to work on, our strategy is evolving and includes a number of new objectives to help us deliver on our vision:

Objective 1: Reducing Homelessness Against its Main Causes

We aim to reduce the number of homeless applications that result from evictions from parents' and friends' accommodation, the loss of private sector accommodation and homelessness resulting from domestic violence by:

- Implementing recommendations from the Barnet housing advice review
- Replacing the customer service team with a housing advice team
- Reviewing and updating the Council's use of mediation services
- Developing the 'Sanctuary Project' to assist people who have experienced domestic violence to remain safely in their homes
- Introducing early warning systems to prevent arrears-based evictions in all three housing sectors.

Objective 2: Reducing Levels of Repeat Homelessness

Reducing levels of repeat homelessness is dependent on ensuring that tenants are re-housed in appropriate accommodation with the right housing support packages. Barnet is committed to achieving this through the following actions:

- Carrying out organisational changes to ensure that the Council's housing support service is made available to all clients at the onset of their contact with the Homeseekers service

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- Implementing the recommendations from the department's joint working audit, including the development of new protocols and procedures

- Commissioning research into the causes of repeat homelessness and putting robust monitoring processes in place.

Objective 3: Reducing the Inappropriate Use of Temporary Accommodation

This strategy aims to reduce the use of traditional temporary accommodation and encourage the pursuit of a wide range of new and affordable housing options. When temporary accommodation is provided it needs to be of a good quality and cost effective for local tax payers. We aim to achieve this by:

- Conducting routine inspections of temporary accommodation to check if the properties are lived in and there is a genuine need for temporary accommodation
- Expanding the use of rent deposits schemes for single people to enable them to access alternative forms of housing
- Establishing a new Private Sector Leasing Scheme to raise standards of temporary accommodation and bring families housed outside of the borough back into Barnet
- Accepting the recommendations of the Best Value Review of children in temporary accommodation
- Consulting with partners regarding child welfare at the Homeless Families and Young Persons Forum
- Developing new options and alternative forms of temporary accommodation for young people, such as supported lodgings.

Objective 4: Reducing Rough Sleeping Levels to Close to Zero

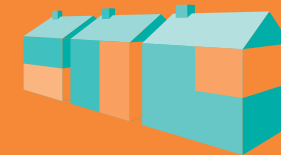
A draft rough sleeping prevention strategy was produced in May 2004 and is still undergoing consultation. The strategy aims to ensure that levels of rough sleeping remain close to zero by:

- Introducing new monitoring procedures to identify and record the incidence of rough sleeping
- Assisting existing rough sleepers off the streets and supporting them to maintain accommodation
- Preventing future rough sleepers through the use of early intervention procedures.

Remembering Our Core Principles: Providing Quality Services and Responding to Diversity

Our two guiding commitments to providing quality services and responding to diversity underpin everything we do. Specific actions that are underway to support these objectives are as follows:

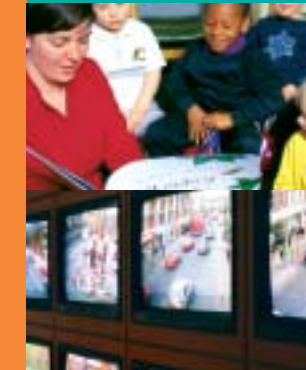
- Building a modern reception area for all Homeseekers clients, set to be completed by December 2004
- Publishing a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing Strategy by April 2005
- Working with partner agencies to ensure that interpreting support is available to people where English is not their first language
- Aiming for a 10% reduction in the percentage of review requests for homeless decisions by April 2005
- Reviewing Homeseekers monitoring, performance management and information technology systems by April 2005
- Updating the user consultation strategy to ensure consultation takes place with hard-to-reach groups and customers are involved in service planning.
- Conducting regular mystery shopping exercises and developing new training programmes for all front line staff



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Key Priorities for our Community

- A First Class Education Service
- Tackling Crime
- Supporting the Vulnerable in our Community
- A Cleaner Greener Barnet
- Repairing Roads and Pavements



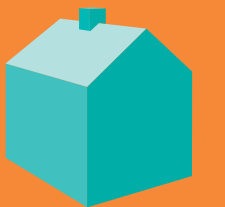
Putting the Community First

BARNET
LONDON BOROUGH



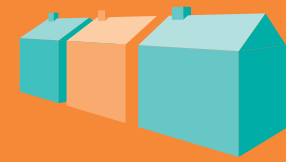
Working Together to Tackle Homelessness:

Summer 2004 Update



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Beacon Council
2002-2003
Improving Urban Green Spaces
Libraries as a Community Resource
2003-2004
Community Cohesion



Working Together to Tackle Homelessness: Summer 2004 Update



Last year, Barnet Housing Service produced its first ever homelessness strategy 'Working Together to Tackle Homelessness'.

This plan has enabled the Council and its partners to develop a strong and ambitious vision for the future:

"To provide the widest range of housing options for Barnet People."

The strategy's impact can already be felt within the community. Since publication, homeless families no longer have to live in hotels with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities and local community groups have a greater say in housing policy through the re-launched Barnet Homelessness Forum.

This summary document records our progress towards implementing the strategy and sets out new targets and objectives that have emerged as a result of the strategy's development.

Barnet Housing Service is committed to strengthened partnership working and would like to thank all of the individuals and agencies that have helped to turn the strategy into a living document that promotes real change.



What We Have Achieved From Working Together

The Council identified three core objectives to realise its vision:

- To provide alternatives to homelessness
- To develop good quality temporary accommodation (TA)
- To provide appropriate services and support to homeless people.

All three strategic aims were underpinned by a corporate commitment to providing quality services and responding to diversity.

The following progress report shows how we have delivered on each of these objectives during the past year.

Objective 1: To Provide Alternatives to Homelessness

- The homeless prevention team intervened in 166 cases where people were threatened with homelessness. 21% of these tenants were helped to remain in their homes and a further 21% were provided with alternative accommodation options, such as the New Start scheme.
- North London Family Mediation Service (NLFMS) provided a service to 437 households in housing need as a result of relationship breakdown. Following mediation, only 22% of those referred to NLFMS ended up in temporary accommodation as homeless
- The Integration Project is helping families to remain in their properties following the withdrawal of support from Social Services. The project is still in its infancy but in the first two months, eleven families were able to remain in their homes as private tenants
- A comprehensive review of local housing advice services was undertaken by external consultants and completed in June 2004. Plans to implement the findings are outlined later in this document.

Objective 2: To Develop Good Quality Temporary Accommodation

- The last Barnet family was moved out of shared bed and breakfast accommodation in October 2003, six months ahead of target
- As of May 2004, 89% of temporary accommodation is provided within the borough. This is a marked improvement from April 2003 when only 80% of TA was provided within Barnet
- The Council has reduced its dependence on unsuitable annexe accommodation and is now more able to provide homeless households with self-contained long-term leases from housing associations (known as HALS), which provide good quality medium-term housing. Between April 2003 and 2004, the ratio of the Council's use of HALS to annexes increased by 30%.

Objective 3: To Provide Appropriate Services and Support to Homeless People

- The housing support team have improved and expanded their support services. In April 2003 the team supported 65 people, by April 2004, this number had almost trebled to 182
- Barnet's housing support team and local mental health services have undergone a comprehensive review that is due to be completed by August 2004
- Joint working between local statutory and voluntary services has been improved by the re-launch of the Barnet Homelessness Forum in January 2004
- Coherent planning for 16 and 17 year olds is being developed through the 'Homeless Families and Young Persons' sub group of the Barnet Homelessness Forum
- The NOTIFY project went live in June 2004 and now enables housing, social services, education and health services to notify each other about the movement of vulnerable individuals in temporary accommodation.

