



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

# Homelessness Strategy



Green  
Flag  
Award

**OneTeam**

*Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities*

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of:

- What the Homelessness Strategy is
- The purpose of the Strategy
- Why Chester-le-Street District Council has produced the Strategy.

Chester-le-Street's vision for this strategy is:

**“Working together, to fulfil the needs of our communities, by reducing and preventing homelessness, and offering support to those in need”**

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places statutory duties on local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Authorities must consider all applications from people seeking accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation. A main homelessness duty is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is:

- Eligible for assistance.
- Unintentionally homeless.
- Falls within a priority need group. The priority needs groups are specified within the legislation.

Priority need groups include:

- Households with dependent children or a pregnant woman.
- People who are considered vulnerable e.g. mental illness or physical disability.

The priority need categories were extended by Order in July 2002 to include, additionally:

- Applicants aged 16 or 17.
- Applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care.
- Applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces.
- Applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

An overview of homelessness legislation can be found at the beginning of the Homelessness Code of Guidance which is available on the internet at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501614>

Social Services are placed under a duty to “give such assistance as the local housing authority reasonably requires” in carrying out a homelessness review and drawing up the strategy. Social Services are also required to take the homelessness strategy into consideration when exercising of its functions in the District.

Homelessness strategies must include plans for:

- The prevention of homelessness and repeat homelessness.
- Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless.
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The development of the 2006 Homelessness Strategy is in line with the national legal and policy framework.

The Chester-le-Street Homelessness Strategy is linked to the following Council documents and other strategic plans:

- Community Plan 2006
- Corporate Plan 2006
- Housing Strategy 2005
- HRA Business Plan 2006
- Supporting People Strategy 2005
- Local Area Agreement
- Regeneration Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy

### **Recognised Good Practice**

Chester-le-Street District Council works closely with a number of agencies who provide guidance notes on the development of local homelessness strategies. A 'fit for purpose' homelessness strategy should include the following:

- A vision.
- Overall objectives.
- Arrangements for partnership working.
- User consultation plan(s).
- Specific objectives for each area covered by the strategy.
- Improving prevention.
- Improving existing provision.
- Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation.
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Accessing permanent accommodation.
- Making use of private sector housing.
- Plans for securing resources.
- An action plan.
- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

The Homelessness Act 2002 required Councils to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness services in their area, and to then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review. The Council complied with this part of the 2002 Act by producing its first Homeless Strategy in July 2003. The 2002 Act also requires local authorities to formally review their homelessness strategies at least every 5 years. The current review, 4 years after the first, also complies with the provisions of the 2002 Act.

The review must assess:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness.
- The activities undertaken to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation for homeless people and provide support to homeless people.
- The resources available.

The strategy must also show how Chester-le-Street, Social Services and partner agencies will work together to:

- Prevent homelessness.
- Secure sufficient accommodation for people who are or may become homeless.
- Secure the satisfactory provision of support services (advice, information and assistance) for homeless and potentially homeless people.

The Strategy seeks to:

- Identify the groups at risk from homelessness in Chester-le-Street
- Identify the current and likely future levels of homelessness and its causes.
- Map the supply of homelessness provision in the District.
- Identify gaps in provision then work with partners to develop services and increase provision.

The Strategy has been developed using quantitative and qualitative data provided by agencies and service users. Focus groups and consultation meetings have all been utilised to elicit information on which to build the review.

Whilst the Council has statutory responsibilities to deal with homelessness, it cannot solve the challenges and problems of homelessness alone, nor can it deliver all of the services that are needed to give support, assistance and advice to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is therefore essential that we have strong and established partnerships that are effective with both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The development of this Strategy has been overseen by a multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. A list of the members of this steering group are listed below, together with the aims and how these aims will be met by the group are detailed below:

### **Chester-le-Street District Council - Community Services Directorate**

- Housing Options Team
- Community Safety Team
- Housing Management Team
- Housing Strategy Manager
- Income Management Team
- Research Officer

### **Partner Agencies**

- Homeless Action Partnership
- SHELTER
- Centre Point
- Durham Constabulary
- Probation Service
- Youth Offending Team
- Welfare Rights Service
- North Durham NHS Trust
- Drugs Services
- Supporting People
- Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordination Unit
- Mental Health Team
- Teenage Health Project
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Connexions Service
- Domestic Violence Initiative
- Sure Start
- Housing Associations
- Chester-le-Street Landlords Association

The aims of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group are to:

- Oversee the development and implementation of the Homelessness Strategy.
- Ensure that homelessness is reflected in all relevant local plans and strategies.
- Influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.

To meet these aims the Group will:

- Monitor and assist with the progress and delivery of the Housing Options Team Plan.
- Develop partnership arrangements within the group to strengthen the homelessness service for particular service users.
- Share good practice and existing models.
- Receive details of new services with service implications for homeless people.
- Comment on plans, strategies and initiatives that impact on homeless people.
- Report service development and improvements to the relevant committees within the Council.

## **Agency Consultation**

A Focus Group of agencies was established to receive feedback on the basic structure of the Strategy and issues related to homelessness in the District. The Group have met twice and a draft Strategy has been reviewed by both the Homeless Action Partnership and the Housing and Environment Theme Group which form part of the Local Strategic Partnership.

## **Service User Consultation**

The views of homeless and potentially homeless applicants have been used to help develop the strategy and service users must be facilitated to engage with the planning and delivery processes. Service user consultation exercises have been carried out in two stages:

Firstly all Council tenants received a copy of a Tenants Satisfaction questionnaire during December 2005. Those that had been homeless in the previous 12 months and had been provided with Council accommodation were requested to provide information about how good the homelessness service was.

A Focus Group was also established for those households who had presented themselves as homeless in the last 12 months but where no finding of homelessness was made. They were asked to provide feedback to the Service of their experience of accessing the homelessness services in the District.

## **Chapter 2 – Strategic Context**

The purpose of this Section of the Strategy is to set the Homelessness Strategy in both a national, regional and local context.

In order to inform and develop the Homelessness Strategy, we have reflected upon and considered the local and national context, respective strategies, policies and data analysis. This evidence base is summarised below, with more detailed information set out in Appendix 1

### **National Context:**

With the publication of 'More than a Roof' - a report into tackling homelessness, the Government formally recognised that homelessness is a complex issue involving many factors, affecting a wide variety of groups and not confined to street sleeping and homeless families in bed and breakfast hotels.

The Government's determination to address the issue is indicated by the creation of the Homelessness Directorate within the Social Exclusion Unit at the [Department of Communities and Local Government](#). The work of the directorate is informed by 8 key objectives:

- Strengthening help to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Developing more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness.
- Encouraging new responses to tackling homelessness.
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast hotels for families with children.
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
- Tackling domestic violence as a root cause of homelessness.
- Sustaining the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.
- Ensuring the opportunity of a decent home for all.

The report noted that statutory homelessness was set to rise over time and that structural factors such as the housing supply, location and affordability of housing are exacerbated by 'personal and social factors' such as mental health and domestic violence.

For some people the causes of homelessness can be clear cut, such as giving up an existing tenancy or a relationship breakdown. For others, the reasons will be more complex, and for these people, homelessness is not just a housing problem. Some homeless people have other difficulties and support needs, such as physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, unemployment, histories of offending and chaotic lifestyles.

People leaving prison are often vulnerable and homeless, this group is therefore at a high risk of re-offending, a risk which can be reduced by the provision of settled housing and support. People who are vulnerable as a result of spending time in prison are now considered a priority need group under the Homelessness Act 2002.

Nationally, ex – service personnel are over represented amongst the street homeless population: as many as 30% of people sleeping on the streets may have been in the armed forces at one time (Shelter 2002).



Young people (especially 16 and 17 year olds) who have to leave the family home have difficulty obtaining tenancies in their own names. They also frequently require 'life skills' training if they are to maintain a tenancy and not slip into arrears or behaviour patterns that may result in eviction and therefore prejudice their future chances of securing accommodation.

Young people leaving care are now catered for under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and will have accommodation provided by Social Services but the Social Service department will first have to secure that accommodation either in the public or private sector. As will be seen later, Chester-le-Street has a significant number of young people who are either homeless or having difficulty with their housing situation.

Many people are forced to leave their homes because of violence or the threat of violence – this could be 'domestic' violence perpetrated by a partner or other family member or other forms of violence from someone outside the home. People may become homeless as a result of racial tension and consequent (threatened or actual) violence. Domestic violence is a key issue for Chester-le-Street to address.

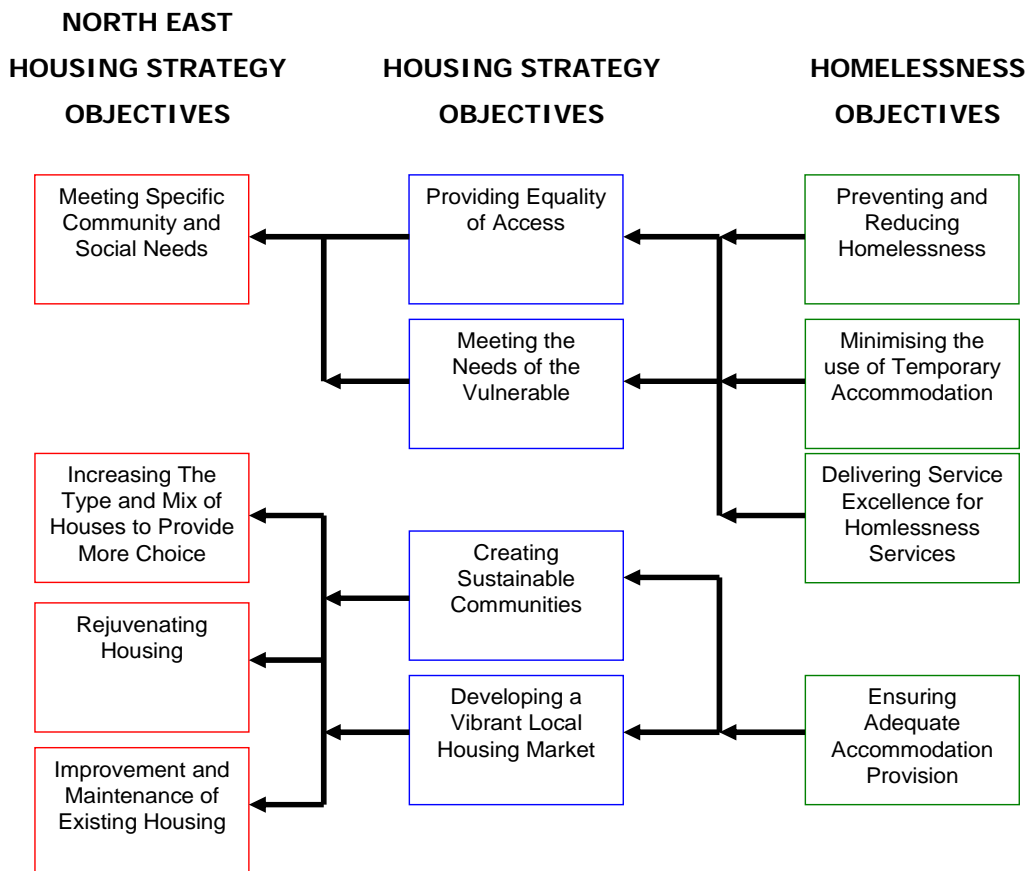
A central plank of this approach is the development of a homelessness strategy that draws together all the information and enables effective partnership working at the same time as contributing to other strategies and plans that address related issues such in health, community safety and economic regeneration.

## Regional Context

### North East Regional Housing Strategy

Chester-le-Street's Homelessness Strategy is informed by and supports the priorities set out in the North East Regional Housing Strategy as set out in Diagram 2.1 below.

Diagram 2.1 Strategic Linkages



## Local Context:

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's Corporate Objectives as follows:

- Customer Excellence.
- Working in Partnership to achieve the Community Strategy.
- Meeting the Decent Homes Standard.
- Regenerating the District.
- Neighbourhood Management.
- New Ways of Working in Leisure.
- Maximising Efficiencies.

## Values

- An authority that is customer focused, that understands the needs of communities and values resident and business engagement.
- An authority that is value-added based, where services are focussed on outcomes and where success is measure by the impact on the quality of life of local people.
- An authority that learns from experience and the experience of others and is open to external challenge and operates comfortably in a mixed economy.
- A council that acts as 'One Team' where staff and elected Members work together and have a clear understanding of their role and the contribution they make to service and corporate priorities.
- A culture of performance management where service plans are closely aligned to the Community Strategy and where staff development and training is prioritised.
- A Council that is accessible to everyone with a commitment to equality whilst recognising diversity.
- A Council that is active both regionally and nationally.

Chester-le-Street District Council has identified five key objectives that will support and deliver our vision:

- **Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness in the district**  
Reduce homelessness by preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place, and by preventing repeat homelessness.
- **Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation**  
Ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to meet the needs of homeless people.
- **Improving Support Services for Homeless Households**  
Ensure that there is appropriate support to meet the needs of homeless people.
- **Implementing Service Improvements**  
Ensure the provision of excellent, customer focused homelessness and advice services.
- **Raise Homeless Policy issues with Central Government**  
Work with partners to bring policy issues to the attention of central government bodies

## Location

Chester-le-Street is a District located in the North of County Durham sharing its boundaries with the conurbations of Gateshead and Sunderland, historic Durham City and rural Derwentside. It covers 68 square kilometres in size and has a population of 53,300, giving it a population density of 784 people per square kilometre. The population within Chester-le-Street has risen by 3.4% since the 1991 Census compared to the North East average of a 2.8% fall. The District Council is still the largest single employer in the District with a workforce of some 560 people and a gross expenditure of £36.4 million. The main town in the District is the market town of Chester-le-Street, which is surrounded by former mining villages and rural settlements.

In order to provide a framework within which individual actions can be developed to support the vision the Council has set out a set of strategic objectives and values as follows:

- Demographics
- Local Economy
- Deprivation
- Educational Attainment
- Teenage Conceptions
- Standardised Mortality Rates
- Limiting Long Term Illness
- Crime and Disorder
- Housing

## Chapter 3 - Homelessness in Chester-le-Street

The purpose of this Section is to highlight the nature and scale of homelessness within the Chester-le-Street District.

All of the information enclosed below has been sourced from the yearly returns which have been submitted by Chester-le-Street Council to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

### Trends in Homeless Presentations

During 2005/06 there were 586 households who presented themselves to the Housing Options Team claiming that they were either currently homeless or could become potentially homeless in the near future (see diagram 3.1 below).

This figure has rose in 2006/07 to 737, seeing an increase in presentation of 26%.

Diagram 3.1 - Trends in Homelessness

Year	Homeless Presentations	% Increase in Presentations	Homeless Applications	% Increase in Applications	Accepted as Homeless	% Increase/decrease in Acceptances
2003/2004	N/A	N/A	239	N/A	122	N/A
2004/2006	N/A	N/A	231	-3.00%	103	-16%
2005/2006	586	N/A	273	28%	81	-22%
2006/2007	737	26%	322	18%	82	0%

In 2005/06 only 50% of these households who made an initial presentation eventually went on to make a formal Homeless Application. The successful reduction can be attributed to the improvement in the provision of information and advice given either directly by the Service or through partner agencies.

Whilst the number of households who were presented as homeless has increased in recent years, the proportion of households found to be actually unintentionally homeless and in priority need has also fallen quite markedly. This is thought to be due to a number of factors which include:

- A more thorough training of staff within the Housing Options Team leading to more consistent decisions.
- The impact of homeless prevention work by the Housing Options Team which is resulting in genuine homeless cases being resolved before the household faces a homeless crisis.

Diagram 3.2 below is a breakdown of the reasons for presentation to the Housing Options Team during 2006/07

**Diagram 3.2 Reasons for Presentations**

<b>Reason for Homelessness</b>	<b>Total</b>
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	201
Loss of rented accommodation due to termination	134
Non-violent relationship breakdown	113
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	98
Violent relationship	62
Other	52
Mortgage arrears	40
Rent arrears	18
Harassment	14
Person from Institution or armed forces	5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>737</b>

The increase in presentations can be attributable to a number of reasons to include:

- Increased awareness about the availability of homeless services in the District.
- An open door approach by the Council, which encourages households to seek help and advice at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Increased cross-agency working leading to an increase in inter-agency referrals.
- Increased publicity about the Council's prevention role.
- Loss of Council rented accommodation through the Right to Buy process within the District over recent years. Over 50% of all Council houses have been lost since the Right to Buy was introduced (See diagram 3.3)
- The limited provision of other social rented housing in the District
- A significant increases in house prices in recent years which are preventing low income households accessing the local housing market.
- Significant demolition of Council owned property as part of wider regeneration plans.
- Policy changes at national level through the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 which has widened the definition of homelessness.
- Increasing levels of relationship/family breakdown
- Increasing numbers of single person households, which increases the pressure on the availability of local housing supply.
- An increasing population base.

**Diagram 3.3 – Losses in Council Housing Stock since 1980**

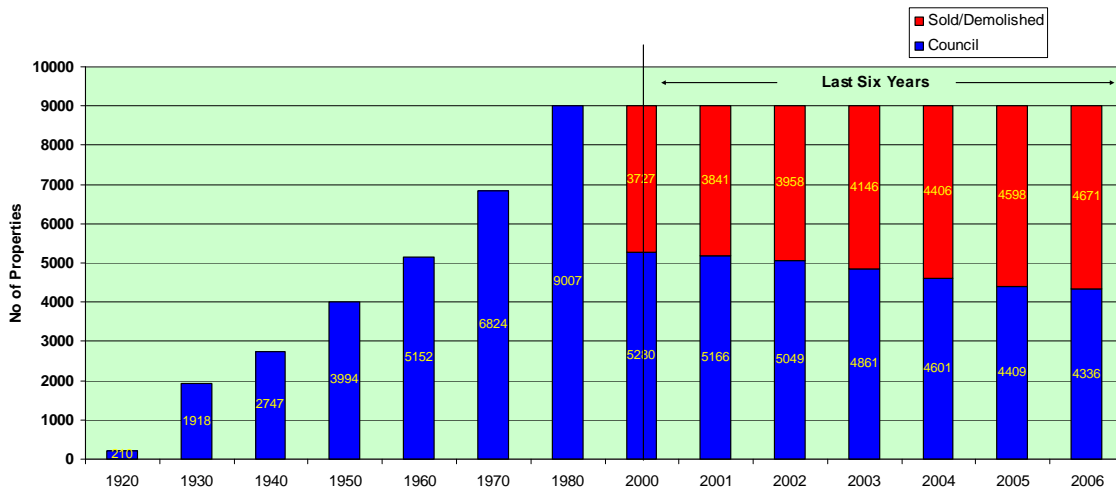


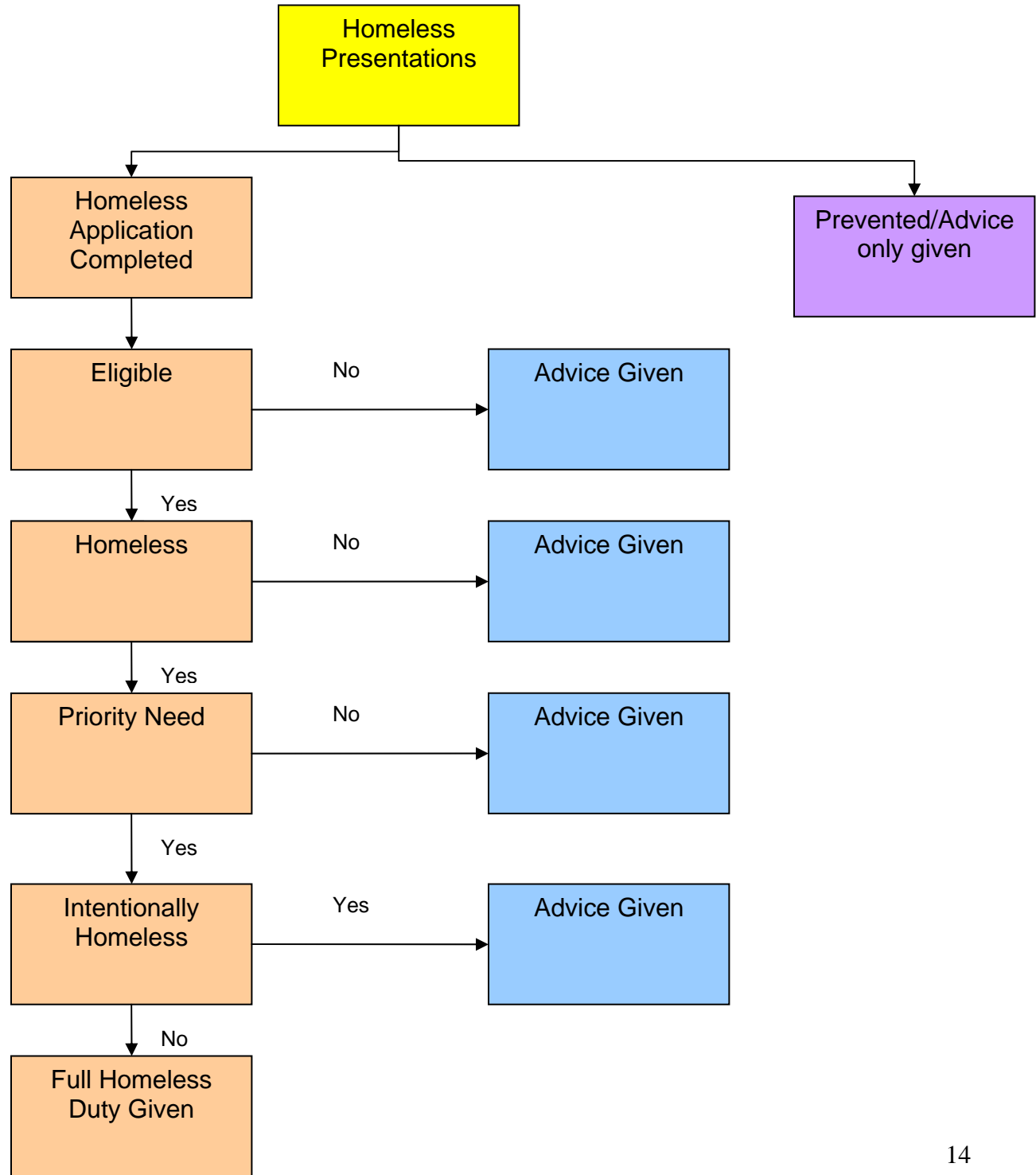
Diagram 3.4 below shows the process of all presentations to the Housing Options Team.

All applications where decisions are other than “accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need” will be given advice tailored to their needs. This will also apply to households that contact for advice only.

The following list is typical of the advice given:

- Advice on their Housing Options i.e. Council Waiting List, other RSLs and Private rented through either Private landlord Accreditation Officer or private adverts.
- Debt Advice.
- Reasons Homeless Prevention officers could assist i.e. liaise with Landlord to suspend any eviction notice.
- Mediation Service.
- Lists of other Housing Providers in Chester-le-Street and surrounding Districts.
- Referral to support agencies.

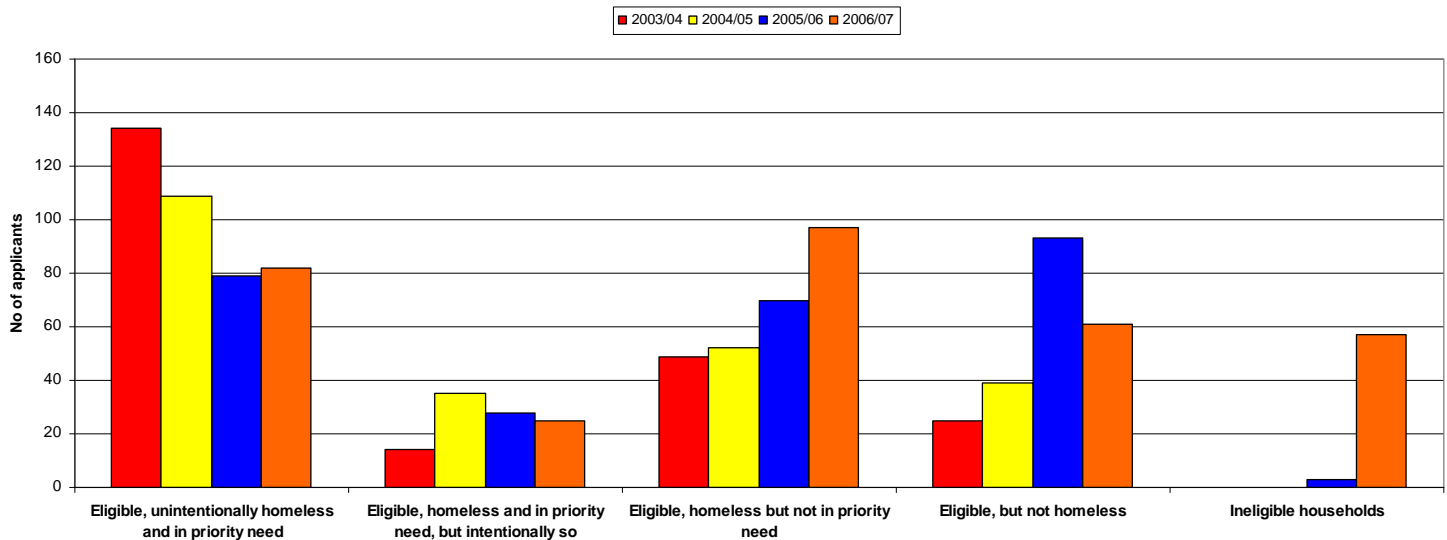
Diagram 3.4- Homelessness Flowchart



## Homeless Decision Trends

The number of homeless applications found “eligible but not homeless” have increased whilst “eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need” have reduced. Early intervention by homeless staff has been the key driver to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place. (see diagram 3.5 below)

**Diagram 3.5 - Homeless Decisions Trends**



## Age Profile of Homelessness Applicants

Surprisingly homelessness is not confined to the younger households i.e. those under 24 years of age. Households in the 25-44 age band are the most successful at accessing homeless services; this is thought to be because they have young children as part of the family group. Although there are comparatively few elderly households presenting as homeless they are also the least successful age group at accessing homelessness services.

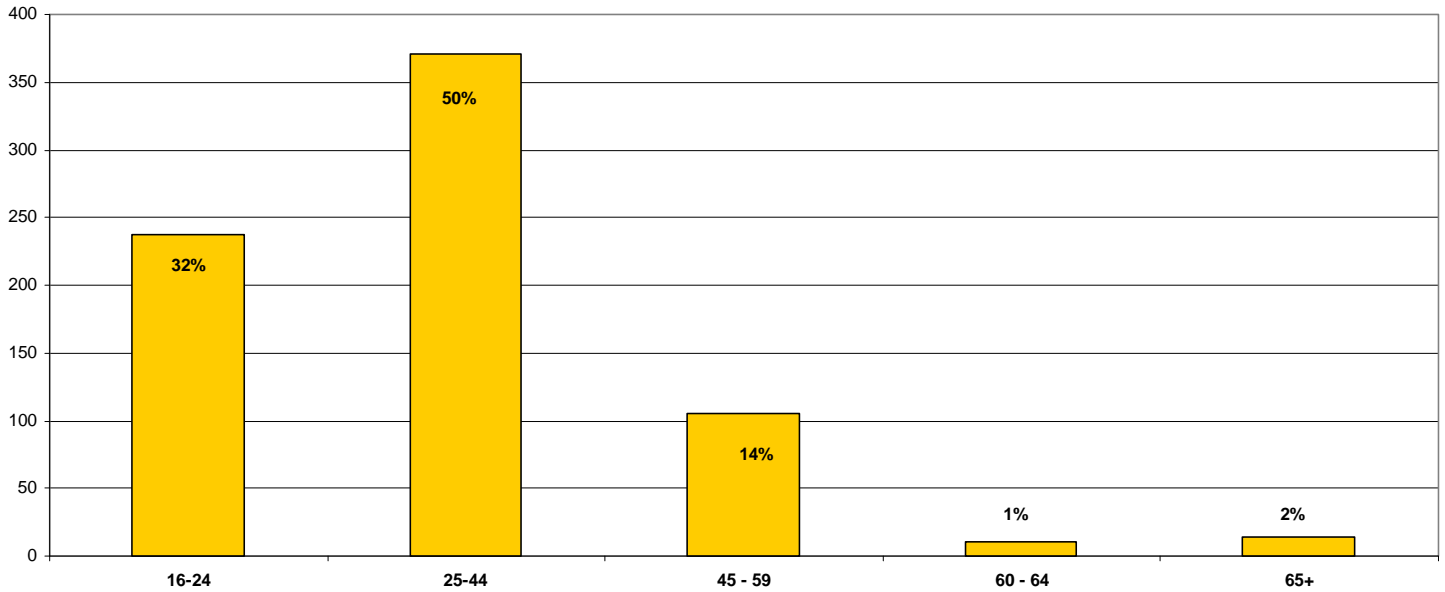
**Diagram 3.6 - Age Profile of Homeless Households 2006/2007**

Age Band	Presenting Households	%	Homeless Applications	%	Successful Applicant	%
16-24	237	32	138	43	35	42
25-44	371	50	145	45	40	49
45 – 59	105	14	26	8	6	7
60 – 64	10	2	13	4	1	1
65+	14	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Applicants</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

The main age group who seek advice and assistance are the 25-44 year olds followed by the 16-24 year olds. 45–59 year olds are the most successful at moving onto the homeless application stage but it would appear that they have a very low rate of success compared with the other two age groups. This is thought to be because of the younger age group being more vulnerable.



**Diagram 3.7 – Age Profile of Homeless Applicants**

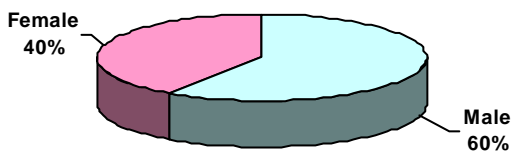


### Gender of Applicants

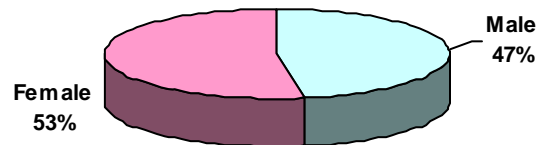
Over the last two years the number of females approaching the housing options team have increased. 237 females approached the council in 2005/06 seeking homeless advice and assistance as opposed to 387 in 2006/07. During the same period the number of males approaching the service for advice and assistance has reduced from 349 to 350 applicants.

**Diagram 3.8 – Gender Profile**

#### 2005/06



#### 2006/07



## Priority Need Profile

All homeless households are assessed in line with the legislation and based around priority need; the breakdown is shown in diagram 3.9.

Diagram 3.9 – Priority Needs Profile

Priority Need Category	2004/05	%	2005/06	%	2006/07	%
Households With Dependent Children	69	63	49	61	53	65
16/17 Year Old Applicant	10	9	11	14	5	6
Household Contains Pregnant Female	5	5	8	10	12	15
Household Member Suffering From a Mental Illness	4	4	4	4	0	0
Household Member With a Physical Disability	2	2	3	4	2	2
Fleeing Violence	6	5	2	2	1	1
Other Social Reasons	7	6	3	4	4	5
Care Leavers	1	1	1	1	2	2
Emergency at Home	3	3	0	0	0	0
Household Contains Elderly Person	2	2	0	0	3	4
Ex Forces	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ex Offender	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Applicants</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

As diagram 3.9 illustrates the majority of applicants accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need are “households with dependant children”. However this has been declining and there has been an increase of 16/17 year olds and pregnant women presenting themselves to the Council.

## Reasons for Homelessness

“Parental Exclusion” is the biggest factor in homelessness cases for Chester-le-Street; accounting for almost one-third of all reasons given by homeless households. With violence or the threat of violence is the next largest factor. (See diagram 3.10)

Diagram 3.10 - Reasons for Homeless Households

Reason for Homelessness	2004/05	%	2005/06	%	2006/07	%
Asked to Leave by Parents	22	20	24	30	22	27
Violence/Threats of Violence	23	21	22	27	7	8
Relationship Breakdown	19	17	9	11	13	15
Loss of Private Accommodation	21	19	11	14	15	18
Rent Arrears	4	4	6	7	2	3
Harassment	5	5	4	5	2	3
Asked to leave by friends/relatives	2	2	3	4	11	13
Mortgage Arrears	1	1	1	1	4	5
In Care/Institution	7	6	0	0	1	2
Other	5	5	1	1	5	6
Asylum Seekers	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Applicants</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

## Homelessness and Ethnicity

Chester-le-Street District Council is committed to constantly improving services and ensuring that all sections of the community have equal access to them. We are also committed to eliminating all forms of discriminatory practice in respect of all social factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, nationality, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. Diagram 3.11 below shows the breakdown of Ethnic Groups who have completed a Homeless Application with the Housing Options Team.

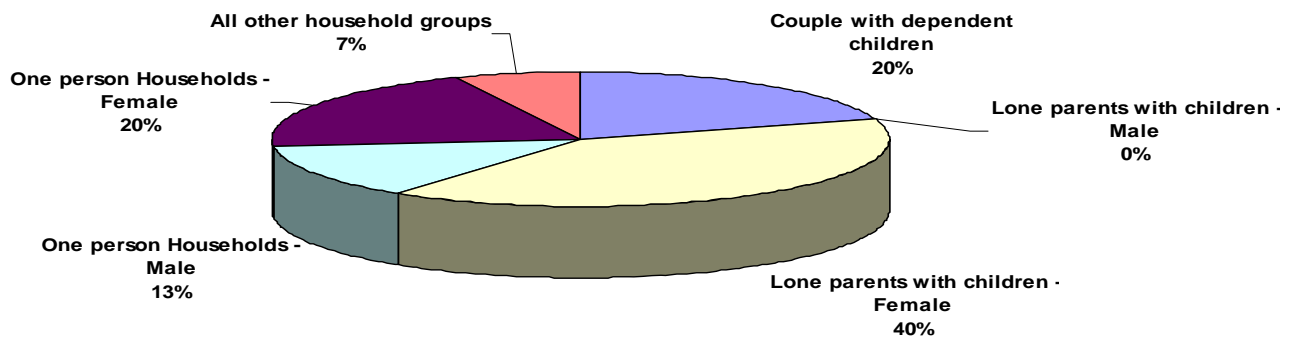
Diagram 3.11 – Ethnicity profile

Ethnic Grouping	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
White	221	235	272	320
African/Caribbean	0	0	1	1
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	0	0	0	0
Other Ethnic	1	0	0	1
Ethnic Origin Unknown	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>322</b>

## Presentations by Household Type

Lone female parents with children make up over one-half of all homeless households (see diagram 3.12 below).

Diagram 3.12

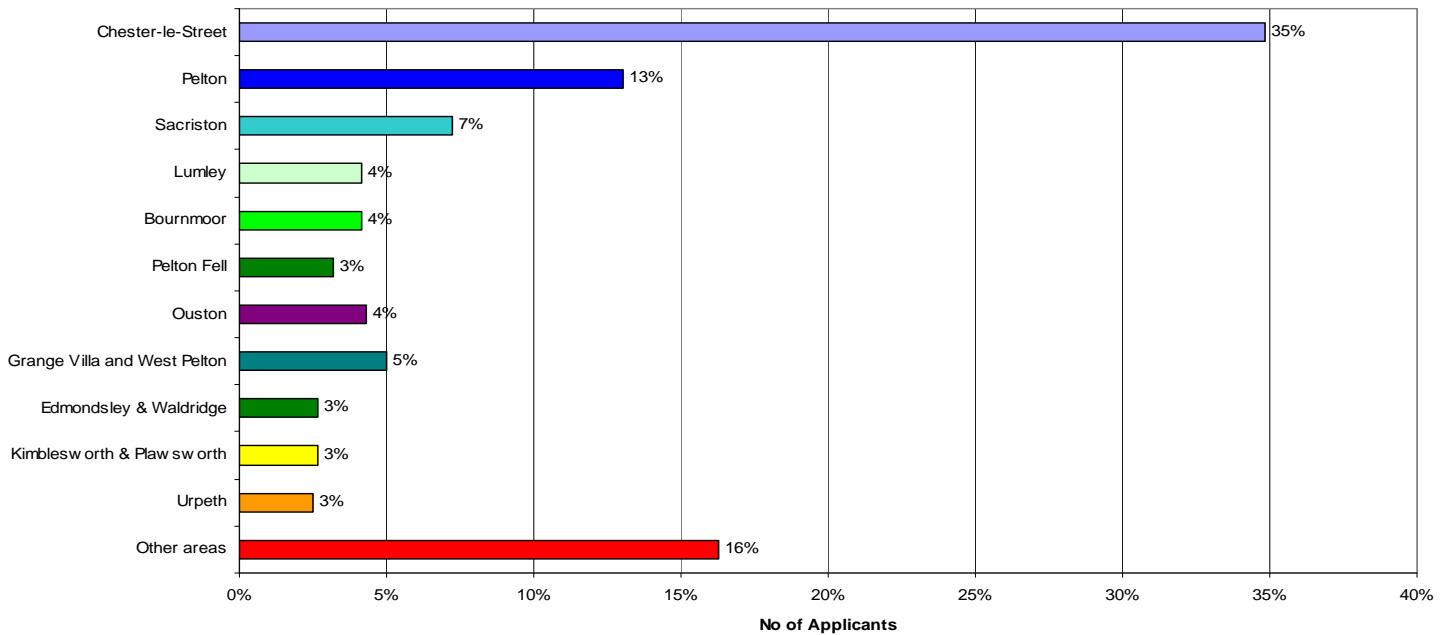


## Presentation by Area

As indicated earlier there were 737 presentations during 2006/07. 603 of these households were living within the Chester-le-Street District with a further 134 households approaching the Council from outside of the area. Areas with larger resident populations such as Chester-le-Street, Pelton and Sacriston make up the majority of homeless presentations. The Service receives fewer potentially homeless enquiries from outlying villages in the District.

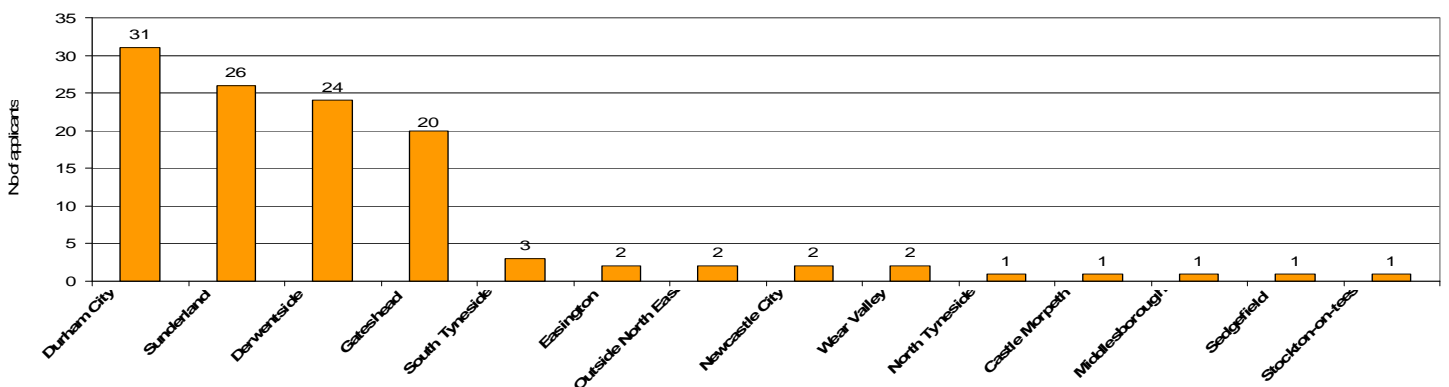
Promotional work has taken place in the areas with posters and leaflets being displayed in various location i.e. Doctors surgeries, advice and drop in centres, post offices etc. In addition, home visits or visits in a convenient location are offered to applicants who have expressed a difficulty in attending an appointment at the Civic Centre.

**Diagram 3.13 – Presentations within the Chester-le-Street area**



18% of all presentations who applied for advice and support from the Housing Options Team came from outside the District or from an institution such as prison. A number of these applicants who applied were referred by the Council to the area where their local connection was under the “local connection” rule. The Gateshead area produced the biggest number of applicants (mainly from Birtley) but Derwentside (Stanley and Consett) and Durham were also significant.

**Diagram 3.14 Presentations outside of the District -**



## Rough Sleeping

The Council conducted a rough sleeper count in 2004 and found that 5 people were sleeping rough.

According to DCLG Guidance “Where estimates remain low (less than 10 rough sleepers), Local Authorities do not have to undertake a formal rough sleeper count. However it is good practice to have a count every 3-5 years and a count should be undertaken where authorities have estimated more than 10 rough sleepers”.

The Housing Options Team liaise with local stakeholders to ensure that advice is given to any person identified as Sleeping Rough. Visits would be made to the location and discussion with the rough sleeper on options available to them.

## Gypsies and Travellers

Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 has placed a duty on Local Housing Authorities to carry out an accommodation needs assessment of gypsies and travellers.

The Guidance states “Every local housing authority must, when undertaking a review of housing needs in their district under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985(c.68), carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers residing in or resorting to their district”

County Durham Districts Councils have in partnership appointed a consultant to carry out an Assessment of the Accommodation Needs of Gypsy and Travellers. A draft of this report has been published in July 2007 and considerations are not being given to the recommendations.

## Domestic Violence

Diagram 3.15 is an illustration from the police on the number of complaints of domestic violence every year.

**Diagram 3.15 - Domestic Violence Complaints Profile**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Number of Incidents</b>	<b>Number of Repeat Victims</b>	<b>% Repeat Victims</b>
Apr-04	67	19	28
May-04	42	17	41
Jun-04	65	16	25
Jul-04	65	22	34
Aug-04	55	10	18
Sep-04	56	15	27
Oct-04	47	14	30
Nov-04	42	12	29
Dec-04	63	18	29
Jan-05	64	18	28
Feb-05	59	16	27
Mar-05	40	12	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>28</b>

Very few of the individuals who lodge a complaint with the Police ever make a formal presentation as a homeless household. Through funding from the CDPR a Domestic Violence Coordinator has been employed to developed services for Durham and Chester-le-Street.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to households who are believed to be in priority need until such time as the assessment is complete and the Council can make a definite decision as to whether the household are homeless or not; the homeless applicants would either stay in their present address, stay in bed and breakfast accommodation or be provided with specialist supported accommodation, for example, if the household was fleeing domestic violence. During 2005/2006 a total of 34 households were provided with accommodation in this way as follows:

- All 34 households were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- No households were placed in hostel accommodation.
- There were no households referred to the women's refuge.

## Chapter 4 - Priorities and Actions

### Objectives

The purpose of this section is to set out what the priorities for the Council are to deliver improved homelessness services over the next 3 years.

Chester-le-Street Council's vision is:

**“Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities”**

We want this Homelessness Strategy to contribute to the vision by achieving the following outcomes:

### **Priority 1 - Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness in the district**

Effective prevention will enable a person to remain in their current home, where appropriate. This prevention will allow for a planned move into suitable alternative accommodation. Housing authorities should take steps to prevent homelessness wherever possible, offering a wide range of advice and assistance for those in housing need. Early intervention to prevent homelessness is to the benefit of any person in housing need and can be considered in 3 stages:

- **Early Identification** – targeting resources to those groups that are known to be in need and working with partnering agencies to ensure the services and protocols are in place
- **Pre-Crisis Intervention** – have services in place to prevent homelessness even if it only delays homelessness to allow a planned move to alternative accommodation
- **Preventing repeat homelessness** – ensuring correct support services are in place to ensure tenancy sustainment.

### Action Points:

**Action Point 1 Home Visits on Parental Exclusion:** Home Visits will be completed where appropriate for all presentations to the Housing Options Team who face homelessness through family exclusion. It will be preferable for both the parent and child to be present. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 2 Mediation Service for 16/25 year olds:** Continued use of the County Wide Mediation service supplied by NHC Support2Talk will be used for 16-25 year olds. These are independent mediators and will be used both to try and prevent Homelessness and to build on family relations to support a young person in a tenancy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 3 Mediation Service for all Households:** Explore use of a Mediation Service for all households by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 4 Joint Protocol for 16/17 year olds:** The County Wide Joint Protocol will be used for all 16 and 17 year olds who present as Homelessness to any agency. This involves a panel meetings being held to draw up a long term plan for the young person with the voluntary sector (SHAID) being involved to act as an advocate. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 5 Early notification from other departments/agencies of potentially homeless households:** Have protocols in place with all other relevant council departments and other partnering agencies to refer any potential homeless cases by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 6 Early notification from Private Landlords:** Agreements in place with Private Landlords on Councils' Accreditation Scheme of issues with tenants that may result in legal action being taken. Early intervention by the Housing Options Team will help to reduce costs for the Landlord and also ensure the tenant has the support and advice they require to conduct a satisfactory tenancy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 7 Provide Support to vulnerable Households to prevent repeat Homelessness:** Ensure all households are offered the correct support in their tenancy to ensure that the tenancy is conducted satisfactorily. This support will range from limited in-house support to referrals to support agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 8 Liaise with Landlords to provide advice/assistance to tenants facing eviction:** Agreements in place with all Private, RSL and Council Landlords to refer any households threatened with re-possession or eviction procedures. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 9 Peer Education:** Develop and progress a Peer Education Group of 16-25 year olds will assist the Housing Options Team is assessing current and future services for young people in Chester-le-Street. In addition the group will run awareness raising sessions on Homelessness with schools and agencies to improve the knowledge and awareness of the service. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 10 Services for Victims of Domestic Abuse:** Work with the Chester-le-street and Durham Domestic Violence Coordinator to develop services within the district for households fleeing Domestic Abuse. This will provide the household with the support and advice they require to assist them to leave the domestic situation and the support they require to assist rebuilding their life. This initiative will also attract funding for the initiative from charitable organisations. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Domestic Violence Coordinator*

**Action Point 11 Partnership working with mortgage lenders and courts to provide advice and assistance to households facing re-possession:** Have protocols in place with mortgage lenders and costs for the early warning of households facing re-possession through non-payments of their mortgage. This will enable the Housing Options Team to ensure the household has received the correct advice and support or referrals to other agency to try and assist them in their mortgage payments. In addition if the re-possession cannot be stopped it will allow the Housing Options Team to work with the Household to secure alternative accommodation before they are actually homeless. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

## **Priority 2 - Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation**

**The availability of a settled, affordable home is vital part of tackling homelessness and creating sustainable communities. Work needs to be done with all Housing providers to ensure our customers have access to suitable affordable accommodation. It is now a government requirement to half the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. Although Chester-le-Street has met this target we must ensure services are in place to continue to provide settled accommodation. We must ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to meet the needs of homeless people.**



## Action Points:

**Action Point 12 Nomination Agreements with RSLs:** Nomination agreements in place and monitored with all RSLs in the area to ensure the correct number of nomination requests are received. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 13 Bond Scheme:** The Bond Scheme is delivered in line with the Private Landlord Accreditation scheme. CLS guarantees the Bond to the Landlord in the event of damage or rent arrears to the property and also allows homeless households to access private accommodation who would otherwise be unable to do so because of the bond. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Private Landlord Accreditation Officer*

**Action Point 14 Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme:** Publicise the Private Landlord Accreditation scheme to encourage more Landlords onto the scheme. Develop referral protocol between the Private Landlord Accreditation Officer and the Housing Options Team. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Private Landlord Accreditation Officer*

**Action Point 15 Referrals to Supported Accommodation for 16-25 year olds where supported living is the best option:** Not every 16-25 year old who presents as Homeless is suitable to be housed directly into a tenancy therefore each case must be assessed and is necessarily referred to a supported housing scheme. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 16 Work with partners to develop supported living scheme Chester-le-Street District area:** Continued work with Sunderland YMCA Foyer to develop a supported living scheme in Chester-le-Street for 16-25 year olds. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

## Priority 3 - Improving Support Services for homeless households

**For some people, the causes of homelessness are complex and homelessness cannot be resolved by just providing accommodation. People may have mental health or substance misuse problems and in many cases chaotic lifestyles. Service must be in place to respond to the needs of these people in both the short and long term.**

## Action Points:

**Action Point 17 Provide support for vulnerable Households via internal resources:** Assess each homeless household and ensure that the correct support is given. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 18 Refer to support agencies as required for the individual:** For those households with more complex needs refer to appropriate support agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 19 Establish Service Level Agreements with Support Agencies to extend and monitor the support available:** Ensure service level agreements are in place with all support agencies to ensure Chester-le-Street receives the best possible service for its service users by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 20 Establish a Homeless Hostel:** Explore the possibility of specialist Homeless Hostel to use as temporary Accommodation in place of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 21 Establish a protocol for joint working with the Community Mental Health Team:**

Liaise with the community mental health team to ensure protocols are in place so that people with mental health needs can access housing. In addition to ensure support services are in place for those with mental health needs whilst in accommodation.

**Priority 4 - Implementing service improvements**

The Chester-le-Streets Corporate plan sets out ways to improving the services for our customers by improving customer care while providing new ways to access our services. This strategy will link to this by ensuring the provision of excellent, customer focused homelessness and advice services.

**Action Points:**

**Action Point 22 Continue to work with the Homeless Focus Group to improve the Housing**

**Options Service:** Work with the focus group on service delivery and planned work. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 23 Hold Annual Homelessness Focus Day:** Invite service users to attend a Focus day get feed back from them on the service they received and what can be done to improve the service.

*Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 24 Work with and hold Homeless Strategy Steering Group meetings quarterly:**

Meet quarterly with the Homeless Strategy Steering Group to monitor and review the Strategy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 25 Review Homeless Policy:** Review existing Homeless Policy and make a summary version available by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Action Point 26 Promotion of Housing Options Service:** Continued promotion of the Housing Options Service including training for Council staff and partnering agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

**Priority 5 - Raise Homeless Policy issues with Central Government**

We will work with partners to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of homelessness by conducting research, examining policies and offering practical solutions. The result of this work will be fed into Central government to feed future policies.

**Action Point 27 Work with partners to bring policy issues to the attention of central government bodies** *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

## **Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy in the Future**

The purpose of this Section is to set out how the Council will review and update the Strategy in the future. Chester-le-Street District Council will:

- Work with partners within the Homelessness Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the strategy, ensure that it is reflected within: relevant local plans and strategies and to influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.
- Review available resource and ensure it is designated to the most appropriate service area.
- Review our progress against the Housing Option Team Plan and report the findings to the Homelessness Steering Group and to the Plan Clinics.
- Undertake a review of the strategy during 2009, and produce our next Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2009.
- Report 6 monthly to Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

## **Chapter 5 - Performance Management**

### **Partnership Working**

The purpose of this Section is to explain Partnership Structures in Chester-le-Street relevant to the delivery of the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

### **Partnership Structures**

Whilst the Council has statutory responsibilities to deal with homelessness, it cannot solve the challenges and problems of homelessness alone, nor can it deliver all of the services that are needed to give support, assistance and advice to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is therefore essential that we have strong and established partnerships that are effective with both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The Council has developed its homelessness service in consultation with partner agencies through the Homeless Action Partnership as illustrated in diagram 5.1. In addition the Strategy will be seen to influence other Strategies and Plans within Chester-le-Street District Council as illustrated in diagram 5.2.

Detailed below are the main partners we will work with to enable appropriate support is provided to homeless households.

The Housing Options team undertakes vulnerability assessments for all homeless households in order to identify the appropriate support package that is required. Households can then be sign posted or referred to the appropriate support organisation:

- Social Services
- Primary Care Trust
- Shelter
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- National Childrens Homes Mediation Service
- Other Council Departments
- Home Improvement Agency
- Supported Housing/ Floating Support Providers: Norcare, DISC (Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities), DART (Disc Accommodation Resource Team), YMCA Foyer, Stonham
- Centrepont
- Private Landlords
- Registered Social Landlords: Durham Aged Mineworkers, Home Housing, Johnnie Johnson, Three Rivers Housing, Nomad, Places for People, Accent, Two Castles
- Probation
- Domestic Violence Refuge
- Community Mental Health Team
- Drug Action Team
- Sure-Start
- Domestic Violence Practitioners Group
- Teenage Pregnancy Board
- Connexions

**Diagram 5.1 Partnership Framework in County Durham**

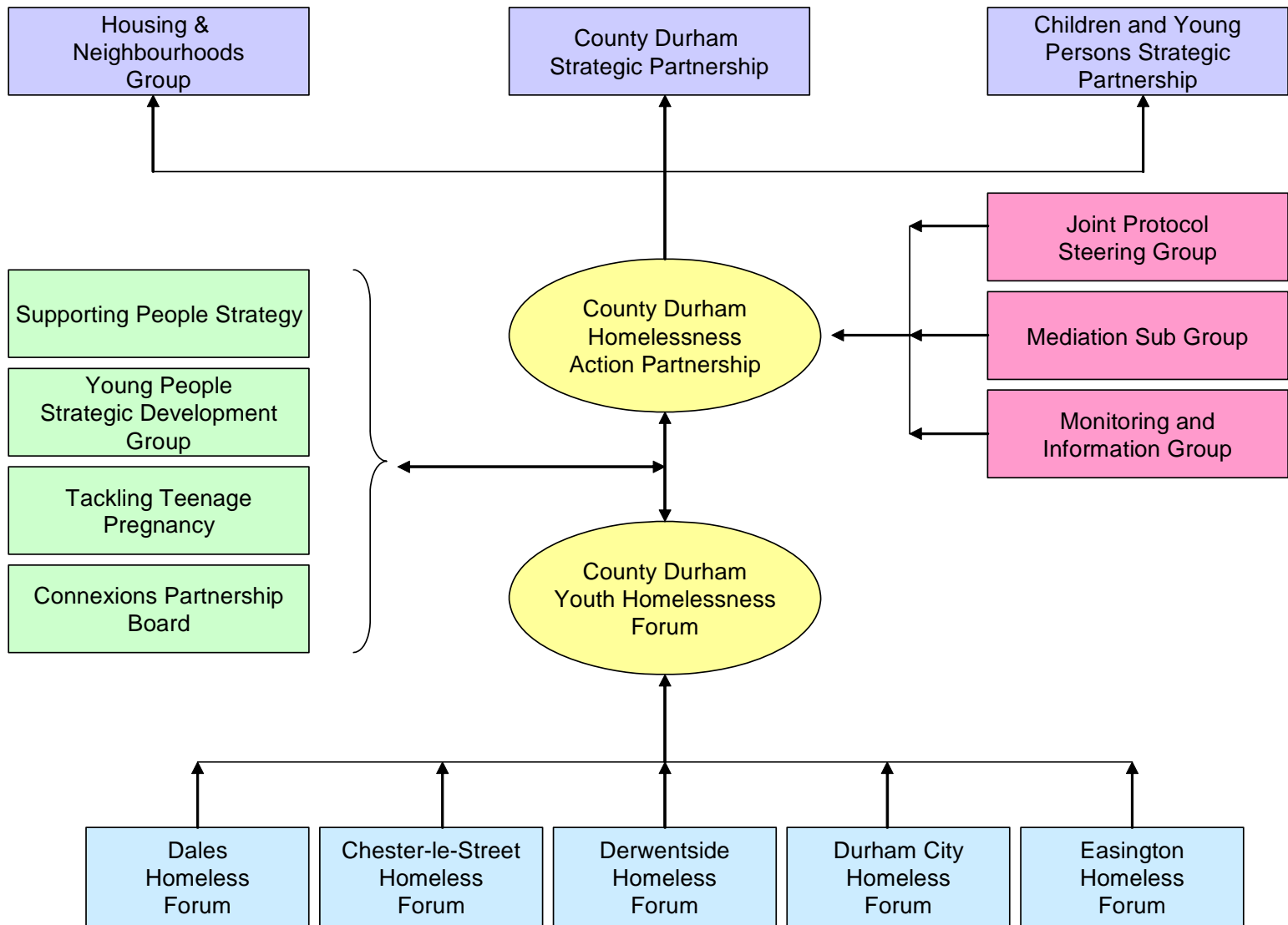
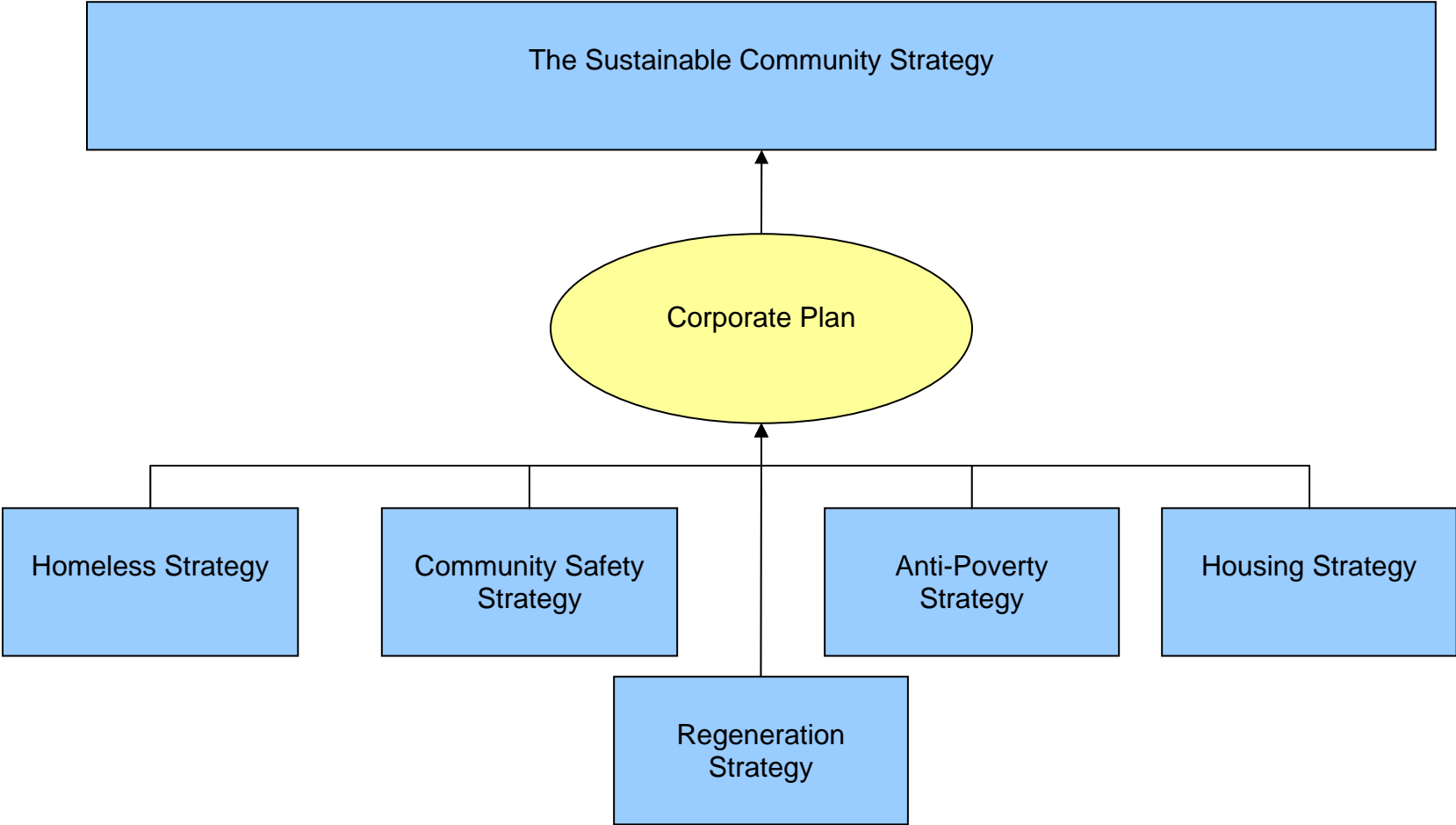


Diagram 5.2 Partnership Framework in Chester-le-Street District Council



## **Working with Service Users**

### **Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2005**

The results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2005 show that of the 98 households who had used the homelessness service nearly one-half of them considered the staff to have been helpful (47%) but almost one-third of tenants who had used the service considered the staff to have been unhelpful (30%).

Staff were considered to have been most helpful during office hours (53%), although 35% said the time of day made no difference.

Almost two thirds of respondents said their circumstances had been handled sensitively (59%) but almost one third (32%) said their circumstances had not been handled sensitively.

### **Homeless Service User Focus Day**

A Service User Focus Day was held to receive feedback from those users who had previously accessed the homelessness service. The focus group comprised of users who had obtained Council accommodation via the homelessness service and those who had not.

Feedback from the Service User Focus Day is detailed below:

- Would like the Housing Options Team to offer a rental agency type service.
- Interview Rooms should be made more comfortable.
- The main reception in the Civic Centre should be improved to offer more privacy.
- Would like the Housing Options Team to avoid the use of the phrase “homeless investigation” as it implies criminality.
- Would like advice packs or booklets to be available in the Civic Centre.
- Sometimes policies conflict between agencies which cause confusion.
- Would like more staff to be employed so that they can spend more time explaining the options.
- Would like there to be less red tape.
- Want services to be delivered consistently.
- Managers often move the goals posts after discussing the case with the case officer.
- Would like more choice of accommodation.
- Would like more support services.
- Would like a feedback box to be provided in reception.

## Customer Satisfaction Surveys

A Satisfaction Survey is sent out to every contact to the Housing Options Team (see diagram 5.3). In addition, a second survey is forwarded to every client that completes a homeless application form (see diagram 5.4). This feedback is used to assist the development of the service and realise the strengths and weaknesses in the service delivery.

The feedback is detailed below:

**Diagram 5.3**  
**Initial Assessment Satisfaction Surveys**

Initial Assessment Application							
	Jun 2006	Jul 2006	Aug 2006	Sep 2006	Oct 2006	Nov 2006	Total
<b>RECEPTION STAFF</b>							
Were the reception staff courteous and polite	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was your case handled sensitively	100%	87%	83%	100%	100%	0%	94%
Was it explained that the Housing Options Team operate an appointment system	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Were you given an appointment that was convenient and suitable to you	100%	87%	100%	100%	100%	0%	97%
<b>HOUSING OPTIONS STAFF</b>							
Did the member of staff give their name	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was the interview carried out in a private interview room	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Were you given time to explain your situation/circumstances	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Were your circumstances handled sensitively	100%	93%	83%	100%	100%	0%	95%
Was your housing options explained	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was the next stage in the process clearly explained to you	100%	93%	83%	100%	100%	0%	95%
Were you given an Information pack	100%	87%	100%	100%	100%	0%	97%



**Diagram 5.4**  
**Homeless Application Satisfaction Surveys**

<b>Homeless Application</b>							
	<b>Jun 2006</b>	<b>Jul 2006</b>	<b>Aug 2006</b>	<b>Sep 2006</b>	<b>Oct 2006</b>	<b>Nov 2006</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>RECEPTION STAFF</b>							
<b>Courteous and polite</b>	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	96%
<b>handled sensitively</b>	70%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	89%
<b>HOUSING OPTIONS STAFF</b>							
<b>Staff give name</b>	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	98%
<b>Private interview room</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
<b>Situation circumstances</b>	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	98%
<b>circumstances sensitive</b>	70%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	89%
<b>explain housing options</b>	70%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	94%
<b>next stage explained</b>	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	96%
<b>DECISION TIME</b>							
<b>decision time</b>	60%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	87%
<b>writing decision</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
<b>clear and understandable</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	95%

This Section describes the performance of the Housing Options Team in delivering services to homeless applicants.

The performance of the Housing Options Team is made in the following ways:

### Best Value Performance Indicators

A range of Best Value Performance Indicators are measured and reported annually to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The performance of the Council can be compared with every other council in the country.

Ref	Description	Current Target	Performance 2005/06
BVPI 183 (a)	The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation by households containing pregnant women or dependent children	3 weeks	0.79 weeks
BVPI 183 (b)	The average length of stay in hostels by households containing pregnant women or dependent children	3 Weeks	0
BVPI 202	The count of rough sleepers	0-10	4
BVPI 203	The percentage change in the number of families placed in temporary accommodation.	-9%	-48.68%
BVPI 213	Number of households where prevention prevented homelessness	0.8	2
BVPI 214	Percentage of homeless households who are presenting as homeless for a second time within the last 2 years	0	0
BVPI 225	Domestic Violence Service rating (Maximum score 10)	100%	36.4%

### Local Performance Indicators

The Service sets Local Performance Indicators which are not always easy to compare with other providers but they do provide useful information about local service performance.

Ref	Description	Target	Performance 2005/06
HSLPH01	Average length of time taken to assess a Homeless Application	23 days	23.57 days

## Service Statistics (New for 2006/07)

The Service records a number of service statistics. These are used to assess the volume of work being undertaken by the Housing Options Team.

Ref	Description	Target	Performance 2005/06 (until 30/9)
HSST23	% of applicants in immediate homelessness interviewed the same day	100%	100%
HSST24	% of routine appointments carried out within 10 working days	100%	100%
HSST25	%of applications assessed within 33 days	100%	100%
HSST 26	%of applicants notified in writing within 3 days	100%	97%
HSST 27	% of review decisions made within 8 weeks	100%	96%

## Resources

The purpose of this Section is to identify the resources available to the Council to support homelessness activity in the District.

### Revenue Resources

Year	Budget	Percentage Increase (Year on Year)	Percentage Increase (Since 2003 baseline)	Homeless Presentations	Cost Per Presentation
2003/2004	£76,910			469	£163.99
2004/2005	£85,380	11.01%	11.01%	597	£143.02
2005/2006	£108,610	27.21%	41.22%	586	£185.34
2006/2007	£125,290	15.36%	62.90%	586	£213.81

NOTE: The figures in red font in the above table are predictions

### Priority Needs Funding

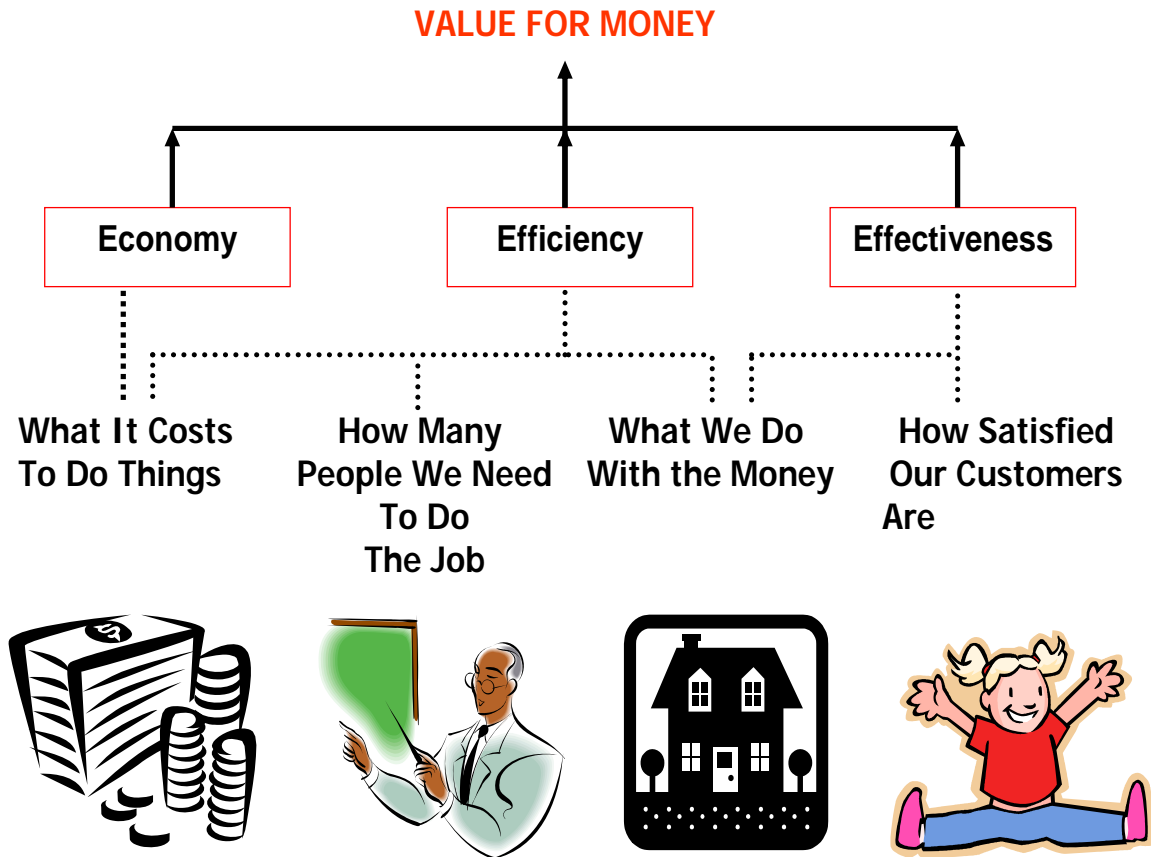
The Council secured £20,000 Priority Needs Funding in 2004/2005. This has increased to £35,000 for 2006 to 2008.

## Value for Money Assessment

The Council assesses value for money by measuring the:

- Economy (what services cost).
- Efficiency (what is produced by the service).
- Effectiveness (what customer impact services have).

Diagram 5.5 Value for Money Framework



The Council rates its Homelessness Service as offering good value for money for service users for the following reasons:

### Economy

Year	Chester-le-Street	Best Performers	Average Performers	Poor Performers
2001	£0.25	£2.10	£1.40	£0.60
2002	£0.60	£2.50	£1.45	£0.60
2003	£1.40	£3.10	£1.50	£0.90
2004	£1.30	£3.60	£1.75	£1.10

## **Efficiency**

The Housing Options Team provides a customer focused Housing Options Service, giving advice and assistance to all service users relating to housing need. Furthermore referrals to specialist agencies will also be used where appropriate depending on the needs of the service user. These agencies are:

- Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) for Debt Advice.
- Outreach Services for Domestic Abuse.
- Floating Support Services for vulnerable Households.
- Department of Working Pensions (DWP) for income advice.

Services within the Team are now being developed to prevent Homelessness from occurring in the first place therefore:

- Reducing numbers of presentations from service users when they are actually homeless.
- Reducing the need for the use of temporary accommodation.
- Reducing the need to use Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.

Promotion and advertising of the service is also encouraging service users to contact the Housing Options Team early to help to prevent Homelessness occurring.

Relationship building and training with other council departments and agencies is also encouraging early referrals of potentially homeless applicants.

## **Effectiveness**

This service provides all residents in the Chester-le-Street with a free impartial Housing Advice Service. This service is available all year round, with an emergency out-of-hours service for those in immediate housing need.

In addition, the Housing Options Team will ensure each service user has the correct support services involved and be referred to specialist agencies if not.

Prevention of Homelessness or repeat Homelessness is now a key priority. Service users are encouraged to contact the Housing Options Team as early as possible to increase the possibility of the Homelessness being prevented and therefore reducing the need to complete a full homeless assessment.

The Council has made a number of changes in the last 12 months that have improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the Services it delivers and these are detailed in Appendix 2.

## Gershon Efficiency Savings

The Council estimates that it has:

- Reduced Housing Benefit expenditure by £600,000 in 2004/2005 by using local authority accommodation to provide temporary housing rather than use bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Saved the General Fund an estimated £100,000 through the non use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Saved £80,000 through more efficient working - a combination of:
  - Higher case load is being achieved with the same staffing resource.
  - Mediation and other prevention services have reduced homeless acceptances by 50%.
- Used 2 modern apprentices rather than full time administrative support saving £20,000.

## Appendix One: Local Context

### Demographics

Chester-le-Street has a population of 53,300. The population of the District is estimated to increase by 13.51% to 2011 and by 16.7% to 2021. If population estimates are correct then there will be 62,200 people living in Chester-le-Street in 2021. The increasing population base is expected to place significant burdens on demands for services during the next 15 years.

42% of all households in the District are married couple households against 36.8% in the North East region. 6.1% of households are lone parent households with dependent children.

Diagram 1 Population Profile

Age Group	Males	Females	Persons	Percent
<b>Under 5</b>	1,400	1,500	2,800	5.25%
<b>5 to 14</b>	3,400	3,300	6,700	12.57%
<b>15 to 19</b>	1,600	1,600	3,100	5.82%
<b>20 to 24</b>	1,300	1,200	2,500	4.69%
<b>25 to 44</b>	7,500	8,000	15,600	29.27%
<b>45 to 64</b>	7,100	7,200	14,300	26.83%
<b>65 and over</b>	3,700	4,800	8,400	15.76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,800</b>	<b>27,400</b>	<b>53,300</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Local Economy

The local economy is characterized by very low and falling levels of unemployment (1.6%) as indicated in diagram 2 below:

Diagram 2 Employment Profile

Annual Labour Force Survey	Chester-le-Street (%)	North East (%)	Great Britain (%)
Economic Activity Rate	78.6	73.5	78.3
Economic Inactivity Rate	21.4	26.5	21.7
Employment Rate	74.3	68.6	74.2
Unemployment Rate	Not available	6.7	5.2
Claimant Count	1.6	3.1	2.4

The majority of the working population are employed in hotels, distribution and restaurants or in public administration. These sectors account for 60.6% of all working people in the District. 65.8% of all economically active adults have a level of education of at least NVQ Level 2.

### Diagram 3 Employment Profile

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Chester-le-Street (%)</b>	<b>North East (%)</b>	<b>England (%)</b>
Agriculture & fishing	0.3	0.5	0.8
Energy & water	0.1	1	0.6
Manufacturing	8.1	15.9	13.4
Construction	7.5	5.4	4.4
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	35.5	22.8	24.8
Transport & communications	6.2	5.4	6.2
Banking, finance & insurance	7.6	13.3	20.3
Public administration, education & health	25.1	30.4	24.3

### Deprivation

Chester-le-Street contains pockets of high levels of deprivation within an otherwise un-deprived area. The key deprivation characteristics of the District area as follows:

- 17.6% of all super outputs areas within the District are in the most deprived 20% in England.
- 2.9% of super output areas are within the most deprived 10% in England.
- Chester-le-Street is ranked 123<sup>rd</sup> out of 354 Districts in England in deprivation terms.
- The areas of the District suffering deprivation score most highly on the “income deprivation affecting children” and “income deprivation affecting older people”.

### Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is rising in the District with 44.6% of all 16 year olds now achieving 5 passes at GCSE, although educational attainment levels still lag behind the regional and national position.

### Teenage Conceptions

Teenage conceptions in Chester-le-Street are low with 37 conceptions per 1,000 of the population aged between 15 and 17 years of age. This compares to 49.7 for County Durham, 51.2 for the North East and 42 for the whole the England.

### Standardised Mortality Rates

Standardised mortality rates for the area at:

- 111.6 for circulatory deaths per 100,000 population, and
- 138.2 For cancer deaths per 100,000 population.

All are well above the national and regional average mortality rates for these conditions.



## Limiting Long Term Illness

The District has comparatively few households with problems of limiting long term illness. Life expectancy for males and females is 76 years and 79.8 years respectively. This is well above the average for the North East as a whole but below national figures.

**Diagram 4 Limiting Long Term Illness Profile**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Chester- le-Street (%)</b>	<b>North East (%)</b>
Limiting Long-term illness	21.5	22.7
General health 'not good'	11.6	12.0
Providing unpaid care	11.5	11.0
Providing unpaid care >50hrs per week	2.6	2.7

## Crime and Disorder

Recorded crime levels in Chester-le-Street are low against a basket of national indicators. Domestic burglaries are therefore almost half that of the regional and national total. A similar pattern emerges with vehicle crime.

## Housing

The 2001 Census estimates that there are a total of 22,851 dwellings in the District. The local housing market is dominated by owner occupied properties.

**Diagram 5 Tenure Profile**

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Owner Occupied	16,420	71.86%
Shared Ownership	80	0.35%
Council/RSL Rented	5,258	23.01%
Private Rented	817	3.58%
Other	276	1.21%
Total	22,851	100.00%

The District contains a good balance between the various house types.

**Diagram 6 House Type Profile**

<b>House Type</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Detached	4295	18.80%
Semi Detached	9194	40.24%
Terraced	7921	34.66%
Flats	1441	6.30%
Total	22851	100.00%

## Local Strategic Partnership

The Local District Partnership developed its first Community Strategy in 2004 setting out a 10 year vision for Chester-le-Street:

*“by 2014 the District of Chester-le-Street will be a place where people choose to live, to learn, to work and to visit. There will be inclusive, safe and healthy communities in our towns and villages built on a strong, sustainable economic base with excellent community networks. The District Council will be a place where everyone is working together for a sustainable future.*

The Strategy and related priorities have all been reviewed and updated during 2006. There are now 10 priorities. 2 of the priorities have specific relevance to homelessness:

### Priority 4

Provide sustainable communities through better quality access to and greater choice and improved efficiency in housing in neighbourhoods across the district.

The following specific objectives have been identified to support this priority:

- Reduce the proportion of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010.
- Secure a score of 100% of the Sanctuary BVPI.
- Develop services for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Complete the development of 50 affordable homes for sale in Sacriston.

### Priority 7

Improve the health and well being of communities across the District; tackle health inequalities; and improve access to and quality of health and social care services.

The following specific objectives have been identified to support this priority:

- Reduce the number of homelessness presentations.
- Reduce homelessness through prevention activity.

## Chester-le-Street Corporate Plan

The Council produced its first Corporate Plan in 2005 and has updated and refreshed the Plan in 2006.

The Plan sets 7 priorities for the Council. This Homelessness Strategy links to 5 of the 7 Corporate Priorities as follows:

- **Customer Excellence**

The Council is committed in this homelessness strategy to the development of service excellence for homelessness services within the District.

- **Working in Partnership to achieve the Community Strategy**

The Council is developing its homelessness services in partnership with other agencies through the Homeless Action Partnership.

- **Meeting the Decent Homes Standard**

The renovation of both council and private sector homes to the Decent Homes Standard will help reduce homelessness and provide potential homeless households with maximum choice of accommodation.

- **Regenerating the District**

The housing-led regeneration schemes that the Council is delivering will result in significant additions to the supply of affordable housing units for both rent and sale.

- **Maximising Efficiencies**

The Homelessness Service has made significant contributions to developing innovative and efficient ways of working.

## **Equalities and Diversity**

The Council is committed to embedding diversity in all its activities, policy planning and service delivery arrangements. The Council's vision is to:

- Create a sense of belonging for all communities within the District.
- Recognise that different peoples backgrounds are appreciated, celebrated and valued.
- Recognise that people from different backgrounds have the same life opportunities.
- Recognise that strong and positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds.

The Council's Equalities and Diversity Strategy contains the following guiding principles:

- Promotion of attitude change.
- Celebration of diversity.
- Encourage faith communities to work together.
- Promote tolerance and understanding.
- Review all policies and procedures.

This strategy also contains commitments to the provision of accommodation and support for travellers who reside or visit the District. The Council manages a gypsy site for travellers who are residing in or visiting the district. The Council will treat travellers as potential homeless households and will provide accessible services to meet their specific needs.

## Supporting People

The Supporting People Commissioning Body has developed its 5 Year Supporting People Strategy, which the Council formally endorsed in March 2005. The Supporting People Strategy is being developed on the back of a detailed needs assessment of each client group.

The District currently receives Supporting People funding to help support a total of 94 units of accommodation linked to supporting or the prevention of homelessness as illustrated in Diagram 7 below.

**Diagram 7 Supported Accommodation Profile**

Client Group	Accommodation Based Units	Floating Support
Homelessness	63	15
Learning Disabilities	3	10
Ex-Offenders	3	0
Total	69	25

## **Appendix Two: Gershon Efficiency Savings**

In the last 12 months the Council has implemented a number of changes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Homelessness Service that it delivers, as set out below:

- The Council has increased the proportion of staff engaged in prevention work.
- Equal numbers of staff are engaged in prevention and case work.
- The Council has secured increased funding from the Priority Needs Fund - £70,000 over 2 years.
- The Council has retrained its staff in the last 12 months to maintain high standards of service delivery.
- The Council has introduced home visits to improve service standards.
- The Council will be using credit referencing to improve the speed at which cases can be processed.
- A County-wide mediation service has been launched in the last 12 months.
- A Rent Deposit Scheme has been launched in the last 12 months to improve choice for homeless households.
- An Action Plan has been developed to improve performance on the Sanctuary BVPI.
- There is outreach support in place to help tackle threatened homelessness rent arrears and anti social behaviour.
- The Council has increased funding to the CAB to help provide case work advice and support.
- All Rent Arrears letters issued by the Council contain the CAB contact details.
- An Accredited Landlords Scheme has been established.
- An Approved Lettings Scheme is up and running.
- Up to 10 tenancies can be support through an external agency funded by Supporting People (DART).
- There is floating support in place to support 4 ex offenders.
- The Council has signed the HARP Protocol.
- There has been training for staff and elected members of the HARP Protocol.