

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL

HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY 2013-2016

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1. PURPOSE OF THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW AND STRATEGY

1.1 Requirement for a Homelessness Review and Strategy

Any Council would be advised to have an up to date knowledge of the extent of homelessness and housing need in its area, and to make sure that services are available for those who need them.

Aside from this, the Homelessness Act 2002 established the requirement for all authorities to produce a Homelessness Review and Strategy taking into account:-

- Levels of homelessness in the borough;
- Services provided to prevent homelessness to provide accommodation and suitable support; and
- The level of resources available to the authority including social services and public authority, voluntary organisations and the public agencies to provide these services.

The 2002 Act requires the authority to keep the Strategy under review, to consult on it and update it at intervals, and to publish a new strategy within five years.

South Gloucestershire Council published its first Homelessness Review and Strategy in July 2003. Homelessness is such a significant matter and factors relating to its causes can quickly change. As such, it has been the practice of

this Council to renew the review and strategy ahead of the five yearly statutory requirement. An update was conducted and published in February 2006 and a fresh review and strategy approved in the Executive decision in June 2009.

1.2 Other Strategic Links

The South Gloucestershire Council Housing Strategy 2013-18 sets out 4 main cross-cutting themes with a set of ambitions to achieve them. Preventing homelessness is one of the key challenges identified, and the measures of success include:

- Number of homelessness preventions
- Number of households accepted as statutory homeless
- Number of households in temporary accommodation
- Average time spent in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation

Enabling access to suitable housing is related to many aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy 2012 and the draft Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013 – 2017.

The Council also has other responsibilities that the Homelessness Strategy can support, for example: its corporate parenting role; its role in helping those with special needs achieve independence, particularly where they are on a ward with no address for discharge or in residential care which is due to close; its role in public protection whether this is assisting those at risk of violence or in re-housing dangerous offenders from prison, as well as other offenders; and in promoting standards in the private sector and bringing empty properties back into use.

1.3 Aims of the Strategy

As well as fulfilling a statutory requirement, the main aims of the Homelessness Strategy is always to prevent homelessness arising by having

a accessible housing advice service for anyone who needs it, by identifying key groups at risk and putting in place early intervention measures, to secure that sufficient accommodation is available for people who are or may become homeless, and that support is available.

The Homelessness Strategy also needs to ensure that it is consistent with other local plans and strategies, including wider relevant cross boundary work. In doing so, it can include specific actions which the housing authority expects to be taken by other services and organisations whose activities could contribute to achieving its objectives.

1.4 Who is the Strategy For?

Homelessness is frequently interpreted to mean rough sleepers or those who have nowhere to live. However, even if someone has somewhere to stay in they can be regarded as homeless or threatened with homelessness if their accommodation is not secure or reasonable for them to live in.

This Strategy seeks to help all households in South Gloucestershire who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, or who are likely to become so if they are not able to access advice and assistance to help them overcome the difficulties they may be facing with regard to having secure housing. This can include those to whom a duty may be owed under homelessness legislation as well as those who do not qualify for statutory homelessness services but who nonetheless have a need to access settled accommodation.

To identify all the people that this applies to, will look at all the people who are accessing housing advice and homelessness services to see if they need to move or to have advice and support to remain where they are.

1.5 Developments Since 2009

Much has changed since the current strategy was adopted and a new set of challenges have emerged. These include;

- a series of measures under the heading of Welfare Reform;
- the Localism Act 2011;
- the growth in the private rented housing sector in South Glos;
- an increasingly competitive private sector market for tenants seeking to rent;
- launch of SG Homes, the Councils Social Lettings Agency.

Welfare reform

There are many issues that could impact on homelessness. The main concern is the number of households on housing benefit who have a gap between housing allowance and actual rent. Other concerns are the impact of the benefit cap and implementation of universal credit. The roll-out of the benefit cap has now started and will be completed by September 2013. The national roll-out of universal credit is expected from October 2013.

Localism Act 2011

The main measure of interest is the power conferred to the Council to discharge a homelessness duty through an offer of private rented sector accommodation. There are also options to amend the re-housing policy arising separately from the 2012 Statutory Code of Guidance on Housing Allocations. During 2013/14, the Council will be considering what use it wishes to make of these options and any impact on lettings, for example on homeless households or those threatened with homelessness. Any changes to the re-housing policy will not however increase the overall number of lettings, rather than consider what priorities the Council wishes to direct lettings to. The social housing sector will not meet housing need.

Private Rented Sector

The 2012 Private Sector Stock condition survey established that the PRS was now the second biggest form of tenure (13%) in South Glos and had doubled in the last 10 years. At the same time, the market has become more competitive as the main growth has been fuelled by younger households (under 35's) who are unable to access owner occupation.

SG Homes

The Council launched its social lettings agency in 2011. This expands the range of services to landlords through offering a chargeable management service alongside the existing tenant introduction.

A new Homelessness Review and Strategy is required to ensure that the Council's homelessness strategy is fit for purpose and meets these challenges.

1.6 Progress to date

Research to develop the new Strategy was started early in 2013. The progress to date has included:

- an assessment of the success in delivering the current Strategy;
- the identification of needs, gaps and issues through an analysis of data sources;
- a thorough self assessment using diagnostic tools and peer review;
- recommendations arising from audits, benchmarking and consultation;
- an analysis of resources through the Council and in the local area to provide services to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- a report on initial findings discussed with Lead members in March 2013;
- considering feedback from the recent consultation to develop the Housing Strategy;
- a survey of service users, Members, landlords, agencies and stakeholders.

The Strategy is based upon the findings of the review with the aim of addressing the particular issues of homelessness in South Gloucestershire. In formulating its strategy, the authority will need to consider the necessary

levels of activity required to achieve the aims set out below and the sufficiency of resources available to do this as established by the review.

2. DEVELOPMENTS SINCE LAST TIME

2.1 Main findings of 2009 homelessness review

The main findings from the last homelessness review are as follows:

- increase in homelessness duties in 2008/09, particularly from young people;
- increase in repeat homelessness;
- high level of support needs for those approaching;
- increase in numbers approaching for advice;
- use of TA was continuously reducing, although it was noted SGC as high user of B & B particularly for YP;
- benchmarking – generally SGC as having a lower rate of homelessness than other authorities with the exception of rates of homelessness amongst young people;
- high levels of customer satisfaction.

2.2 Strategy Priorities

The Strategy which was adopted set out a number of priorities which are reproduced below. These were regarded as being over-arching aims and an accompanying set of short term actions to address the immediate concern of homelessness prevention, particularly amongst young people, were put in place.

1) 'Provide access to services for all households that they need to

approach, of which advice and information are a part, and with each service working to a set of quality standards'

2) 'A range of housing options is needed for all households who are threatened with homelessness to access wherever they are, including recognition of the private rented sector as a prevention option'

3) 'The need for prevention and early intervention to target services at those at highest risk and facing an escalation of the likelihood of homelessness'

4) 'Casework that is intended to go beyond accessing advice and information with service users accessing specialists who can provide assertive intervention'

5) 'Access to support for vulnerable households thereby preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness'

6) 'Promoting financial inclusion'

7) 'The development of a dedicated Youth Housing Strategy, with a specific commitment to ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16/17 year olds'

8) 'The reduction of the use of Temporary Accommodation to meet the LAA and statutory targets, and achieve cost savings and settled lifestyles for households affected by homelessness'

9) 'All of the above needs to be delivered through strong partnerships working towards shared goals'

These priorities were intended to provide an over-arching framework for the reduction of homelessness. At the time, there were pressing matters that could not wait for work towards these priorities to take effect, and so a set of

specific measures were also adopted for immediate implementation . These are:

- assertive intervention for 16/17 year olds
- more supported housing for vulnerable young people as an alternative to B & B and as a prevention option, (this will include all 16/17 year olds plus other single vulnerables)
- intensive housing management and support for private sector placements

An action plan translating the priorities into points for implementation was developed to accompany the Strategy. A copy of this is attached at **Appendix 1** and includes a latest assessment of its implementation.

While it can be reasonably considered that good progress has been made against the delivery of these priorities, some are part of an on-going process and should not be regarded as completed. The short term actions were implemented and have had an impact on the more recent pattern of homelessness, particularly amongst young people.

Inevitably, there have been a lot of changes since this review. Some of these are outlined below.

2.3 Housing Market

The most recent strategic housing market assessment (SHMA) for the West of England was completed in 2009. This contained comprehensive housing needs information covering affordability and other indicators of need. A project to renew this assessment has commenced in August 2013 although it wont report until December 2014. Since 2009, information relating to the housing market in the West of England is contained in the more recent stock condition survey.

2.4 West of England Stock Condition Survey

The Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey was completed for the WoE and reported in June 2012. This survey found that the Private Rented Market had grown in South Gloucestershire Council and for the first time, was now the second biggest form of tenure.

The total number of dwellings in South Gloucestershire Council are as follows.

Tenure	No of Dwellings	% of stock
Owner Occupation	85,360	76%
Private Rented	14,230	13%
Social Housing	11,100	10%
Total	111,690	

The report also found that the proportion of private rented homes in the West of England was greater than the national average

2.4.1 Equalities issues in the PRS

Just under 15% of households recorded a disability, and were adaptations to be required, this may make it difficult to access private rented accommodation.

Overall, 17.8% of households who were renting privately describe themselves as being from a BME group with the remaining 82.2% being White British. Of the 17%, nearly 13% describe themselves as 'white other' compared to just over 2% in owner occupied dwellings. This 'white other' category is dominated by households who state a nationality falling with the Eastern European countries.

2.4.2 Affordability

The survey found that the average property value for South Glos is £222,000. This figure was based on the average sale prices in all the area compiled by the Land Registry from April to June 2011. The figure is slightly above the average value across the UK of £228,000 and in line with the average for the South West of England at £222,000.

Average household incomes in the West of England are slightly lower than those in England overall and are distributed quite differently. Lower average incomes will impact on people's ability to fund repairs and improvements, as well as the choices they are able to make about affording good condition housing. Of households, 42.1% have income levels below £20,000 per annum.

Taken together, this means that the average property value is more than x11 that of household income for at least 42% of households living in South Glos.

2.4.3 Benefit Receipt

Overall 105,000 (26%) households are in receipt of one or more benefits. At the national level 21% of private sector households also had at least one resident in receipt of a benefit. The distribution of benefit receipt by tenure shows the highest proportion for the privately rented sector.

The moderately high rate of benefit receipt in the area is largely down to an above average proportion of low income households coupled with a high cost of living. This increases the number of households in receipt of means tested benefits such as Council Tax benefit, Income support and Tax Credits.

This also means that where the households have a gap between rent levels and eligible HB, this places them below their applicable amount.

2.4.4 Property Standards

The survey estimated that 20% of properties in South Glos are non-decent, with half of these recording a category 1 hazard, 21% in need of repair, 2% lacking modern facilities, and 40% with a poor degree of thermal comfort. It is possible for a dwelling to fail non-decency standards for more than one reason.

While this figure is lower than for England as a whole (31.5%), 38.7% of the non decency in South Glos is found in the PRS. The report speculates that non-decency in the private rented sector tends to be highest where there is a large demand coupled with a small social rented sector, as in the case with this area.

Limited affordable housing choice puts pressure on rental housing stock making maintenance more difficult and giving little incentive for landlords to make improvements. Those most affected by non-decency are single people, lone parents and multi-person households. Couples with or without children are least likely to be affected. It is likely also to bring with it higher costs associated with running the home which places added pressure on affordability.

2.5 Strategic Housing Service Review

Strategic housing services within South Gloucestershire Council were the subject of a re-design to deliver the Council's target operating model. This exercise considered the process elements in delivering the services and changes to achieve efficiencies, and was accompanied by a revised personnel structure to achieve the reduction of 6.5 FTE posts across all housing services, 3.4 FTE of which was allocated to HomeChoice teams.

The front-line triage and homelessness services were not affected by the reduction in posts, although the Accommodation team lost 1 x Senior Officer and 1 x Accommodation Assistant. The loss of some capacity has affected the team's ability to focus on procuring new PRS for use for prevention and as an alternative to TA. The new structure came into affect from April 2012.

2.6 Internal Audits of Homelessness Services

The homelessness service has been the subject of two internal audits since the adoption of the Strategy in 2009.

The first was a value for money audit of its homelessness services. The audit focussed on four key value for money objectives as follows:

- To review the efficiencies within the team, and the performance and service benefits to the clients that have been made since the reorganisation of the homelessness Team to form the new Triage Service. The impact on the trend in homeless approaches, preventions, acceptances and repeat homelessness can be measured and VFM can be demonstrated;
- To establish whether the benchmarking completed by VFM Data Limited has been reviewed and action taken where necessary;
- To establish new areas for benchmarking within homelessness that would add value to the team and could be used to drive the new Strategic Housing Network Group;
- To review whether the number and cost of services provided to combat homelessness are reflected in the number of acceptances and preventions. VFM is provided.

The audit reported in April 2011 and generally found a favourable picture of an improving service, achieving efficiencies and in accordance with a set of known service standards. Some recommendations were made in respect of exploring a benchmarking exercise to compare the distribution of resources within homelessness services. This is very difficult to progress, given the variables that exist and the ability of benchmarking neighbours to participate.

A further audit was conducted in the autumn of 2011 and its final report published in February 2012. Copies of both reports are available from the HomeChoice Manager.

The objective of this audit was to review the procedures in place employed to manage and administer the Homeless service in line with the Homelessness Strategy, and in line with matters arising from the recent reviews, including: the value for money review undertaken by Internal Audit in April 2011; the

Homelessness Review (from which emerged the Homelessness Strategy), 2008/2009, and the Audit Commission Review of Housing Services, including Homelessness, in January 2008.

The main finding of the audit is that service examined are of a Reliable Standard, meaning there were very few significant matters arising from the audit, and a number of areas of strength. The methodology adopted by the auditor included considering progress against the main objectives of the Homelessness Strategy.

There were only two main areas of weakness identified at the audit and these related to:

- closer working with the Children and Young People Department in relation to the Youth Housing Strategy, in order to work from a preventative focus in the area of homeless young people, rather than a remedial and reactive focus, and to include the progression of a toolkit, following the Southwark ruling of 2009;
- a consistent methodology for costing the service, due to costs being overstated in CLG submissions in recent years.

2.7 Localism Act 2011

The main measure in the Localism Act in relation to homelessness is found at s.148. Previously, a local housing authority could not discharge its duty to provide accommodation by way of an offer of an Assured Short-hold Tenancy (AST) without the agreement of the applicant. This is known as a 'qualifying offer'.

S.148 amended homelessness legislation by introducing a power enabling Councils to discharge their homelessness duties via a private sector tenancy without the express permission of the tenant. This section came into effect in November 2012.

The Government has set out certain conditions that must be met before a duty can be ended with a private rented sector offer to ensure that any property is suitable and affordable to the household. These conditions also address the quality of accommodation used and the security of tenure granted to a tenant. Certain conditions remain the same, for example, an applicant has a right to a review of the suitability of any offer made.

New conditions were also introduced by s.148, as follows:

- The AST must be for a minimum of 12 months.
- Applicants who lose their AST unintentionally may reapply within two years from the date of acceptance, even if they no longer have a priority need for accommodation, or they secure their own accommodation during this period.
- If the applicant is homeless, the authority has a duty to accommodate the household pending any consideration of intentionality.
- Where the AST was arranged out of area, under s.149, referrals are able to be made back to another authority regardless of any newly acquired local connection (except where they run the risk of domestic violence).

A new Order governing suitability was also issued requiring authorities to take into account the,

- Distance from the authorities own area.
- Disruption (to employment, education, or caring).
- Access to current medical and other support essential to the applicant's wellbeing.
- Proximity and accessibility to local services, amenities and transport.
- The accommodation must also be in a reasonable physical condition, be licensed (if HMO) and have an up to date EPC and gas safety record. The landlord must also be fit and proper.

Officers recommend that the Council makes use of this power and Committee will be asked for its approval of this. Supplementary guidance also encourages any authority using this power to develop a clear policy around its use, and a draft policy will be attached to the report to Committee seeking approval for the use of this power.

The reasons for this recommendation are as follows. Currently a prevention scheme is in place to assist people to access the private rented sector but they can refuse private sector accommodation if they want to wait for social housing. There is a high demand for social housing and any reduction on this means that more accommodation would be available for other households in the highest level of need, including for homelessness prevention.

If the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is an option to discharge duty it may encourage households to be more willing to consider PRS to prevent them from having to go into emergency and temporary accommodation (TA).

However, it won't necessarily increase the pool of properties available for all households in housing need so could impact on properties available for homelessness prevention and TA. Alternatively it could increase the use of the private rented sector for homelessness prevention if used at the beginning of the process and not at the end. The use of the PRS to discharge a duty to accommodate is consistent however with the recognition that the PRS is now the second largest form of tenure in the district and has a valuable role in addressing housing need and reducing homelessness.

2.8 Launch of 'SG Homes'

To support the use of the PRS, this Council has developed many services for private landlords including leasing, providing bonds and loans for rent in advance, as well as other incentives.

To further expand its portfolio, South Gloucestershire Council launched a Social Lettings Agency (SLA) in July 2011 under the brand 'SG Homes'. As

well as the tenancy introduction schemes above, the Agency offers an enhanced service of chargeable property management and support for private sector landlords. It is run on a 'not for profit' basis with any excess income recycled back into funding the service.

Initially the Agency was been set up as a pilot and was targeted to manage 30 chargeable properties in year one and a further 20 properties in year two. The Accommodation Officers operating the scheme have completed professional training to become Members of the Association of Residential Lettings Agents (MARLA).

In the first two years of operating, 221 enquiries have been received from landlords, and there have been 194 tenancy starts through SG Homes, 30 of which are in managed properties and 164 are through the introductory service (formerly known as Tenancy Start Up and Non-Priority Bond)

While it is disappointing that the targeted number properties under SG Homes management has not been achieved, the service nonetheless completes the portfolio of offers to landlords that they would now expect. The scheme has been further enhanced through the offer of a rent guarantee. The aim is to continue to market the scheme as a added value to landlords who prefer not to manage properties themselves. .

2.9 Welfare Reform

The coalition government has introduced a number of measures under the umbrella of welfare reform. The scope and impact of welfare reform on housing and homelessness is considered in Chapter 4 of this review.

2.10 Supported Lodgings

A project was undertaken to research models for a possible supported lodgings scheme to contribute towards meeting the housing and support

needs for care leavers and homeless young people accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

The project reported in May 2012 with a proposal for an outline scheme to be launched on a two year pilot basis and through re-channelling existing resources. The proposal was accepted and at the time of writing, a qualified Social Worker is in the process of being recruited to develop and coordinate the supported lodgings scheme.

3. HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

STATUTORY HOMELESSNESS

3.1 Current Levels Of Homelessness

This section looks in more detail at homelessness in South Gloucestershire arising from applications and approaches to the Council. This includes approaches to triage, all applications made under the Housing Act 1996, other applications where homelessness is evident, either statutory or non-statutory, and approaches by young people to all services.

3.2 Homelessness Decisions

The following table sets out decisions issued in relation to formal homelessness applications.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Accepted	229 (65%)	140 (63%)	173 (67%)	155 (62%)	141 (59%)
Intentionally homeless	21 (6%)	16 (7%)	15 (6%)	26 (10%)	30 (13%)
Non-priority	11 (3%)	15 (7%)	6 (2%)	13 (5%)	13 (5%)
Not homeless	88 (25%)	52 (23%)	59 (23%)	50 (20%)	54 (23%)
Ineligible	3 (1%)	1	4 (1%)	5 (2%)	1 (1%)
TOTAL	352	224	257	249	239

While there was some variance in 2010/11, the general trend across the whole term is a decline in applications and duties to accept. While generally

the proportionate outcomes are steady in the type of decisions being issued, there has been a slight decrease in duties to accept in terms of actual numbers and as a proportion of decisions, and an increase in decisions of intentional homelessness.

3.3 Reason for Homelessness

The following table gives the reasons for homelessness for accepted cases.

Table 3 - Reason for homelessness for those accepted as homeless					
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
Parental eviction	100 (47%)	40 (29%)	41 (24%)	35 (23%)	28 (20%)
Told to leave by friends/relatives	14 (6%)	17 (12%)	18 (10%)	16 (10%)	14 (10%)
Relationship breakdown (non-violent)	14 (6%)	20 (14%)	13 (7%)	17 (11%)	11 (8%)
Relationship breakdown (violent)	24 (10%)	20 (14%)	22 (13%)	25 (16%)	7 (5%)
Hate crime/ other harassment/violence	11 (5%)	4 (3%)	9 (5%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)
Mortgage arrears	4 (2%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (4%)
Rent arrears – RSL	1 (0.5%)	0	0	0	0
Rent arrears – private sector	7 (3%)	1 (1%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)	8 (6%)
Termination of AST – other reasons	33 (14%)	31 (22%)	49 (28%)	42 (27%)	48 (34%)
Leaving institution or care	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	9 (5%)	2 (1%)	7 (5%)
Asylum seeker	7 (3%)	0	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)
Other	12 (5%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	6 (4%)	7 (5%)
emergency	0	0	0	0	1 (1%)

Total	229	140	173	155	141
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In 2009, the main causes of homelessness were related to intra-familial factors, for example parental eviction or to the breakup of a relationship. The latest data shows that homelessness due to these factors is declining both in numbers and as a proportion of duties.

Parental eviction has been the main cause of homelessness in all previous homelessness reviews. The table above shows that it has been overtaken by the loss of private sector accommodation, which has been the main cause of homelessness since 2009. This is concerning when taking into account that the loss of private sector accommodation has increased not just as a proportion but also in actual numbers, albeit marginally, while other reasons have declined in terms of the number of households affected.

The reasons for landlords wishing to have their properties back are mixed across those who wish to sell, those who state that they wish to move back in and those who wish to re-develop or do works on their properties. Only a small number of cases give any indication that market factors could be influencing landlord behaviour, although the pool is too small to draw any meaningful conclusions from. The HomeChoice team have now started to ask landlords more directly for any other reasons that may lie behind their decision to ask their tenants to leave.

It is noticeable that 35% of duties accepted were in the final quarter of 2012/13, representing 49 households. Were this to become the average, this would project the number of accepted households at around 200 per annum.

The reasons for homelessness of those accepted in January- March 2013 were analysed to see if there was any particular reason for the sudden upturn. Most reasons were proportionate to those in earlier in the year, although there was some higher instance of relationship breakdown and a lesser instance in those becoming homeless from the private sector. Of these, only two cases were showing issues of affordability due to changes in benefit rules. The

conclusion therefore is that there is no discernable reason for the sudden increase, although this is an area that merits particular monitoring.

As such, the question arose of whether the increase in homelessness has continued into the new financial year. A comparison of the numbers approaching in April 2012 to April 2013 was made which shows that in April 2013, there were fewer approaches, fewer new applications as homeless made and fewer cases outstanding. It is not expected therefore that the sudden surge will continue and it seems that the reason for the increase in the quarter January – March 2013 is unexplained.

3.4 Priority Need Categories

The following table sets out the priority need for households where a duty was accepted.

Table 4 – Priority Need for Statutory Homeless					
PN for those accepted as homeless	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
	%	%	%	%	%
1 Child	68 (30%)	41 (29%)	55 (32%)	40 (26%)	42 (30%)
2 Children	32 (14%)	21 (15%)	35 (20%)	34 (22%)	34 (24%)
3 and 3+ children	14 (6%)	15 (11%)	18 (10%)	24 (15%)	14 (10%)
Pregnant	56 (24%)	14 (10%)	20 (12%)	19 (12%)	14 (10%)
Sub Total (families)	170 (74%)	91 (65%)	128 (74%)	117 (75%)	104 (74%)
Old age	1 (0.5%)	2 (1.5%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (1%)	1 (1%)
Physical disability	8 (3%)	9 (6%)	12 (7%)	9 (6%)	12 (9%)
Mental ill health / learning difficulty	16 (6%)	19 (14%)	18 (10%)	16 (10%)	16 (11%)

Vulnerable young person	31 (14%)	12 (9%)	7 (4%)	8 (5%)	6 (4%)
Care leaver	0	5 (4%)	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	0
drugs	0	0	0		1 (1%)
DV	2 (1%)	1 (1%)	0	2 (1.5%)	0
Other*	1 (0.5%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	0	0
Emergency	0	0	0	0	1 (1%)
Asylum seeker	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal (single people/ couples with no children)	59 (26%)	49 (35%)	45 (26%)	38 (25%)	37 (26%)
TOTAL (all households)	229	140	173	155	141

The proportion of duties accepted towards families with children, the size of those families and with single people has remained generally steady and there are no trends emerging.

3.5 Secondary Support Needs

The following table records any secondary support needs for households accepted as homeless. This is in addition to their primary priority need category.

Reason	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Domestic Violence	10	8	1
Mental ill health / learning difficulty	2	5	5
Alcohol dependency	0	0	1
Physical disability	1	1	3

Violence	5	0	1
Vulnerable young person	6	3	0
Pregnant	1	2	2
Children	1	1	1
Old age	1	1	0
In custody/remand	0	0	1
Served in HM forces	0	0	1
Asylum seeker	0	0	1
All other	3	1	0
% of cases accepted recording a secondary need	17%	14%	12%

It is a requirement of the recording system that information regarding any secondary support needs is to be noted, even where there are none.

The proportion of households recording secondary needs has dropped steadily in the last three years. This could be related to the emergence of loss of private sector accommodation as the main reason for homelessness, compared to parental eviction or relationship breakdown which are likely to be more traumatising.

3.6 Duties accepted from those in a BOME Category

Homeless applicants are asked to identify their ethnicity according to the categories as set out in the statutory P1E return, available on the Communities website. The P1E uses broad categories which are summarised further in the table below in relation to South Gloucestershire Council decisions:

	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
BME*	12	6.9%	7	4.5%	6	4.2%
White other	3	1.7%	5	3.2%	6	4.2%

Total	15	8.6%	12	7.7%	12	8.5%
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* includes Black, Asian, Mixed and Chinese people

The Housing Strategy 2013 identifies that the population of South Gloucestershire includes 5.0% from black and minority ethnic groups and 2.5% from White Other sub-group, which includes people of eastern European origin. .

It would typically be expected that those from minority groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness, as well as poor housing conditions and overcrowded accommodation. ¹ The reasons for this are not well understood, although reports have identified that all ethnic minority communities experience social exclusion, poverty and discrimination which are major factors in reducing housing options.

The table above does not show that this is the case for South Glos, with people from black and other minority ethnic groups being marginally under-represented in the last two years. This underlines the importance of ensuring that information continues to be available to all Groups, and that access to housing support and other council services are provided, and that are culturally sensitive.

Agencies representing and working with BOME groups were surveyed as part of this review. The feedback and findings from their responses are incorporated in this review and may give an indication as to whether barriers are present.

3.7 Repeat Homelessness

Three of the applications accepted during 2012/13 were repeat cases. This means that there are no particular concerns around tenancy breakdown and again, as with secondary support needs, is likely to be related to homelessness from the private sector rather than other causes.

¹ www.homelesspages.org.uk

3.8 Intentionality

The number of cases found to be intentionally homeless has increased in actual numbers. To identify if there may be a pattern emerging, the actual reasons for this determination were looked at for the 30 decisions issued in 2012/13 and it was found that there are no factors or common thread that would raise any particular concerns.

Following any finding of intentional homelessness, the Council nonetheless has a duty to offer advice and assistance to any household to help them access suitable accommodation. In some cases, this has included offering financial assistance through a deposit bond and/or loan for rent in advance.

3.9 Non Statutory Homeless

Aside from those found to be intentionally homeless, 13 applicants were found to be homeless but not to have a priority need for accommodation. Of these ten were single men, two were single women, and one couple.

The cases notes were looked at to establish, where known, what their circumstances were now. Seven were identified as having found alternative accommodation, including supported housing, two were living with parents, and there was no information available for four. The case notes record that where appropriate, applications for supported accommodation were made and several remained on the housing register and were bidding.

3.10 Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention

The Council has a duty to ensure that housing advice is available to anyone in the district. This is delivered directly by the Council as well as through a contracted provider, currently Orchard and Shipman.

The HomeChoice officers operate a drop-in triage service from 9.00am – 3.00pm Monday to Friday at the Civic Centre. This service offers instant advice and determines what further action or referrals, if any, are needed.

The service offered by Orchard and Shipman is targeted at private sector tenants. They run surgeries around the district and operate a telephone advice line.

Information regarding approaches for housing advice and homelessness prevention are recorded by HomeChoice and Orchard and Shipman and the most recent figures are given in the table below.

	2011/12	2012/13
HC	2084	1958
O & S	580	611
Total	2664	2569

There is a surprising decrease in the numbers coming forward for housing advice, however there are signs that those seeking advice from the private rented sector is increasing and those from other forms of tenure declining. . This is an area for particular attention if, as expected, affordability is a growing issue.

3.11 Reasons for Approach

An analysis was conducted of all households approaching the triage service in January 2013, which was a particularly busy month. Of 162 individual cases, 21% were private sector tenants and a reasonable proportion reported problems with affordability of rent.

Reason	No.
AST	39
Parents	26
Family/Friends	17
Relationship	27

Breakdown	
DV	6
Eviction from supported or perm tenancy	5
Single non priority	31
Harassment	3
Hospital	2
Mortgage arrears	2
Other	4
	162

The table shows a mixed picture. The main reasons for seeking advice for families are represented in roughly the same proportions as for accepted cases. What is noticeable is the number of approaches from single people who have no priority need for assistance. The options for them are limited. Where they are aged over 25, there is one supported accommodation scheme within the district that they can be considered for (where they have support needs in addition to being homeless). Otherwise, there is some access to non-priority bond schemes, although historically the take up of this is very low.

It is recommended that the Council review its services for this group. For most, particularly those within the shared accommodation rate of the local housing allowance, the only accommodation that is available is a room within a shared house. Where these fall under the Housing in Multiple Occupation criteria the landlords have a requirement for them to be licensed. Where landlords find the management of these properties problematic, the Council could look at working with partners to lease and manage the accommodation for them.

3.12 Prevention breakdown

The preventions reported in the table below accord with the definition as given by Communities in their guidance on the completion of the quarterly statutory

return known as the P1E. This is in relation to outcomes recorded by the HomeChoice team and Orchard and Shipman.

Table 9 - Total Preventions with Reasons*		
	2011/12	2012/13
Household could remain		
Mediation	0	0
Conciliation	6	4
Financial payment from homelessness fund	1	1
Debt advice	2	2
Resolution of HB problems	8	10
Resolution of Rent/Service charge arrears	8	11
Sanctuary scheme	0	0
Crisis intervention – emergency support	0	11
Negotiation/advocacy to remain on PRS	22	24
Other assistance to remain in PRS	9	8
Mortgage arrears / rescue	12	7
Other	0	0
Household helped to move		0
Into hostel/HMO	1	5
TSU	80	92
Accommodation through friends /relatives	3	1
Supported accommodation	3	16
Social housing offer	10	15
Low cost home ownership	0	0
Other	2	0
Total	166	207

*as per P1E report

There is a wider welfare advice partnership offering services commissioned by South Gloucestershire Council which will also affect on preventing homelessness. In addition, the Council has in place a team of officers within the Benefits service which is identifying and offering have casework support to

private sector households facing a gap between their local housing allowance rate and actual rent.

The outcomes achieved by these services are not included in the preventions achieved as reported. For the Council to have a complete picture of whether its resources are being used to the full, it is recommended that the activities related to homeless prevention of all its advice-related commissioned services are included where appropriate.

3.13 Use of Temporary Accommodation

The total number of households in temporary accommodation has increased in South Glos from March 2012 to March 2013. Of the other WoE authorities, both BCC and BaNES also report an increase in TA occupancy and in B & B placements. The following table shows the end of year snapshot for each of the local authorities.

	31.3.2009		31.3.2010		31.3.2011		31.3.2012		31.3.2013
	Total	N/a	Total	Per 1k local pop	Total	Per 1k local pop	Total	Per 1k local pop	total
BANES	31	-	19	0.3	27	0.36	28	0.38	31
BCC	274	-	211	1.2	159	0.86	160	0.87	181
NS	77	-	48	0.6	55	0.62	67	0.75	56
SGC	222	-	90	0.9	82	0.77	69	0.64	85
All England		-		2.4		2.2		2.32	

The following table shows a breakdown of the type of temporary accommodation in use by South Gloucestershire Council in the last four years:

Type	31.3.10	31.3.11	31.3.12	31.3.2013

B&B /Annexe	26	25	37	56
Hostel	2	3	0	0
Refuge	1	1	0	0
Private Sector Lease	15	17	10	11
DGS	9	8	0	4
RSL stock inc short-life and supported	31	26	21	12
Homeless at Home	1	0	0	2
Other	6	2	1	0
Total at year end	90	82	69	85

The increase in the use of TA, including B &B, is concerning although it is associated with the surge in homelessness and duties accepted during January - March 2013, which also partly explains the doubling in the use of B & B. Until this last quarter, steady progress was being made in TA reduction with the following being the end of quarter figures earlier in the year:

	Total	B & B
June 2012	67	28
Sept 2012	61	29
Dec 2012	58	27

The breakdown in TA type indicates that the reduction in permanent RSL stock used as short-life has also had a direct impact on increasing B & B. Merlin Housing Society are the main source of this type of accommodation and have indicated in a recent report describing their relationship with the Council that they intend to look at a protocol in relation to the availability of this accommodation, and this will be raised with other landlords through the partnership.

Other factors contributing to the increase in TA and use of B & B is the reduction in move-on accommodation.

3.14 Discharge of Duty from Temporary Accommodation

Where a duty to accommodate a homeless household is accepted, this duty can only be discharged under the circumstances outlined in S.193, Part VII, HA 1996. This section looks at the reasons for duty ending in the last two years, as set out below.

	2011/12	2012/13
Part VI offer	131	107
IH from TA	9	3
Qual Offer of PRS	5	6
Vol left	18	10
Ineligible	2	0
	165	126

The table shows that there were 24 fewer permanent tenancy starts for homeless households in the last year than the previous, and also that the numbers voluntarily leaving temporary accommodation (having found their own housing) has also reduced. This reduction in opportunities to discharge duty through an offer of permanent social housing has contributed to the increase in TA.

3.15 Length of stay

The length of stay of those in temporary accommodation is reasonably steady. For the last year, the relatively small number of households in occupancy for more than 12 months can be attributed to the use of direct offers for those who have not been successful in bidding within six months.

	2011/12	2012/13
< 6 months	120	92
6-12 months	32	28
1-2 years	11	4
2-3 years	2	2
	165	126

3.16 Access to move on

It is acknowledged that amendments to the re-housing policy has improved relative access to move on accommodation for homeless households compared to other applicant types, particularly the provision for a direct offer. While this has assisted in reducing the length of stay in temporary accommodation, the number of properties available to let has seen a general decline since the start of the recession while lettings to homeless households have remained steady as a percentage.

Previously, a local housing authority which accepted a full housing duty towards a homeless applicant under Part VII could not discharge this duty by way of an offer of an AST without the agreement of the applicant. This is known as a ‘qualifying offer’.

With effect from November 2012 an amendment to S.193 arising from the Localism Act 2011 s.148 enables the housing authority to add an offer of an AST in the private sector without the agreement of the applicant to the grounds on which it can now also discharge a homelessness duty.

This Council has promoted, encouraged and invested in the use of private rented sector accommodation to prevent homelessness. It also has a high proportion of private rented sector accommodation in use as temporary accommodation for homeless households prior to an offer of permanent social housing. We have also promoted discharge of duty through a qualifying offer

where possible. It is a logical extension therefore to use the new power to discharge duty into the private rented sector.

The use of the new power to discharge duty into the private rented sector would place homeless households on a level playing field with other applicants and mean that more properties would be available to let to other households in the highest band.²

To promote further links with private rented sector landlords and make more properties available to let, a pilot is currently running to operate a social lettings agency through the Accommodation Team.

Officers are in support of using the power to discharge a homelessness duty into the Private Rented Sector. Supplementary Guidance issued in November 2012 requires that any Council intending to adopt this power should develop a clear policy around its use. To this end, a report is due to be presented to Committee seeking approval to use the new power, to which a draft policy has been drawn up.

3.17 Youth Homelessness

The Youth Housing Strategy was adopted in February 2010. It arose as a main priority of the Homelessness Review and Strategy 2009 which found that homelessness amongst young people was a serious issue in the district and that South Gloucestershire Council had been identified as a high user of B & B for 16/17 year olds.

Approaches as homeless from all teenagers aged 16+ to the Council were collated, double counting eliminated and a net figure produced. This included those approaching HomeChoice triage, the single access service for applications for short-term supported accommodation, and the CYP duty teams (for 16/17 year olds). A breakdown of the collated figure is presented in the following table:-

² figures available if requested.

	16/17	18/19
Single female	56	20
Single male	63	48
Single Pregnant	7	11
Lone Parent	6	6
Couple	4	5
Couple pregnant or plus one	3	1
Total	139	91

In some instances, a young person had approached more than once. Where this has happened within a short period of time and/or with the same set of circumstances, this is regarded as a continuation of the same episode of homelessness.

An exercise to identify any repeat approaches over a longer period of time has been conducted and this involved analysing all approaches to the Single Access Service for those aged between 16-24 during January – March 2013. A total of 499 applications for services were received for housing support services during these months, out of which 27 were repeat cases, of whom six were approaching for the third time. The following table shows a breakdown of these cases by age at time of first approach and by household type.

	16/17	18/19	20/24
SF	5	6	3
SM	3	2	2
SF + 1	0	1	3
SM + 1	0	0	1
Co + 2	0	0	1
	8	9	10

While it is concerning for those who are still not in settled situations, it is reassuring that the overall number of repeat cases is low. What this does indicate though is that the net number of young people experiencing housing problems including facing homelessness continues to be high and it is recommended that the Youth Housing Strategy be renewed.

It was reported previously that approaches to the Council for 16/17 year olds were 105 in 2010 and 98 in 2011. Table x shows an increase in the numbers approaching in 2012. The underlying reasons for this are unknown a Youth Housing Strategy would look at any common factors and the opportunity for prevention activity. The numbers in themselves would be worrying if it were not for the following.

Previously, a number of cases went out of contact and information on outcomes was quite difficult to obtain. A careful examination of each case in Table 16 was completed in February 2013 to establish the work that was actually done and the outcomes achieved, and the findings show a less concerning picture than the numbers approaching suggest. The outcomes are described in the table below:-

	Single 16/17	16/17 TP	16/17 couples	Single 18/19	18/19 TP	18/19 couples
Placed, of whom	61	8	3	41	10	2
- Part VII	8	0	2	1	3	0
- S.20 ³	13	1	0	0	0	0
- CL ⁴	13	0	0	12	1	0
- Prevention	27	7	1	28	6	2
No further action, (inc returned home, referred	55	7	1	25	7	3

³ Includes 3 provided with foster care

⁴ Includes care leavers provided with accommodation within the short-term supported housing schemes

out, other family)						
Custody	1					
Waiting	2	1	0	2	1	0
Total	119	16	4	68	18	5

A glossary of terms in the above table is as follows:

- 'Part VII' refers to placements made under a Homelessness Act duty;
- 'S.20' refers to placements made under a Children Act duty for homeless young people falling within the meaning of the Southwark judgement;
- 'CL' refers to young people approaching the Council as homeless whose priority need is conferred through their status as care leavers;
- 'prevention' refers to placements in supported accommodation made prior to actual homelessness;
- 'TP' refers to teenagers who are pregnant;
- 'no further action' refers to cases where, having examined the case notes, a solution was found for the young person that did not require an accommodation placement through this Council.

While there is always more to do, this represents a much more positive picture than previously. The re-commissioning of Charles England House into a dedicated supported housing scheme for young people has undoubtedly had an impact on homelessness prevention for young people, including using the accommodation to offer respite for families for a 'cooling off' period or until other accommodation is available.

3.18 Use of B & B

One area with no room for complacency is the continuing use of B & B for 16/17 year olds. Table 18 below shows the number of admissions and end of the month snapshot for B & B in the current year so far. The figures reflect a situation that is still variable.

Table 18 - Admissions to B & B 16 / 17 year olds 2012/13											
		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
New Admissions	Part VII	2	2	1	2	2	0	4	0	0	1
	S.20	1	2	4	5	2	0	1	0	0	0
End of month snapshot	Part VII	1	3	1	3	1	1	4	0	0	0
	S.20	1	2	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	1

The average length of stay for placements made in the last three months of 2012 was 41 days, although each case in B & B will have its own individual factors that affect how long they remain there.

The original specification for the re-commissioned CEH contained provision for an emergency bed-space to be used as an alternative to B & B. This didn't work particularly well for many reasons and the accommodation that had been set aside for this use was absorbed back into the main scheme.

It will be considered if an alternative could be viable in one of the other schemes when the contracts for short term supported housing are re-commissioned.

3.19 Non Statutory Homeless

An analysis has been conducted of applications on the Housing Register for those who are assessed as non-statutory homeless and therefore awarded a Band B.

The total number of live applications at 21 May 2013 was 6766. The number of live non-statutory homeless applications was 41. This included those with a local connection to South Gloucestershire Council, who had no other

circumstances that would confer a higher banding, and who were not deemed to be intentionally homeless and therefore considered elsewhere.

Of these, 15 were NFA, 21 living with family or friends, and 5 in some form of unsettled accommodation with no rights to occupy. 10 were aged under 25, 14 between 25-34, 16 aged 35-60 and 1 above aged 60. 13 were working full time and 1 part-time, 4 were students and the remainder, 23, unemployed, with 2 recording inability to work through disability. 10 single people recorded support needs, and 4 had children.

4. WELFARE REFORM – SCOPE AND IMPACT

4.1 Main Measures

On 8th March 2012 the Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent. The Act introduces a wide range of reforms to the benefits and tax credit system.

The main elements of the Act are:

- Changes to Housing Benefit including the Local Housing Allowance for Private Rented Sector Tenants and introducing a size criteria for social housing tenants
- Introducing an overall cap on benefit entitlement
- The introduction of Universal Credit to provide a single streamlined payment
- Reforms to Disability Living Allowance, through the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment
- Reform of the Social Fund system by giving greater responsibility to local authorities
- Reforming Employment and Support Allowance
- Introducing a local Council Tax Support Scheme .

Changes to the calculation of housing benefit entitlement for private sector tenants started in April 2011, and 2013 will see further changes with the implementation of the remaining provisions of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. These changes altogether have affected tenants, both private and social, as an increasing number experience a shortfall between their rent and benefit entitlement.

These changes in relation to housing benefit entitlement are described in more detail from here. Other measures that have an impact are discussed after.

4.2 Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is a way of working out Housing Benefit for people who rent from a private landlord.

Changes to LHA were introduced in April 2011 and the main changes are as follows:

- LHA rate reduced from 50% average market rent to 30%
- Maximum rooms limited to 4
- Shared Accommodation Rate was extended for single occupants with no children from 25 year olds to those under 35
- LHA rates will be set annually from April 2013

The PRS is now the second biggest form of tenure in SGC (13%) outstripping social housing (10%) and so there is likely to be an impact on housing needs as described.

At February 2013, there were a total of 3060 LHA claims in South Gloucestershire Council, which represents around 30% of total private rented accommodation. A snapshot of the same month shows gives a breakdown of the number of claims where liability exceeded the LHA rate by bedroom size;

Table 19 – LHA claims with shortfall	
Household size	No affected
Shared room	426
1 bed	594
2 bed	516
3 bed	212
4 bed	314
Total	1779

Approaches as homeless and/or for housing advice from private rented sector tenants is growing. While the main impact on arrears is not being seen by the Council yet, national research shows that it is very reasonable to anticipate

that this will snowball⁵ and it is reasonable to assume that this is related to LHA falling behind market rents in some areas. Housing Options colleagues in the West of England also share this view.

There is already an impact on the procurement of private sector accommodation for use as temporary accommodation and homelessness prevention where the Council requires rent to be set at LHA levels. Many landlords state they are able to achieve rents above the LHA and the Council has developed additional services to offer sound business reasons for landlords to work with us to compensate for a lower rent level.

The shortfall of HB to rent largely impacts on 1- and 2- bed households in terms of numbers, which is the same area of largest impact for social tenants affected by under-occupation deductions and is also the biggest group of accepted homeless duties. However, combined with the impact of the benefits cap, it is larger households who are likely to find it more difficult to find suitably sized accommodation within benefit levels. There is likely to be an increase in over-crowding if larger families are unable to find accommodation at an LHA rate suitable for their household size and are forced to continue to share.

Should arrears build up for those experiencing a shortfall, there is a possibility that there could be an increase in landlords unable to meet buy-to-let mortgage commitments. Likewise, there could be a decrease in standards if landlords have less income to do repairs due to bad debts or charging lower rents.

The HomeChoice Officers have started gathering more information when clients come in for advice and asking additional questions to landlords to see if there are underlying reasons for them wishing to have their property back that could relate to the market and issues of affordability. This information will assist with our prevention work and help us to monitor the impact of market changes in relation to LHA.

⁵ 'Monitoring the impact of changes to the Local Housing Allowance system of housing benefit: Summary of early findings' by Christina Beatty et al (DWP Research Report, No 798)

The Council has responded to the difficulties faced by LHA claimants by establishing a team of three officers based in the Revenues and Benefits service and resourced through a combination of temporary funding from DWP and from homelessness grant. This team has contacted all LHA tenants showing a shortfall to give information to those with a shortfall of £15 per week or less and offering an appointment or visit for those with more than this amount or who are impacted on more than one welfare reform measure. Until the end of July 2013, 316 claimants have been seen, and advice and information given over a range of areas including: welfare benefits; debt, budgeting and financial management; housing; energy efficiency; and employment. The LHA Officers have signposted to other organisations where more specialist advice is needed.

Those who were contacted were asked to comment on whether they found the information and advice given to be useful and 88% of those who responded confirmed that it was. The team has broadened their remit out to include working with those affected by the Benefit Cap.

4.3 Social tenants under-occupancy deductions

From April 2013, social housing tenants who are deemed to be under-occupying, and therefore over-accommodated, are subject to a deduction in the amount of housing benefit they receive. A deduction from eligible rent is made of 14% for those who have one spare bedroom and 25% for those who have two or more spare rooms. At March 2013, 923 households identified as potentially affected comprising 170 who are under-occupying by 2 or more bedroom and 753 by 1. This equalled an annual loss of benefit totalling £878,061.74. Should those impacted not be able to meet the difference and seek to move, almost all will be seeking to downsize to 1 and 2 bed accommodation.

Most social landlords have established their own teams focusing on welfare reform and specifically under-occupation, and have developed action plans.

Feedback so far is that most tenants are assuming that they will be able to meet the shortfall, although many social landlords have reported an increase in those coming forward seeking a transfer following the implementation of the deduction. Applications for DHP (discretionary housing payment) have also markedly increased since the deduction took affect. This may impact on DHP available to be used for other cases.

Many avenues for re-housing are being explored by landlords however it is reasonable for them to use their own nominations quota to downsize tenants. This will have an impact on the number of properties available to rent through choice based lettings (CBL) which in turn will impact on the opportunities to prevent homelessness through an offer of permanent housing and will also reduce the number of properties that become available as move-on for homeless households in temporary accommodation. This could increase the use of TA and the length of stay.

However, even the current availability of permanent housing will not meet the need for all tenants who may need to downsize. For instance, the total number of general needs 1- and 2- bed properties available to let through CBL in April – Sept 2012 was 213, as compared with 900+ existing tenants who could be seeking this size of accommodation. Where a tenant recognises that they need to move, the most realistic option is likely to be a move to private rented sector accommodation and this could mean greater competition for 1 and 2 bed PRS accommodation at LHA rents.

We are seeking to establish a protocol in the West of England that landlords will not seek possession on arrears due to welfare reform, however each organisation will have their own policy and regardless, any loss of income will result in a reduction of resources for landlords in other areas, be they housing management, repairs and maintenance, tackling ASB or new development.

4.4 Benefit cap

The March 2013 list identified 97 SGC households who will be affected

- 9% under £10 per week cap
- 21% over £100 per week
- 46% in private rented sector
- 54% in social rented sector

The benefit cap is now live in South Glos and the roll out will be completed by end of September 2013. It is being implemented through the deduction from housing benefit entitlement. The households affected are likely to face particular difficulties in meeting the gap.

Where a household is accommodated in TA including B & B, the Council will have to cover any shortfall between the cap limit and accommodation charges.

An analysis has been completed of this based on households in occupancy on a particular night. This is considered in Chapter 5 'Resources for Homelessness' under the Temporary Accommodation section.

4.5 Universal credit

Later in the year, the first claimants will begin to receive universal credit and many tenants who are accustomed to having their benefit payments in different streams as well as housing benefit paid directly to their landlord, will need support and advice to help them to manage their money and ensure that they do not fall into arrears.

The Council has established the Universal Credit Local Support Service Framework sub-group to address the issues facing the Council and its customers, including assisting with on-line applications and with budgeting skills needed to manage with a single monthly payment.

4.6 Cap on Benefit Increases

A three year cap of 1% effective from April 2013 has been announced. Many people who are of working age and receive benefits will be affected. The table below identifies the average loss of weekly income for those affected. This takes them the equivalent below their applicable amount.

Table 20 – households affected by cap on benefit uplift	
Household type	Ave change
Couple with children	-£3
Single with children	-£5
Couple without children	-£3
Single without children	-£2
Couple one working age/one pension age	-£2

4.7 Local Council Tax Support Scheme

On 31 March 2013 council tax benefit was abolished. Every Council is now required to devise its own local scheme. In South Glos, the LCTS Scheme is no longer treated as a Benefit but as a Council Tax discount and there has been over a 15% reduction in grant funding for awards. This means that a new scheme either has to award less, cost less or be funded by the LA. The Council is currently modelling options for 2014/15.

4.8 Personal Independence Payments (PiP)

PiP replaces Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for eligible people aged 16 to 64 for all new claims from June 2013, and all existing claimants will be reassessed through to 2017. Currently, there are 5540 adults of working age in South Gloucestershire receiving DLA. The criteria has changed and where entitlement is lost following reassessment this may impact on a household who relies on DLA to meet essential expenditure which could impact on any ability to top up any shortfall in rent.

4.9 Getting the message out

A Welfare Reform Working Group (WRWG) was established in South Gloucestershire in July 2012. It worked to an action plan which largely focuses on organising case work for those affected and also on advertising the changes. All households affected by benefits changes have been directly contacted by the Council or DWP or their landlord, or by all three.

A series of road-shows were held around the district in April and May 2013 to publicize the changes. Those who attended were asked to identify their top three financial concerns arising from benefit changes. In total, 64 completed the questionnaire. Of those, the majority (42) identified paying rent as their main concern, 16 identified paying council tax as their second concern and 5 cited debt as their third. Others financial concerns were expressed around paying for utilities, food and health related costs.

In February this year DWP published the Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework (LSSF). This set out in outline how DWP intended that local authorities would take the main role in ensuring that support was in place for claimants who need additional help when Universal Credit replaces various benefits and credits. The roll-out timetable is set to deliver the implementation of universal credit by 2017. The main task of the WRWG was to put in place a case-work framework for those affected by the changes to the main benefits and this had largely been completed by early summer 2013. It was felt that the purpose of the WRWG would more usefully be directed to the requirement of delivering the Local Support Framework and so the Group was re-constituted from July 2013 with this as its main purpose.

4.10 Universal Credit

Universal credit combines six benefits into one single payment made monthly. It is currently being piloted in 13 local authority areas. It was announced in July 2013 that the LA led pilots will be extended by three months to December 2013 to allow for further testing.

In July 2013, DWP published a paper 'Local Authority Led Pilots: A summary of early learning from the pilots'⁶. The paper highlighted the key learning from the pilots and drawing on the evidence supplied by the pilots themselves and as shared within the UC Programme. A summary of the findings has been developed by 'Raise', a representative body for voluntary and community organisations, which show that there is still some amount of preparation needed before the programme can be rolled out.⁷

What is worrying are reports of increases in rent arrears from RSL's in the pilot areas as cited by 'Inside Housing' which found that 40% of social housing tenants in LB of Southwark struggled to adapt to monthly budgets and that a sizeable number of tenants who started the pilots with no arrears had accrued an average of £180 arrears at the end of the pilot in their area.⁸

4.11 Summary of Welfare Reform

Not all measures will affect all claimants, It is reasonable, though, to conclude that most benefit claimants will experience problems with affording rent and other essentials as benefits are either reduced in real terms or fail to keep up with rising rents and prices.

Of those who have been contacted by the welfare reform teams in the housing associations and by the Councils LHA transitions officers, the three main measures that households are taking to pay meet the gap between rent and benefit are:

- economise
- top up from other benefits
- borrow from family and friends

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225068/rrep848.pdf

⁷ <http://www.raise-networks.org.uk/07/2013/early-learning-from-universal-credit-pilot-areas/#>

⁸ <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/tenancies/rent-arrears-to-go-up-%C2%A3180-under-universal-credit/6526711.article>

While it is not acceptable for households to fail to pay their rent whatever their reason, it can be expected that more will struggle to pay as the gap between household incomes and outgoings increases. National research has identified that two-fifths of LHA claimants reported that they found it difficult to afford the rent and 10% reported actually being in arrears.

This research is very worrying when it is considered that social housing will in no way meet any demand for those approaching HomeChoice with a housing need. Housing affordability will be an increasing problem where there are 3,000+ households whose rent is not met through benefits and who have to top up from other income. It would be prudent to expect arrears to rise and homelessness will follow.

The big concern will be ensuring that homelessness is prevented and that customers receive the best advice and support.

5. RESOURCES FOR HOMELESSNESS

This chapter sets out the resources available to the authority for services to homeless households, including services within the Council, other public bodies, commissioned services and any other organisations, for examples Registered Providers.

5.1 HomeChoice Service

The HomeChoice service consists of four 'strands':

- Housing advice and homelessness
- Housing Register and Lettings
- Accommodation Team
- specialist liaison officers

5.2 Housing Advice and Homelessness

The Housing Advice and Homelessness team consists of 5 full-time HomeChoice Officers, and 1 full-time Senior Officer (reporting to the HC Team Leader) who work solely on advice, prevention and assessment. This team operates a walk-in triage service, provides more intensive, case-work based housing advice, and assesses homelessness applications. Home visits are conducted where needed.

5.2.1 HomeChoice Triage –

Triage runs daily until 3pm with 2 x HomeChoice Officers on duty. Each customer is seen on the same day for a quick assessment of their main circumstances and a follow up plan devised after that. Most approaches are in person, however the duty officers also complete any call-backs to those who have phoned or emailed and are unable to attend the Civic Centre.

5.2.2 Case-work based housing advice –

Where customers need more advice and intervention, the HomeChoice Officers offer more intensive case-work based assistance and work with them to either overcome difficulties where they are or help them move to a suitable alternative.

Contact length depends on the nature and complexity of the issues the customer is facing. Referrals to more specialist advice, for instance around budgeting or debt, and housing related support, are made at this time.

(An approximate breakdown taken from an estimate of time spent and number of contacts from case file notes is given below.)

5.2.3 Homelessness Assessment

Any customer approaching for housing advice is informed of their right to apply as homeless. HomeChoice Officers receive and assess each application based on the statutory criteria, and a formal decision letter issued. Applicants are entitled to a statutory review of any decision they disagree with.

5.3 Housing Register and Lettings

The Housing Register and Lettings team consists of 2 x Housing Register Assistants, 1 x Housing Register and Lettings Assistant and 1 x Senior Lettings Officer (reporting to the HC Team Leader). All posts are full-time.

This team receives and assesses applications to the housing register, and refer onto the HomeChoice Officers any instances where an applicant has described circumstances that suggest that they are at risk of homelessness or actually homeless. The housing register team otherwise verify and assess all other applications to the housing register, including seeking information from other professionals and services.

In some instances, where circumstances would confer a Band A, i.e. an equivalent priority to an applicant who has a homeless duty accepted, Officers

ensure that the application is banded and the applicant aware of the bidding process in order that they may bid successfully to prevent homelessness.

The team also operate the Choice Based Lettings scheme. The lettings service also identifies those homeless households who have not been able to bid successfully within 6 months and arranges for direct offers of social housing to be made as per the re-housing policy.

5.4 Accommodation Team

The Accommodation Team consists of 0.6 FTE Team Leader, 3.5 FTE Accommodation Officers, 2 x Accommodation Assistants, 1 x Supported Housing Access Co-ordinator and 0.5 x Supported Housing Access Assistant.

The Accommodation Team is responsible for accessing accommodation, other than permanent social housing, when it is needed. This includes working with private landlords, identifying B & B vacancies for emergency accommodation and operating the single access service to supported housing schemes. In some instances, permanent social housing can be used as temporary accommodation. Merlin is the main landlord to offer this and have indicated their wish to establish a protocol around this.

Self-contained private sector accommodation is made available for homelessness prevention, as temporary accommodation and for move-on where a duty has been accepted.

The Council operates various schemes for private sector landlords, which essentially can be broken down into a tenant introduction service only, a tenancy management service and a leasing scheme. Any property that becomes available for let through the Accommodation Team is inspected by a Private Sector Housing Officer within the Private Sector Housing. This takes up approximately 0.6 FTE.

Bidding by homeless applicants in temporary accommodation is monitored by the delegated Accommodation Officer and those who are not regularly bidding reminded to do so.

5.5 Specialist Liaison Officers

Two posts (1.6 FTE) are based in HomeChoice to provide specialist assistance for adults in receipt of care who have mental health problems and learning difficulties to access independent housing. In respect of adults with learning difficulties, homelessness is rightfully extremely rare and moves are generally planned with the care management team.

There are however a number of approaches to HomeChoice from those who have a level of learning difficulty but who do not qualify for care services although they have an on-going need for some housing related support. The Council could consider what services it is able to develop to meet the needs of this group.

For adults with mental health problems, there is a higher likelihood of crisis that can be accompanied by actual homelessness. The MH Liaison Officer post was established specifically to assist with homelessness amongst those with MH problems, including being ready for discharge but with no address.

Since its inception, the post has been invaluable in assisting with complex cases including those who landlords are initially reluctant to consider, and in training MH professionals access housing services directly.

5.6 Proportion of Resources within HomeChoice for Homelessness

The table below sets out the staffing resources within the HomeChoice service. While it is reasonable to consider that the main focus of the whole service is related to homelessness, the table reflects the proportion of each role that is taken up directly with homelessness matters.

Table 21 – Proportion of Staff Time for Homelessness Matters				
Post	FTE	% time	% FTE	Budget (k)
Manager	0.6	30	0.2	10.8
HC Team Leader	1	75	0.75	33.2
Senior HCO	1	100	1	39.6
HCO's	5	100	5	169
Accommodation TL	0.6	80	0.5	22
Accommodation Officers	3.5	80	2.8	86
Accommodation Assistants	2	80	1.6	41
Senior Lettings Officer	1	20	.2	8
HR and Lettings Assistant	1	20	.2	5.2
HR Assistants	2	10	.2	4.5
MH Liaison Officer	1	50	.5	15.5
LD Liaison Officer	0.6	20	.1	3.4
Housing Support Access Co-ordinator	1	75	0.75	30
Housing Support Access Assistant	0.5	75	.3	8.5
HB Assessment Officer	1	100	1	12.4
			15.1 FTE Out of 20.8 (75%)	489.1k

5.7 Temporary Accommodation

In addition to the assessment of homelessness applications, under certain circumstances the Council has a duty to provide emergency and temporary accommodation. Chapter 4 contained information relating to the use of TA.

The costs of providing TA can be broken down into three elements: rent, service charge and support costs (for supported accommodation). Service charges are typically non-eligible and should therefore be paid by the occupant to cover items such as utilities. Of rent, this should be paid by the occupant, although SGC effectively acts as guarantor to landlords through paying rent directly and then collecting it from the occupant (for B & B and leased accommodation) or by providing a bond through the deposit guarantee scheme which can cover rent arrears should the tenancy end.

Where TA is managed by a registered provider in any of the short-term supported accommodation options or as short-life, it is their responsibility to collect all rental charges and take appropriate action should arrears accrue. A dedicated HB Assessor is located within the Accommodation Team to focus specifically on HB applications for those in TA.

5.8 Costs

The table below outlines the cost of provision of emergency and temporary accommodation for 2012/13 where the Council is responsible for under-writing the rental and ineligible service charges only. These figures do not include any commissioned services for support.

Table 22 – Costs of Temporary Accommodation			
Scheme	Spend	Recovery	Net
B & B	616,947	559,895	57,052
PSL	99,341	127,267	(-27,926)
DGS	2,838	2,598	240
	719,126	689,760	29,366

The table above shows an overspend across all temporary accommodation largely due to B & B costs. This is clearly an area to focus on for many reasons, not least of all the impact of the benefit cap.

5.9 Shortfall from benefit cap

As discussed in the previous chapter, where the Council has a duty to provide emergency or temporary accommodation, and the costs of this added to the households personal living allowances are greater than the benefit cap, the responsibility for covering any shortfall will rest with the Council.

An analysis was conducted of all households occupying B & B on the night of 30 July 2013 and the shortfall between housing benefit entitlement following the benefit cap being applied and the actual charges. It was identified that 10 families would be in this category with a total difference of £2993.14 per week. This is the amount that the Council would have cover should this situation remain as one the night of the analysis.

The Accommodation Team has inevitably taken action to ensure that the impacts on budget for the Council are minimised. This includes re-negotiating charges with B & B proprietors and expanding the number of properties within the Private Sector Leasing scheme. The team is also negotiating with Merlin Housing Society at the moment for access to short-life accommodation, including possibly leasing properties or tenanting them on a temp-to-perm basis.

This also highlights the need for other commissioned services to maintain a level of vacancies in supported accommodation by focusing support plans on resettlement and achieving independence, and to work with the Council to support households into other areas

At the time of writing, a report is being prepared for CAH directorate containing a total projection of possible shortfalls between B & B and private sector housing provided as TA where LHA is less than rent. This is unlikely to be available to be contained in this review however it will be taken into account in any finalising of the Homelessness Strategy and Action plan due in April 2014.

5.10 Accommodation for Homelessness Prevention

The main source of accommodation for homelessness prevention is accessed via the Tenancy Start-Up scheme.

5.11 Tenancy Start-Up

The purpose of the scheme is to offer practical advice and financial assistance in some circumstances to households who are homeless and threatened with homelessness who otherwise the Council would have a duty to accommodate.

The scheme still involves households being more actively involved in seeking their own accommodation through, although more frequently the Council is able to help in the search for a property through the network of landlords who approach the Council seeking a tenant.

The Council offers a combination of bonds and loans for deposits and rent in advance. Overall the scheme is intended to be self-funding given that loans should be repaid, although a budget has to be maintained in the event that a number of bonds are called in.

5.12 Households assisted and cost of the scheme

The table below summarises the number of households assisted through the TSU scheme since the scheme began and the costs of the loans for rent in advance and bonds committed for deposits. It is reasonable to assume that a homelessness duty would otherwise have been accepted for the households who opted to go through TSU and that they would therefore have been placed in TA.

Table 23 - Total households assisted through TSU with costs				
Year	Number of preventions	Cost of loans and	Bonds paid out	Repayments received

	through TSU	bonds		
2010/11	63	£69,766	£6,103	£10,675
2011/12	69	£63,574	£6,928	£15,541
2012/13	72	£76,249	£3,222	£25,483
		£209,589	£16,255	£51,700

The total cost showing for the combination of loans and bonds is not necessarily actual budget that is needed in terms of net costs to the Council. Instead the figure represents a combination of loans for rent in advance, which are repayable, and bonds committed for payments to landlords where a tenant leaves and a claim is made by the landlord against the bond amount. Where payment is made, this would be recharged to the former tenant.

It does need to be acknowledged that while in principle the TSU scheme should be self-funding, in practice an amount does need to be accepted for non-payment of loans and a bad-debt provision.

5.13 Administering the TSU scheme

In addition to the cost of the loans, the equivalent of one full time Accommodation Officer is needed to run the scheme, at a cost of c. £30,000 per annum.

The costs need to be offset against the benefits that the scheme brings, as summarised below:

- Increases choice for households by offering an option otherwise unavailable.
- Prevents homelessness.

- Reduces the use of temporary accommodation and contributes towards the statutory target of halving the number of households in temporary accommodation by April 2010 and the more challenging local target of 132 households in temporary accommodation.
- Achieves savings in the cost of the provision of temporary accommodation (once loan repaid) by enabling the Council to give notice on expensive TA schemes, thereby achieving savings
- Reduces the pressure on permanent social housing.

It should also be noted that income from the repayment of loans is going up at an improving rate. This income will be recycled to be used to subsidize the costs of future loans. A question that this raises is to what extent is the total amount lent recoverable? Until 2008/09 all recovery was referred to the Councils exchequer services. During this year, the TSU officer adopted their own recovery procedures as part of operating the service and the increase in the level of recovery shown in table 7.4 shows that the results of this. It is too early to tell at this stage what the realistic level of bad debt provision should be and therefore how far the loans will be able to self-funding.

5.14 SG Homes

The Council launched its Social Lettings Agency in July 2011 under the brand 'SG Homes'. It offers an enhanced service of chargeable management and support for private sector landlords. It is run on a 'not for profit' basis with any excess income recycled back into funding the service. Some initial funding was made available through homelessness grant to start the scheme off. This included preparation of materials, advertising, systems development, and 0.5FTE Private Sector Housing Officer to inspect properties.

Some element of homelessness grant will be available for any one-off non-operational initiatives, for example any extension of the empty homes loans for small works to bring a property back into use.

Initially the Agency had been set up as a two year pilot, with any long term delivery to be considered following the evaluation of the pilot. It was targeted to manage 30 chargeable properties in year one and a further 20 properties in year two, which was very ambitious.

A highly competitive market has to the most extent worked against the Council, particularly when the Accommodation Team is seeking properties that are let at Local Housing Allowance levels where they have fallen behind rents achievable from non-LHA tenants. The service is able to offer some incentives to landlords in lieu of higher rents and the scheme has now started to offer a rent guarantee.

5.15 Pilot's success

The success of SG Homes so far has been in enhancing the range of options available to landlords and to improve the Councils profile in the private rented sector market.

Evaluation of the pilot is not straightforward as it cannot be measured solely in terms of properties under management. The additional advertising brought about by the schemes launch and by maintaining a profile in such a competitive market means that that it is the overall number of enquiries from landlords and lettings agents who choose to work with the Council that is important, regardless of the scheme that any property then falls under should it be tenants through the Accommodation Team.

		2011/12	2012/13
Number of enquiries from landlords		126	95
Number of new properties taken on	TSU	31	46
	DGS	0	1
	PSL	0	0
	Managed	10	16

5.16 Further work

At the time of writing, SG Homes had 27 properties under direct management, and a further 15 properties under the leasing scheme. While enquiries from landlords have dropped, the conversion rate into tenanted properties has improved and this continues into the current year.

We know that the PRS market is buoyant at the moment and there are opportunities for the Council to work in an expanding market. This would also assist the Council in preventing homelessness and should it approve the use of the power to discharge duty through an offer of private rented accommodation. LHA levels do work against this and it is a good opportunity for the Council to work out a procurement strategy supported by incentives that offer value for the Council and its partner landlords.

5.17 Other front-line housing advice services

It is a requirement of the Housing Act 1996 that Councils ensure that housing advice is available to anyone within their district. Since 1999, the Council has contracted an external agency to deliver an independent housing advice service for the residents of South Gloucestershire. The current contract is due to run until 30 September 2014 and is operated by Orchard and Shipman.

5.18 Housing Advice Service Contract

The HAS contract is operated by Orchard and Shipman. The contract value enables the employment of 1.5 FTE advisors as well as a proportion of management time in relation to running the contract.

The service consists of drop in and phone advice sessions, which are operated for 12 hours each per week. The surgeries are located at the Kingswood Civic Centre, Yate One Stop Shop and Patchway Hub.

Taken together with the in-house team, this means that there are a total of 6.5 front line specialist housing advice officers and 1 Senior Officer employed to provide services directly to any household who approaches.

The added value of an external contractor is to offer households in South Glos a choice. In some instances, customers prefer to see what they regard as an independent service. For the Council, the contract specification focuses on areas that have seen an increase in numbers coming forward, i.e. from the private sector. Specially, the contract focuses on

- Tenancy Relations Work

This part of the contract specification is to address this issue by providing advice to tenants with general tenancy relations queries including rent disputes and rent increases, deposits, repairs, the need to vacate a property during repairs, access rights and tenancy rights. More acutely, it is also to investigate allegations of illegal eviction and harassment of residential occupiers living in privately rented accommodation, and if necessary to prepare a case for the Council to use its powers to prosecute under the Protection From Eviction Act.

- Debt advice and mortgage repossession

This is to provide debt advice to clients, who are at risk of losing their home due to rent or mortgage arrears. This could include, offering advice on welfare benefits and income maximisation, compiling a statement of income and essential outgoings and debt prioritisation. This could also include negotiation with lenders, prepare documents - including any supporting information - for the Courts and refer the case on to a Court representative, or attend Court as necessary. Where a household could be interested in one of the mortgage rescue products, Shelter are also able to assess and advise HomeChoice on eligibility for a referral to be made.

5.19 Emergency Duty Team

The EDT service also covers those who contact the Council as homeless out of hours. EDT will undertake a quick assessment and if necessary find suitable emergency accommodation. The household is expected to attend for an appointment the next working day. In the last year, admissions to emergency accommodation via EDT were rare.

5.20 Total HomeChoice Resources for Homelessness

A calculation has been completed of all HomeChoice cost centres and an estimate arrived at of the total cost of direct homelessness services. This includes:

Table 25 – Summary of Resources in HomeChoice for homelessness services		
	Total budget	£k for homelessness
Staffing	652 x 75%	489.1
Operational cost centres, inc HAS contract	709 x 75% Plus 54.5	586.7
TA spend 2012/13	30,000	30,000
Plus Private Sector Housing Officer	0.6FTE	20,000
		1.15M

This means that the total budget for homelessness related services funded directly by SGC is £1.15M from total HomeChoice operational budgets of £1.2M plus.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR HOUSING ADVICE AND HOMELESSNESS

In addition to resources delivered via the Councils Housing Advice and Homelessness service, there are other avenues through which other services that contribute to prevention and homelessness are delivered.

5.21 Housing Related Support

The Housing Related Support budget (previously Supporting People) currently funds 18 Short Term Housing Related Support Services, that directly prevent homelessness and events leading to homelessness and which can be accessed via the Council's Housing & Support Access Co-ordinator. This includes short-term supported accommodation and floating support delivered in the customers own home.

The total cost of these 18 services in 2013/14 is £1,862,000 and each provider submits performance information on a weekly basis to the Access Service in respect of individual service users, 6 monthly (mid and end year) to the Contracts Team on annually St Andrews University for outcome monitoring.

The most recent information recorded on the Access Service database shows that these services support about 2,000 service users who would either be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

5.22 Supported Accommodation

Short Term Supported Housing is an option for people who have a need for accommodation and who need to live in a supported environment. A range of supported accommodation is commissioned by the Council and which developed from the funding stream formerly known as Supporting People which was paid to the Council through ring-fenced grant. This stream no longer exists and the funding is absorbed into the Council's area based grant.

The schemes that are within this range are outlined in the table below and largely provide accommodation for under-25's, with the exception of the Forecastle and refuge accommodation. Those occupying all schemes do so either as a measure of homelessness prevention or as TA where it is suitable for them. Short term means up to two year although the person does not have to stay in the supported accommodation for the full two years – they can move on to more independent accommodation at any time within this period. the accommodation and the support offered helps the person develop the skills to live independently and to explore their options for move on accommodation.

The capacity of short term supported accommodation services is as follows:

- Young people 55
- Young teenage parents 9
- Mental health 12
- Learning difficulties 14
- Single people (generally Aged 25+) 15

The total number of approved applications for supported accommodation for the year 2012/13 was 338 and 509 for floating support services.

This shows a ratio of just over 3 applications for every space within the accommodation based schemes however this doesn't reflect the vacancy rate. Average waiting times ranged from 21 to 45 days for accommodation depending on the customers needs. For most applicants, this is acceptable through it does demonstrate the lack of emergency provision as evidenced by the continuing use of B & B for example for young people. This is something that a Youth Housing Strategy could look at in further detail in time for any re-commissioning planned for 2014/15.

5.23 Other SP funded accommodation based services

The Refuge spaces are not allocated to through the single access service and the budget is contained within the Safer South Gloucestershire service. A

review of refuge provision is ongoing and there is likely to be a requirement for capital funding for any further development of accommodation based services.

5.24 Floating Support

Floating Support is a range of services provided to support people in their own home or in temporary accommodation. The support is provided to them for the time they need the support and is not dependent on them living in supported or sheltered housing schemes. When the services are no longer required they can be 'floated off' to another service user.

Services are normally short-term, which is defined as up to two years. However many services provide support for shorter periods where this is required. Service users are not charged for short-term services.

To assess how far this capacity meets demand, it is useful to consider not how many referrals are made for services (this will include many who are not eligible) but how many service users have been assessed and are waiting for services to start. During 2012/13, waiting time averaged from 4-5 weeks for floating support and at the time of writing, 34 households waiting for generic services and 13 young people. Indications are that the length of time services are delivered for has declined.

5.25 Children's Services

In some instances, CYP has a responsibility to provide accommodation to young people in care or leaving the care system. This includes B & B. Voluntary sector partners are also funded to provide support to care leavers to prepare them for independent living in similar ways to other contracts covering young people seeking accommodation and support.

There are examples of good joint work between housing and children's services to jointly commission services, for example Charles England House.

It is recommended however that a review be undertaken of what services are being commissioned to ensure that they best meet the Councils needs.

5.26 Welfare Advice Partnership

As well as approaches direct to the Council and Orchard and Shipman, households can approach partner agencies, including other commissioned services. The South Gloucestershire Welfare Advice Partnership provides a general advice service with a focus on welfare benefit and debt in acknowledgement that in building safer, stronger communities, access to advice is a core part of joint efforts to tackle social exclusion and deprivation.

The partnership is a consortium between five Voluntary and Community organisations. The Council invests £268,540 annually.

The consortium does not collect any monitoring statistics that directly relate to homelessness although a CVS Survey of voluntary and community organisations recorded that homeless people were amongst those seeking assistance.

Other than attendance at the Welfare Advice Partnership meetings there are few other links with HomeChoice by members of the consortium and no monitoring information related to provision of housing advice or homelessness prevention, or outcomes. It would be valuable for any agency who provides services that contributes towards homelessness prevention, either through public funding or through independent fund raising, to have this information reported through to HomeChoice for incorporating into the statutory reporting and so the Council can monitor and benchmark the outcomes for all cases.

All agencies who were surveyed for this review were asked for their views on what works or doesn't work in the provision of housing advice and their recommendations will be considered in the Strategy. While feedback is always highly valued, stronger links through a partnership working together would likely achieve more.

5.27 Move-On Accommodation

This section considers the numbers and range of move-on accommodation used by the Council to discharge its duty towards homeless households and to prevent homelessness. This includes both private sector and permanent social housing.

Table 13 in Chapter 3 recorded the following figures for move on from temporary accommodation and is duplicated here.

Duplicated Table 13 - Reasons for Discharge of Duty		
	2011/12	2012/13
Part VI offer	131	107
IH from TA	9	3
Qual Offer of PRS	5	6
Vol left	18	10
Ineligible	2	0
	165	126

This decline is continuing into the current year as lets through the Council are down this year by 8% compared to Quarter 1 2012.

5.28 Permanent Social Housing

The number and proportion of lets to statutory homeless cases has steadily dropped since the last Review was conducted. In 2012/13 a total of 547 lets to general needs properties were completed of which 322 were to Band A (107 to homeless), 213 to Band B and 12 to Registered Applicant. This means that lets to homeless were 19.5% of total general needs lettings compared with an average of 40% in the 6 years leading up to 2009. Over time, the re-housing

policy has been amended to support the increase in lets to homeless in order to reduce the pressing problem of SGC being a high user of TA.

What is significant to note is that Band A lets are 59% of total general needs against a target of 70%. This supports the award of Band A on other grounds as a tool for homelessness prevention if it can be reasonably assumed that Band A places these applicants in an equivalent level of housing need being statutory homeless. Any review of the re-housing policy would be prudent to maintain this and to look for ways to achieve the target percentage.

What is also useful to monitor is the take up by the housing providers of a higher proportion of their own nominations quota. There are signs that this is happening in response to landlords transferring tenants to smaller properties as a result of deduction in housing benefit to tenants who are under-occupying. Should the property being vacated comes back to be advertised through choice based lettings, this means that the proportion of larger properties advertised through CBL will grow. Although the proportion of larger families as duties accepted has grown, the largest number of duties is still for 1-and 2-bed needs. Should This means that where housing partners use a disproportion number of smaller properties for their own nominations, this could impact on TA if households have fewer 1-and 2-bed properties to bid for. This supports the use of alternatives, such as PRS offers.

5.29 Qualifying offers

In previous years, reasons given by households for accepting a qualifying offer have included the following:

- Needed to move out of borough to seek medical assistance not available in the area
- Wanted to live in Bristol
- Happy with property, landlord and local amenities so didn't want to move (remained in DGS)

- Happy with property, area and settled so didn't want to move (remained in DGS)
- Happy with property and area, tenant had medical problems so was nervous about being offered alternative accommodation (remained in DGS)
- Concerned about being offered property with bedrooms too small to accommodate their children, good relationship with current landlord (remained in DGS)
- Previous rent arrears of £4000.00 with housing association disqualified them from being accepted as tenant with new social landlord if they bid under CBL
- Family size increased to 4 bed need as partner and her children joined application, as such wanted large property and was aware that reality of waiting on HomeChoice may take time
- Wanted to remain in area, settled

5.30 Discharge of duty through PRS offer

The ability of councils to use qualifying offers has been repealed since the introduction of the power under the Localism Act 2011 to discharge duty through a PRS offer brought in by. The reasons given above by those who accepted a qualifying offer illustrate the benefits of using the PRS as move-on.

The use of this power leads to the same outcome for families as accepting TSU at the time they present would have done. As TSU prevents the need for households to go through B & B and a further placement in TA, the use of this power supports the use of the PRS as a viable option for homelessness prevention if some households are going to end up in the same place.

5.31 Resources For Non-Priority Households

The Council has no duty to provide accommodation to households without a priority need, although we are committed to assisting people on low incomes where possible with accessing accommodation. This is done through the Non-Priority Bond Scheme which is similar to the Tenancy Start-Up scheme in the assistance given, i.e. being practical and financial.

A small budget (c. £5k) is available within HomeChoice to assist single people into accommodation. If the average loan is based on Local Housing Allowance rates, this would be £286.17 rent in advance for a single person up to the age of 35 to access a shared room or £499.98 for someone over 35 to access a 1 bedroom dwelling, then this means that between 10-15 people could be assisted at the same time with loans being recycled to new applicants as they are repaid.

The Accommodation Team report that whilst a number of people are approved for the Non Priority Bond Scheme, in reality few proceed to find a property that would require the process to be completed. This suggests that single people need more assistance with accessing accommodation and, given the level of approaches to triage from this group, this is an area that could be focused on to help those facing homelessness and also to redirect single people to a more appropriate and tailored service.

The Accommodation Team does work closely with Home Turf, the service operated by Developing Health & Independence (DHI) through a successful bid for funding allocated by Crisis to focus on developing accommodation options for single people. Home Turf complements local priorities and South Gloucestershire Council's own schemes.

CHAPTER 6 - WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

6.1 Government Guidance

In August 2012, DCLG published 'Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness'⁹

In this, the Government set ten local challenges that, if adopted, should lead to all local homelessness teams delivering a gold standard service and aspiring to the achievements of the best.

The management team within HomeChoice together completed an assessment of how far it feels that these challenges have been met. This was by carefully considering each challenge and awarding a score from 1 -10 with 1 being 'needs more development' and 10 being 'met'.

It is recognised that other services may have different views however it was felt that the service responsibility for delivering the Councils statutory duties for homelessness and housing advice was an appropriate adjudicator. Some comments have been added that explain how the HomeChoice management team reached each score.

6.2 Self Assessment Against Government Challenges

The ten challenges and the self-assessment against those is set out as follows.

	Challenge	Score	Comments
1	adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all	7	The Council has historically invested in its homelessness and housing advice services and adopted a spend to save

⁹ Making every contact count - A joint approach to preventing homelessness, August 2012 Department for Communities and Local Government, ISBN: 978-1-4098-3567-7

	local authority services		<p>approach, as evidenced by the ring-fencing of homelessness grant for the purposes of developing new prevention services and supporting initiatives to develop the PRS as a housing option. Funding for front-line homelessness services has been maintained through the recent service review.</p> <p>There are some relationships with other service areas that could work more effectively to prevent homelessness or to provide services to those at risk.</p>
2	actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs	7	<p>Strong partnerships exist with support and advice services as evidenced through service specifications and through forums such as the SG Housing Group, Supporting People Providers, Welfare Advice Partnership, and the Welfare Reform Working Group. Much work also takes place in the West of England through the housing and support sub-group and the Transitions Working Group in 2011-12.</p> <p>Monitoring outcomes and effectiveness could be embedded more.</p>
3	offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients	9	<p>This is in place for all those who approach HomeChoice through triage or through the housing register and with the Housing Advice contractor.</p> <p>A 10 is not scored until there can be complete certainty that everyone who needs the service approaches.</p>
4	adopt a <i>No Second Night Out</i>		The annual rough sleepers survey for

	model or an effective local alternative	n/a	continues to show that this is not an issue of significance in this area.
5	have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support	7	Much work is done and support planning aiming at independent housing embedded in contract specifications for support services. As with item 2 above, missing from this is a system of monitoring outcomes and effectiveness. The work-plan for the West of England sub-group shows that developing homelessness prevention protocols with RP's is a work in progress.
6	develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords	7	We are satisfied that this is in place for those we work with in the PRS. A higher score is unattainable until we can be confident that this is also accessed by those we don't work with.
7	actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme	7	We are satisfied that this is in place for those we work with and who come through to us via housing advice and the housing register. A higher score is unattainable until we can be confident that this is also accessed by those we don't work with, for example those attending the Court desk.
8	have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs	9	The homelessness strategy sets out a proactive approach and regular reports are taken to the directorate of the CAH department regarding progress and an annual report to the CYP Select Committee regarding issues relating to

			youth housing. Monitoring through other formal arrangements with other partners does not otherwise take place and is recommended for a new Strategy.
9	not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation	1	This author has taken the view that this area is either wholly met or unmet. Information contained elsewhere in this report shows that the use of B & B for 16 and 17 year olds continues to be a problem.
10	not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks	10	As above, this is either met or unmet. Statutory reporting shows that this is met.

6.3 Common themes of an excellent local approach

‘Making Every Contact Count’ also identifies some common themes that have emerged from the good practice seen across the country and that should form part of the local strategic response across the country. These are copied and pasted verbatim as follows. ¹⁰

1. The first of these is **services working together to target those at risk of homelessness**. For example, Oxford City Council are developing a protocol arrangement with local mental health services with a specialist mental health worker and have a priority referral arrangement with the Citizen’s Advice Bureau for debt advice. The six boroughs in the North London Housing Partnership and the five in the South East London Housing Partnership have used both Department for Communities and

¹⁰ Ibid page 33

Local Government funding to jointly commission St. Giles Trust to operate a Through the Gates service which will help to prevent homelessness and reduce reoffending amongst residents of those boroughs being released from prison.

2. Secondly, **identifying and tackling the underlying causes of homelessness** as part of housing needs assessments by **referring vulnerable clients into support services** where necessary. For example, New Charter Housing Trust and Tameside Council have developed their housing advice service into an advice hub, providing a variety of services. These include welfare, debt, tenancy support, protection from illegal eviction, relationship breakdown and family conciliation, and support for 16/17 year olds, as well as refuge, Citizen's Advice Bureau and hospital based surgeries and street outreach.
3. Thirdly, **local authorities coordinating access to services for vulnerable people and multi agency action to address** them also play an important role. As we mentioned earlier, the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition has demonstrated how intensive case management coupled with a flexible response from local agencies can benefit vulnerable people. Coordination is already common in serious circumstances such as child protection, domestic violence and serious ex-offenders and coordinated approaches such as those developed by MEAM should be used more widely for individuals facing multiple needs and exclusions⁴⁸. Less intensive advocacy has also proven to be successful for those with lesser support needs. Learning from the *No Second Night Out* pilots highlights the value of advocate support to help individuals to navigate their way through the range of services available to support their recovery.
4. Fourthly, **making rented accommodation work by supporting people to remain in their homes, and increasing access to the private rented sector is essential to manage demand**. Eviction prevention panels can work well in both social and private rented sector housing, bringing relevant services together to prevent vulnerable families from being

evicted from their home. Most authorities now offer rent bonds or deposits to assist with accommodation options, Tameside Council and New Charter Housing, for example, offer practical help to maintain tenancies such as budgeting advice, furnishing assistance, signposting and advocacy for other services (including legal advice, mental health, drugs and alcohol services). They also provide advice for private landlords on fulfilling their legal responsibilities and assistance to find tenants.

5. Finally, **a focus on youth homelessness** is key to preventing homelessness in the longer term. Aside from managing demand for homelessness services, supporting vulnerable young people helps avoid long term benefit dependency and expensive interventions funded through specialist health services, social care and the criminal justice system. Tailored housing advice and integrated wrap around services (including education, employment, specialist health services, children's services, youth offending and probation services) at the point of crisis can offer positive options for young people. Birmingham City Council's successful Youth Hub, for example, provides a service focal point for young people at risk of homelessness delivering housing advice alongside triaging to other support services

Each of these themes has been carefully considered and taken forward into the proposed priorities for a new Strategy.

CHAPTER 7 - SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK TO DATE

7.1 Asking for Feedback

Views of customers, partners and stakeholders that contribute to this review have been gathered through a number of avenues.

7.2 Housing Strategy

Formal consultation for the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2013 was undertaken from October 2012 – January 2013. The consultation document contained information on many issues that impacted or arose in direct relation to homelessness. These include:

- a description of the main changes relating to welfare reform
- the power to discharge homelessness duties through an offer of private rented accommodation
- key facts in relation to housing and the local economy, including the growth of the PRS, the number of households approaching the Council for housing advice and homeless duties accepted

Key ambitions were outlined including

- Ensure that advice and assistance is available to anyone with a housing problem, particularly those who are struggling with housing costs or facing homelessness.
- Work with private landlords to improve the condition of the homes they rent out
- Provide help and support so that people can stay living in their own homes for as long as possible
- Minimise the number of homes that lie empty
- improving fuel efficiency and making homes cheaper to run

Key measures of success were identified:

- number of households in temporary accommodation

- average time spent in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation
- number of households accepted as statutory homeless
- number of homelessness preventions.

7.3 Welfare Reform Road-shows

The South Gloucestershire Welfare Reform Working Group was established in July 2012 and developed an action plan in relation to meeting the challenges in relation to welfare reform measures and their impact. Part of this action plan was focused on 'getting the message out' and planning for intensive case-work for those affected.

As such, the Group arranged for five road-shows at locations around the district and issued invitations to individual households to attend for more information on individual measures and how they might be affected. A short, voluntary, questionnaire asked those who attended to identify their main financial concerns. Of the 64 who commented, the biggest area of concern was paying rent, with 42 'votes'. General benefit entitlement came second with 8 expressions of concern, and third equal was paying council tax and health related expenses with 4 votes each.

7.4 HomeChoice Customer Feedback

Feedback was sought from customers of the HomeChoice service asking them to describe and comment on their experience and outcomes of using the service. More than 300 customers were directly contacted, including all households for whom a homeless duty was accepted in 2012/13, 170 others who attended for housing advice, and some households who had taken up a private sector prevention option.

Copies of the questionnaires used and comments made are contained within the draft Review document, and are attached at Appendix 2. A summary of the main points made are as follows:

- Over 70% of respondents assumed that the Council would arrange accommodation for them and the majority expected that this would be permanent housing.
- 40% of respondents did not try and find their own accommodation before approaching the Council and 60% did not ask for any help, or advice before they became homeless. Indeed 40% of clients were already homeless when they approached the Council for help, which clearly limits the prevention work that can be conducted.
- Where households were provided with emergency housing, approximately half felt that this accommodation was poor, which potentially reflects the fact that a large proportion of households assumed they would be offered permanent housing.
- Of the households who approached the Council for housing advice, 50% were helped to either remain in their home, or access alternative accommodation. The same proportion also stated that their situation had improved since working with the Council and our involvement had made some difference.
- Over 60% of respondents felt that staff were helpful and friendly and listened to them. They also understood the advice given to them.

7.5 Survey of Members, Partners and Stakeholders

A survey was undertaken with Members, Partners and Stakeholders from 24 May - 30 June 2013 asking for feedback that could assist in forming the new priorities of the Homelessness Strategy. Links to an on-line survey was sent to

- all SGC Members, parish and town councils,
- all stock-holding social landlords in the district,
- partner agencies and stakeholders

The survey contained a series of questions requesting information about what services were delivered to those facing homelessness, the continued relevance of the existing strategy priorities, whether any new priorities were identified and the delivery of the key measures of success adopted in the Housing Strategy.

Respondents were asked specifically to comment on a number of statements in relation to the above points.

A summary of the main points are as follows:

- Respondents felt that the most useful services are,
 - Floating support
 - Debt advice, budgeting & income maximisation
 - Independent housing advice
 - They also value face to face contact
- The following gaps in services were highlighted,
 - Lack of information available on general homelessness services
 - Lack of supported accommodation for ex prisoners and people suffering from drug/alcohol addiction
 - Services for young people including; mediation, peer education in schools & independent advocacy services
- The majority of respondents felt that the priorities from the existing homelessness strategy should be maintained.
- Whilst the existing priorities include promoting financial inclusion and ensuring that a youth housing strategy is in place, respondents felt that new priorities should include,
 - The development of budgeting skills and financial advice

- A greater focus on young people, particularly care leavers, young parents and those not in education, employment or training.
- The development of more supported accommodation for young people and an increase in the amount of floating and tenancy support.

7.6 Feedback Summary

A full copy of all responses received and comments made from the three surveys conducted by the HomeChoice service is available from the HomeChoice Manager. In the main they show that customers felt that the service they received from HomeChoice was good and helpful, although expectations still persist of a solution being through social housing.

The survey of partners, stakeholders and Members shows a number of gaps in information collected and shared relating to those in housing need and a number of suggestions of initiative operating elsewhere that could be developed in South Gloucestershire. These were carefully considered and incorporated into any action plan accompanying a new Strategy.

When asked what the priorities of existing strategy should be retained, all the nine priorities of the 2009 Strategy were fairly evenly supported. These were summarised into a reduced number of five priorities and a formal consultation took place on the proposal that these become the priorities of a new Strategy. The consultation took place between January – March 2014 and all the proposed priorities were supported as the basis for the new Homelessness Strategy.

CHAPTER 8 – HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

8.1 Summary of the Homelessness Review

The key findings of the Homelessness Review are summarised here:

- SGC continues to have a positive record in reducing statutory homelessness and in homelessness prevention, although the Strategy should consider developing alternative types of TA;
- Loss of private sector accommodation has taken over from parental eviction as the main cause of homelessness, including those asked to leave due to arrears, and there are indications of a growing concern over affordability;
- The private rented market continues to be difficult to access for benefit claimants;
- There is some increase in intentionality but not enough to detect any underlying patterns;
- Approaches for 16/17 year olds has increased and the reasons for this need to be looked at;
- Although the numbers have increased, the outcomes for young people when they do approach has improved. The use of B & B for 16/17 year olds by the Council is still a factor and so some consideration should be given to finding alternatives, for example commissioning emergency bed spaces within the supported living schemes;
- Overall the rate of prevention continues to increase. Figures reported are arrived at by applying the definition used to complete the P1E statutory return. This is a narrow one and doesn't necessarily reflect the successes achieved through all of the Councils efforts. Reporting on homelessness is also not done by all of the Councils commissioned services and consideration should be given to reflecting how their activity contributes the aim of preventing homelessness and supporting those with a housing need;
- Single, non-priority households make up a significant proportion of those approaching as homeless and are experiencing a particular impact in respect of benefits changes in the private sector. The issues faced are specific to this group and warrant a special focus in respect of services, support and solutions;
- The number of social tenants identified as under-occupying and subject to a reduction in housing benefit stood at 923 at the time this measure was introduced (753 by 1 bedroom and 170 by 2 or more bedrooms).

This is likely to impact on smaller properties available to let through HomeChoice as landlords opt to use a greater % of their own nominations quota to enable their tenants to downsize;

- The number of households who will be affected by the benefits cap is likely to be around 100 with a high degree of impact on those households, some of whom will be occupying temporary accommodation;
- Other welfare reform measures, such as the roll-out of universal credit, are likely to have an impact on homelessness as claimants struggle to make claims and manage their money, though this needs further case work analysis and monitoring of findings arising from pilots being conducted nationally. The South Gloucestershire Universal Credit Local Support Framework working group is addressing this in more detail.

8.2 Homelessness Strategy – Main Priorities

The main priorities for the Homelessness Strategy are aligned directly with the key measures of success in the Housing Strategy and the main points of the review as set out above. These are:

Prevention

A continued focus on intensive and integrated case work approach to housing advice and homelessness prevention

Private Rented Sector

To take best advantage of the opportunities arising from the growth of the private rented sector by expanding the offer to private landlords to work with the Council and its partners

Youth Homelessness

To continue with a dedicated Youth Housing Strategy with a particular focus on early years prevention and alternatives to B & B

Partnership Working

To have strong arrangements for a consistent approach and collective responsibility for homelessness prevention and early referral from all agencies

Single Non-Priority Households

A review and reconsideration of the services, support and solutions available to Single Non-Priority Households experiencing homelessness.

Affordability of Housing

To consider how households can be supported to access accommodation that is affordable to them. Welfare reform measures are likely to have an impact on homelessness particularly with the

introduction of the benefit cap and universal credit. This needs further case work analysis and monitoring of findings arising from pilots being conducted nationally.

8.3 Next Steps

An action plan will be drawn up around these priorities and a monitoring group established to monitor progress.

Appendix 1)

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan – updated June 2013

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
1. Provide access to all services that households need to approach and with each service working to a set of quality standards	Service users know where to go	Good quality advice and information on options provided	Follow up surveys for every case after 6 weeks	SHCO	N/a	Green
				HCTL	6 monthly	Amber
		Range of leaflets available regarding all relevant information and services	Leaflets reviewed at set timescales	HCTL	N/a	Green
			Delivered	Shelter	N/a	Green
		Information available in accessible languages and formats	Delivered	HCTL		
			Delivered			
		Design pocket sized leaflets with relevant numbers, info and web address				
		Linked websites for better information				
	Fair access for all service users	Advice services publicized in every relevant outlet	Delivered	Community services CS		Green
			Access available to all			Amber
		Take account of individual needs including workers, people with disabilities, geographically diversity	Current leaflets available in all OSS	HCTL	N/a	Green
				Corporate		
		OSS	Out of hours advice service available	HCTL /corporate		Green
		Review opening hours, including out of hours surgeries, evenings and Saturdays	Surgeries taking place	Contracted HAS		Amber
		Information distributed	HCTL	N/a		
Use of premises of partner agencies					Green	
	Information points	Households				

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
		at other outlets including libraries, mobile 'booths' in shopping centres and leisure centres. Rural areas – maximise use of drop-ins/advise centres or 'mobile' van/booth Home visits available for all unable to visit outlets	from rural areas access services Home visits take place			
	Ensure consistent and high quality advice and customer care standards when service users get there	Establish quality framework – commissioned services have publicised standards People are listened to about their needs/wishes Information available is current and relevant Maximise publicity and networking amongst services and linked websites Commissioners and providers know whether people are happy with their services	Services are delivered to required standards by trained and knowledgeable staff Reflected in appraisals and team training plans Joint training programmes and updates Links on Council website updated regularly Services are developed and improved through contract monitoring and service user feedback	Service managers Service managers Service Managers Service Managers Service Managers		Green Green Green Green Green
2. A range of housing options is needed for all households who are threatened	A choice of housing options available in the right areas	Information available on each option with realism in considering what's available and relative opportunities for	Leaflets on tenancy types, security of tenure and responsibilities	Accommodation Team Leader SLO HomeChoice		Green Green

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status	
with homelessness to access wherever they are, including recognition of the private rented sector as a prevention option		households to access Maximise range of options including supported housing	Information on Housing schemes and stock available through websites and updated weekly Numbers of vacancies increase				
	Private sector is considered a viable option	Publicise services directly to landlords and recruit landlords to let properties through HomeChoice services, including lettings agents and landlords forums	Package of incentives in place for landlords PRS properties advertised through HC	PSHM and ATL ATL ATL			Green Red Red
		Advertise accredited properties	Take up increases	ATL ATL			Amber Green
		Landlords to target households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness	12 month AST's issued PRS let at LHA level	ATL CYP			Green Amber
		12 months AST's negotiated	Support available for all at early stages	ATL			Green
		Assistance with negotiating rent including up to date knowledge of LHA	Younger people assisted into PRS	Contracts team			Green
		Pilot intensive tenancy management for landlords and tenants including support available to landlords to establish tenancy including any HB claims (specific measure)	Take up for homelessness prevention maintained or increased – loans made for RIA Included in specifications for accommodat	?			Red
		Landlords to accept under 18 with guarantors					

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
		Private sector has to be attractive to tenants PRS considered in move-on plans	ion providers. Monitoring of individual outcomes of move-on plans			
3. The need for prevention and early intervention to target services at those at highest risk and facing an escalation of the likelihood of homelessness	Keep families together or facilitate planned moves	Develop early intervention and family mediation services for parental eviction of young people.	Mediation contract considered as part of YHS	HCM	March 2010	Green
		In the meanwhile, pilot the assertive intervention scheme for 16/17 year olds (specific measure) People know what services exist and can make choices	Staff in place and visiting – homelessness and B & B admissions reduced Home visits to all parental evictions to discuss choices	HCM HCTL	April 2009 N/a	Green Green
	Targeted services at families with identified risk indicators	Identify who these households are	Number of CAF's	SHCO	N/a	Green
		Survey of social housing tenants re any links between overcrowding and affordability issues with eviction of adult children and newly forming households	TIS in place for under-occupying households to move	SGSLP	?	Green
			Protocol established	SGSLP	?	Amber
		Work with South Glos Social Landlords for RSL's to understand their role in prevention	Housing Officers trained and knowledgeable	SGSLP	?	Red
		Staff are aware of early indicators of risk Launch service with CYP for peer visits to schools and colleges by	Service operating	HC/CYP	November 2009	Green

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
		young people who have experienced homelessness and advise on prevention.				
	People know what to do to maintain their homes or find another one	Options available established through instant interview with prevention officer	Triage service and duty rota operating	HCTL	N/a	Green
		Maintain current accommodation	Reported through BV213	HAS contractor SHCO	N/a	Green
		- Mediation – family and with landlords		PSHM HBManager DV Co-ord	N/a N/a	Green Amber Amber
		- Mortgage rescue – scheme available through HomeChoice	Reported through BV213	SHCO HCO's ATL SLO ATL Contracts Manager		Green Green Green Red Green
		- Use of DFG's				
		- Use of DHP				
		- Use of stay safe schemes				
		Need to move				
		- planned moves through transfers	Placements used for monitored	HCM SHCO HCM		Green Amber Amber
		- assessed on HC and participating in CBL	B & B and use of S.188 duties reduced	HCM SGSLP HCO's		Amber Amber Green
	- accessing PRS					
	- drop in service established for instant HR banding,					
	- TSU sign-up					
	- support specifications include move-on/outcomes					
		Access to emergency accommodation available while prevention options being investigated	Prevention through CBL occurring			Green
		- single access service				
		- refuges used in place of B & B				
		- reception and assessment centre for 16/17 year olds in place of B & B				
		- respite accommodation for homeless YP				

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - empty stock used by RSL's for man trans - temp decant with family and friends negotiated <p>Re-housing policy works to achieve the prevention of homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bandings reflect level of urgency - early id of risk of homelessness through HR applications 				
4. Casework that is intended to go beyond accessing advice and information with service users accessing specialists who can provide assertive intervention'	Formal legal advice available	<p>Resources established within HAS teams</p> <p>TRO services available</p> <p>Advice for households facing repossession</p>	<p>Partnerships established with solicitors signed up to SLA's</p> <p>New HAS contract in place</p> <p>Court desk operating</p>			<p>Red</p> <p>Green</p> <p>Green</p>
	Vulnerable households helped through 'the system'	<p>Co-ordinated institutional discharge plans including housing - establish protocols and train relevant staff</p> <p>Triage model for associated services</p> <p>Lead officer role established under protocols and contract specifications ensuring effective referral to related services to take appropriate role</p>	<p>Zero admissions to B & B from ward and prisons, including YOI</p> <p>In place</p> <p>In place and model of delivery</p>	HCM		Red

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
5 Access to support for vulnerable households	Homelessness prevented	HRS commissioning priorities tied in with housing support needs data	Current HRS Service Programme capacity matches housing support needs data and SGC Housing Strategy	Contracts Manager		Green
		Providers clear of their role in homelessness prevention and housing access through all options - contracts and SLA's to reflect shared priorities - contract monitoring to include service standards and outcomes	Prevention protocol in place and staff trained, with continuous training in place. HRS Service Specification and contract monitoring returns	Contracts Manager		Green
		Clear referral processes to access services	Service user involvement in service provision. Information on website and referrals being made. Access Service Protocol.	Contracts Manager/Service Managers /HCTL		Green
		Take up maximized and monitored	HRS contract monitoring returns.	Single access service		Green
			Periodic auditing of referral sources.			
	Repeat homelessness reduced	Provider to have clear understanding of risk indicators leading to tenancy breakdown Vulnerable households have opportunity to re-engage	Prevention protocols in place RE-referrals to FSS	Contracts Manager and SGSLP Providers		

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
6 Promoting financial inclusion	Making sure all housing choices are affordable (you have enough money to access it and pay for it)	Bond schemes access criteria targeted for maximum impact on prevention for those most in need	Budget available and used	ATL	N/a	Green
			Access to credit union for all SGC residents	Comm Services	2010?	Amber
		Work to expand credit union throughout South Gloucestershire	Contracts in place and monitored / Financial advice/debt advice	CS		Green
		Ensure debt advice is available and targeted and working to SLA's to	surgeries established and publicised / HB community officer service used	ATL		Green
		- maximize take up of financial advice		HB Manager		Amber
		- maximize income for households in ££ difficulties	Rents held at LHA/ Tenancies start	PSHM		Amber
		- deliver specialist benefits advice	DHP targeted at prevention			
		Welfare advice partnership members advertise services	Take up off fuel efficiency grants			
		Encourage landlords to let properties at LHA or below	Use of DHP targeted where not possible			
		Encourage landlords to minimise running costs of properties through fuel efficiency				
	Making sure housing choices are sustainable	Advice for homeowners facing mortgage debts	Referrals made to debt advice			Green
		Early intervention for financial advice, including associated debts	Referrals made to mortgage rescue			Green
		Participation in mortgage rescue scheme	££ paid			Green

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
		Prevention fund available for small sums through TRO work Benefit take up maximized for accommodation charges	Referrals made to Community Benefits Officer service DHP used to prevent homelessness			Amber
7 The development of a dedicated Youth Housing Strategy , with a specific commitment to ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16/17 year olds'	Strategy finalized and approved	Project team to deliver project action plan	Strategy goes live in January 2010 B & B used ended for 16/17 year olds as per statutory requirement	HCM	March 2010	Green
8 The reduction of the use of Temporary Accommodation and statutory targets, and achieve cost savings and settled lifestyles for households affected by homelessness'	Meet LAA target	TA reduction plan in place and monitored weekly.	NI 156 met	HCM	n/a	Green
		TA reduction plan reviewed monthly	Target extended beyond 2011	ATL		Green
		TA reduction sustained after 2010	Hostel handed back	HCM	2010	Green
		Review and reduce extent of TA hostel provision.	Provision increased	HCM	Dec 2009	Green
		Increase the provision of supported housing schemes for 16 to 24 year old Young People, possibly be re-commissioning of TA hostels. (specific measure)	Direct offers reduce	HCM	Qtr3 2010	Green
		Encourage those in TA to bid regularly through HomeChoice for re-housing.		ATL	N/a	Green

Priority	Outcome	Action	Measurement	Lead	Time	Status
	Ensure accommodation needs are met through non-statutory routes	Develop options for accommodation access	Qualifying offers take up maintained or increased Move on from supported accommodation through the PRS			N/a Amber
9 All of the above needs to be delivered through strong partnerships working towards shared goals'	Housing issues reflected at every level of relevant agencies - strategically - by managers - in day to day working practices	Establish protocols governing working practices - MH - RSL's - HRS providers	Protocols established and rolling training programme established for front line staff HRS Provider Forum, SGC Learning & development website, HRS Service Specification , Access Service Protocol and other HRS joint operating protocols eg Extra Care, contract monitoring	Service managers Contracts Manager		Red Amber Green

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

1) Feedback Questionnaire - Homelessness Service

I am writing to you because you have used the Council's Homelessness service in the last year.

As part of South Gloucestershire Council's commitment to providing a good service, we like to get your feedback about your experience. We can then use this information to help us improve.

All information will be completely confidential unless you choose to give your name. If you were not satisfied with how you were treated, then it would be useful if you felt that you were able to give you contact details so that we can contact you to discuss this in more detail.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,



Kim Mylchreest
HomeChoice Manager

1. Age

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a. Under 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. 26 -35 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. 35-60 | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. Over 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. Ethnic Origin.

a. White

- British
 Irish

Other white background

b. Mixed

- White & Black Caribbean
 White & Black African
 White & Asian

Other mixed background

c. Asian or Asian British

- Indian

d. Black or Black British

- Caribbean
 African

Other black background

e. Chinese

- Chinese

f. Gypsy/Traveller

- Irish Traveller
 British Romany Gypsy

Other

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Other Asian background

g. Other Ethnic Group

h. Question refused

3. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person

Yes

No

4. Household Size

Number of adults ...

Number of children ...

Was anyone pregnant? Y / N

5. Before you approached the Council for help, what type of accommodation were you living in?

- a. Private rented
- b. Owner occupied
- c. Ex-partner's home
- d. Housing association
- e. In local authority care
- f. With parents
- g. With relatives/friends
- h. No fixed abode
- i. Abroad
- j. Other (please state)

.....
.....
.....

6. When were you expecting to have to leave that accommodation?

- a. Already left
- b. Within a week
- c. Within a month
- d. Within two months
- e. After two months
- f. Not expecting to leave

7. Why did you leave that accommodation?

- a. Parental eviction
- b. Told to leave by family/friends
- c. Landlord wanted property back
- d. Rent arrears
- e. Evicted
- f. Relationship breakdown
- g. Domestic violence

- h. Hate crime/ other harassment
- i. Leaving care
- j. Mortgage arrears/repossession
- k. Other (please state)

.....

8. Did you try and find your own accommodation before coming to the Council?

- a. Yes
- b. No

9. What did you expect to be offered when you came to the Council?

- a. Help to keep your accommodation
- b. Help to find other accommodation e.g. private rented
- c. Temporary accommodation
- d. Permanent accommodation
- e. B&B

10. Did the Council try to help you in any way to prevent you becoming homeless?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. What do you think could have been done to help prevent you from becoming homeless?

.....

12. Did you ask any other advice or support services for help?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, which ones?

.....

13. When you came to the Council for assistance, how would you rate the service you received?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Satisfactory
- d. Poor

14. How do you think we could improve our service?

.....
.....

15. Please answer this question if you were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. On a scale of 1 - 10 (1 being poor, 10 being excellent), how would you rate the b&b you were placed in?

.....
.....
.....

16. What type of accommodation are you in at the moment?

- B & B
- Supported Accommodation Scheme
- Private sector let
- Housing Association property

17. How would you rate this accommodation on a scale of 1 - 10 (1 being poor, 10 being excellent)? If you would like to make any other comments about your accommodation, please do so below.

.....
.....
.....

18. When you were placed in temporary accommodation, did you have to,

- i Register with a new GP?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- ii Enrol your child(ren) in a new school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
- iii. Change any other services (please specify)?

.....
.....
.....

19. If you were referred to a Support Agency when you approached the Council as homeless, did you take this support up?

- a. Yes
- b. No

20. Which support services were you referred to?

.....
.....
.....

21. Were the support services useful?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If you feel that you need support now, please telephone the Single Access Service on 01454 868005. The team will be happy to discuss the help that might be available to you.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please use the space below to tell us more about your experiences of the housing needs service and any other comments you would like to make about your experiences of being homeless.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Your name (optional) _____

Telephone Number (optional) _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

2) Feedback Questionnaire – Housing Advice Service

Dear

Feedback Questionnaire - Housing Advice Service

I am writing to you because you have used the Council's Housing Advice Service in the last year.

As part of South Gloucestershire Council's commitment to providing a good service, we like to get your feedback about your experience. We can then use this information to help us improve.

All information will be completely confidential unless you choose to give your name. If you were not satisfied with how you were treated, then it would be useful if you felt that you were able to give you contact details so that we can contact you to discuss this in more detail.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely

Kim Mylchreest
HomeChoice Manager

1. Age

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a. Under 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. 26 -35 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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2. Ethnic Origin.

a. White

British

Irish

Other white background

d. Black or Black British

Caribbean

African

Other black background

b. Mixed

White & Black Caribbean

White & Black African

White & Asian

Other mixed background

c. Asian or Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Other Asian background

e. Chinese

Chinese

f. Gypsy/Traveller

Irish Traveller

British Romany Gypsy

Other

g. Other Ethnic Group

h. Question refused

3. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person

Yes

No

4. Household Size

Number of adults ...

Number of children ...

Was anyone pregnant? Y / N

5. How long did you have to wait to see an advisor from your first contact with us?

a. Straight away

b. Within 24 hours

c. Within a week

c. More than a week

6. How helpful and friendly were our staff?

a. Very helpful and friendly

b. Helpful and friendly

c. Okay

d. Not very helpful and friendly

e. Unhelpful and unfriendly

7. How well did we listen to what you had to say and look into your housing problem?

a. Very well

b. Well

c. Average

d. Below average

e. Poor

8. How well did we explain things to you and keep you informed?

a. Very well

- b. Well
- c. Average
- d. Below average
- e. Poor

9. Was our advice understandable?

- a. Very easy
- b. Fairly easy
- c. Undecided
- d. Fairly difficult
- e. Very difficult

10. What was the outcome of you approach for housing advice?

- a. Problem was resolved - still at home
- b. Problem still exists
- c. Accessed other accommodation - homelessness prevented

11. Did you access other services as well?

Yes - please specify.....

No - if no, then would this have been helpful? Yes/No

12. Did our advice help resolve your housing problem?

- a. Very helpful - made all the difference
- b. Helpful - made some difference
- c. Made no difference
- d. Made things worse

OR

If you became homeless, what could we have done to prevent this?

Comments:

13. Since we worked with you, how has your situation changed?

- a. Much better
- b. Better
- c. No change
- d. Slightly worse
- e. Worse

14. How could we improve our service?

Comments:

Your name (optional) _____

Telephone Number (optional) _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

3) Survey of Partner Agencies, Stakeholders and Members

South Gloucestershire Council contacted you recently for your views on our new five-year Housing Strategy.

The overall aim of the Housing Strategy is to create a clear action plan to tackle the major housing challenges which have been identified and prioritised by the people of South Gloucestershire, one of which is the prevention of homelessness.

A number of Key Measures of Success in meeting this challenge have been identified, including:

- Number of homelessness preventions
- Number of households accepted as statutory homeless
- Number of households in temporary accommodation
- Average time spent in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation

We are now taking this further and re-doing our Homelessness Strategy and we value your views again on what the needs and gaps are in our housing advice and homelessness services.

I would be grateful if you could offer your comments on the following:

Yours sincerely,

Kim Mylchreest

Kim Mylchreest
HomeChoice Manager

So far this year, work has been done to look in more detail at homelessness in South Gloucestershire. This has been from those who have approached the Council's housing advice services or those who have made an application as a homeless household.

From this work, a number of messages have emerged that may help you complete this questionnaire.

- SGC continues to have a positive record in reducing statutory homelessness, although there is still a high dependence on B & B where there is a duty to provide accommodation. The Strategy should prioritise the development of alternatives, and making best use of all accommodation options available;
- Youth Homelessness is still significant and the numbers approaching have increased. Although the immediate response is much smoother, a re-evaluation

of the Youth Housing Strategy and the services available to prevent and relieve homelessness is recommended;

- The Private Rented Sector is now the second largest form of tenure in South Gloucestershire, although access and sustainability for low income households facing affordability issues is challenging. A special focus is required to consider all ways in which private landlords can be incentivised and supported to meet lower income households, and to promote it as a viable housing option;
- Overall the rate of homelessness prevention continues to increase, although the Council does not record activities contributing towards this from its commissioned services. Consideration should be given to adopting a broader partnership and monitoring to make best use of opportunities for prevention and the use of the Councils resources;
- Around 40% of approaches to triage are from single people with no priority need for assistance. There are very few housing options available to them and the Council needs to explore improving services;
- Welfare reform measures are likely to have an impact on homelessness, though this needs further case work analysis and monitoring of findings arising from pilots being conducted nationally.

If you need any more information, please contact cengagement@southglos.gov.uk

1. What services does your agency offer for general advice and homelessness prevention and what more could your agency do?

2. Do you have any experience of housing advice services?

- With the Council
 With any other organisation

Please state:

3. How do your customers find out about advice services, including housing advice?

4. What works well for your organisation?

5. What works well for your customers?

6. What are the gaps?

7. Do you know of services that operate in other areas but not in South Glos that you would recommend? Please give details

7. What information do you routinely collect regarding housing needs from your customers? Please tick as many as apply

- Behind in rent Affordability problems with other costs
 Overcrowding Disrepair Can't access suitable housing
 Health problems linked to their housing
 Can't access local services Threatened with homelessness
 Staying temporarily with family of friends Harassment
 Need support to maintain housing
 Other

8. What do you do with this information?

9. These were the priorities for the last Homelessness Strategy. Which priorities (up to a maximum of 5) would you like to see retained:

1) Provide **access to services** for all households that they need to approach, of which advice and information are a part, and with each service working to a set of quality standards

2) A range of **housing options** is needed for all households who are threatened with homelessness to access wherever they are, including recognition of the private rented sector as a prevention option

3) The need for **prevention and early intervention** to target services at those at highest risk and facing an escalation of the likelihood of homelessness

4) **Casework** that is intended to go beyond accessing advice and information with service users accessing specialists who can provide assertive intervention

5) Access to **support** for vulnerable households thereby preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness

6) Promoting financial inclusion

7) Having a dedicated **Youth Housing Strategy**, with a specific commitment to ending the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16/17 year olds

8) The **reduction** of the use of **Temporary Accommodation** to meet the LAA and statutory targets, and achieve cost savings and settled lifestyles for households affected by homelessness

9) All of the above needs to be delivered through **strong partnerships** working towards shared goals

Are there any other priorities not listed that you think are important that are not listed?