

**Report to City and County of Cardiff
Council**

**Tackling Homelessness – A Review
of Cardiff’s Homelessness Service.**

**Report produced by
Andy Gal
Housing & Public Sector Consultar**

Draft Report January 2007

Aims of the Review.

This review of the homelessness service of Cardiff Council has taken place at the request of that Council who wished to obtain a 'critical friend' audit of its statutory homelessness service.

In the short time available the review concentrated on the operational homelessness services relating to advice, prevention, casework assessment and temporary accommodation.

Recommendations within this Report have no status and are simply my observations as the Council's "critical friend". However, due consideration should be given by all parties to the comments and recommendations contained.

It is intended to revisit the service in six months from the date of the final report in order to assess progress in tackling homelessness and in implementing the report's recommendations.

I would like to record my thanks to all those who took the time to meet with me and answer my questions and supply me with information. A full list of those who met during the course of this review is recorded at appendix A.

Andy Gale

CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

1. Executive Summary – Page 4
2. Key Considerations against eight point test – Page 4
3. Homelessness in Wales – Page 9
4. Managing homelessness: how is Cardiff Council performing
Page 12
5. Review key findings and recommendations – Page 18
6. Staff structure and resources – Page 18
7. The administration of homelessness – Page 22
8. Homelessness prevention and housing options – Page 25
9. Temporary accommodation services – Page 32
10. The Council's Homelessness Strategy and Partnership working
Page 36
11. Appendix A – List of people and organisations interviewed – pa
38
12. Appendix B – Bibliography and document references – Page 38
13. Andy Gale biography - Page 39

1.0 Executive Summary

Overall conclusion:

1.1 The review found that Cardiff Council provides a good homelessness service where there are far more strengths than weaknesses. Significant progress has been made in the last twelve months to develop the service despite the City facing increasing housing pressures. It is accurate to state that the service has been 'turned round' during this period and foundations have been put in place to ensure that the Council will be able to move forward in its efforts to tackle homelessness.

1.2 This overall positive conclusion is based on current performance and the fact that there is a clear vision and an achievable plan in place to tackle homelessness more effectively in the future. However, it is essential that these plans are fully implemented in order to meet increased demand for the service and new expectations from the Welsh Assembly Government. The Housing market boom in the capital will place further pressures on already dwindling social housing stock leaving the Council with no choice but to fully implement its homelessness prevention strategy if it is to be able to meet this challenge.

The report is structured in the following way providing:

1. An assessment of the service against eight key considerations using a risk management system to assess the level of risk to the council
2. A more detailed analysis of those findings.

1.3 Key considerations: Is Cardiff Council's Homelessness services in a position to meet the increasing demands placed upon it?

This question is answered by considering eight key considerations that assess a council's 'fitness' to tackle homelessness effectively.

1. Are decision makers taking strategic and practical actions to effectively tackle homelessness?

Medium risk - There is strong evidence that tackling homelessness is a priority for the Council. A clear target was set to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and achieved. The Council regularly scrutinise

performance in tackling homelessness and progress in implementing an action plan produced following the Welsh Audit Office visit in September 2005. Councillor Woodman the Portfolio Holder for the service, and the appointed 'Homelessness Champion', is fully committed to improving the service. In addition members have been supportive in the past where there has been an unavoidable overspend on the homelessness budget and has backed the flexible use of budgets to introduce new initiatives to prevent homelessness and bring the budget under control. Members must now back the final implementation of the structure and the introduction of a number of key new initiatives to ensure that the homeless prevention agenda is firmly embedded. The Council has also provided over £450,000 WAG Performance Incentive Grant (PIG) for the service in 2005/06, one of the few Welsh authorities to ensure that the correct share of this grant has been filtered through to the Homelessness Service. Unfortunately this money has largely been used to pay for an overspend in bed and breakfast accommodation in 2005/06 and in the early period of 2006/07.

2. Is the staff structure, including the number of staff and overall resources adequate to effectively tackle homelessness?

Medium risk – The service has been restructured to provide greater focus on options and prevention. After a number of 'false starts' the Council has now put in place a staff structure that should ensure that homeless prevention is fully implemented. However, the number of staff currently employed on homeless prevention and casework assessment is small compared to many other large city Councils in England. Additional resources must be provided to fully introduce a homeless prevention home visiting service using savings in 2007/08 that will result from ending the use of bed and breakfast hotels. The Council needs to address the gaps in resources and formally adopt an 'invest to save' approach for this service to allow staff resources to be deployed flexibly financed within the overall budget. Currently resources are used flexibly but on a more informal basis which can sometimes delay the implementation of key prevention activities. This has been seen in the time it has taken to fully introduce initiatives to open up the private rented sector and to develop a comprehensive system for visiting applicants claiming to be threatened with homelessness.

3. Has the local authority effectively implemented the homelessness prevention and options agenda required by WAG under the Revised National Homelessness Strategy (2005)?

Medium risk – Much of the preparation work has now been completed in order to implement a prevention and options approach to tackling homelessness. This is an area where work over the next six to twelve months will be crucial. The council needs to fully implement

comprehensive and structured options interviews, and introduce key prevention initiatives relating to home visiting and domestic violence. In addition it needs to significantly increase access to the private rented sector. The success of the proposed private rented lettings agency through Cadwyn Housing Association will be crucial

4. Is there a clear, robust and measurable plan in place to meet new WAG legislative requirements relating to the use of bed and breakfast?

Low risk – Despite high housing demand the Council has eliminated the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This is a significant achievement and the first Council in Wales to achieve this target. Cardiff is also the only large city Council in England and Wales to have eliminated the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. This has been achieved through success in preventing homelessness; more effective management and administration of the service; and the development of good quality alternative temporary accommodation. However, in order to ensure that this position is sustained the council will need to fully introduce and embed its strategy for preventing homelessness.

5. Is the local authority in control of its costs relating to homelessness and is it making best use of its own budget and the external financial resources allocated to tackling homelessness?

Medium risk – There has been significant progress in this area over the last twelve months. In 2005/06 the Council is estimated to have lost upwards of £650,000 on the costs of using bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2005/06 systems for reconciling payments for temporary accommodation with reimbursement through housing benefit payments were not sufficiently controlled. This position has been reversed in 2006/07. Bed and breakfast costs have been reduced significantly and there are strong processes in place to maximise the income received through housing benefit for all forms of temporary accommodation. Managers have a clear understanding of temporary accommodation costs and have monitoring systems in place to reduce the loss to the council through ensuring that the maximum number of housing benefit claims are processed. The senior officer responsible for Housing Benefit and Housing Income recovery is working closely with the Head of Strategy, Advice and Support to ensure that comprehensive systems are in place to reduce costs and maximise income. It is important that the Council releases some of the temporary accommodation savings that will be accrued in 2007/08 to fund the development of the full homeless prevention agenda.

6. Are homelessness administration systems including decision making processes efficient and is there a clear understanding from all staff of the homelessness legislation and its implementation?

Medium risk – This is an area of improving performance. There are good systems and procedures in place covering the homelessness assessment process. This is backed by the introduction of stronger management and supervision systems to cover case decisions and outcomes. Staff possess a good knowledge of the homelessness legislation which is improving, and although they apply the legislation robustly decisions are fair and consistently made. New forms are being introduced as well as a new workflow system which should further improve efficiency and performance. However, these improvements are recent and set against a background of poor performance in this area in the recent past. Whilst an earlier version of the restructure was implemented there was insufficient control and management over the service leading to case backlogs and poor systems for administration. Cases outstanding for up to a year are only now being determined. As a result the number of cases accepted as homeless in 2006/07 will rise significantly on previous years and leaves the Council as one of the few in Wales with rising levels of homeless acceptances. However, it should be recognised that this is entirely as a result of the action taken to clear the backlog of homeless cases and is not as a result of any new working practices.

7. Is the service currently sufficiently customer focused?

Medium risk – Staff provide a responsive customer focused service and are polite and helpful. However, the physical constraints of the current accommodation restrict the ability to offer a service that is fully customer focused. The current Housing Advice Centre building in Marland House is recognised as being inadequate with staff accommodation and interview facilities being fragmented. Overall management of the service is split between two sites which is far from ideal. The Council intends to develop new office accommodation for the service based around the development of a single assessment centre. These plans need to be progressed as a matter of urgency. Some concern was expressed by representatives from the voluntary sector regarding what they perceived to be poor working practices relating to the taking of homelessness applications and decisions. It is clear however, from the review that overall case decisions on homelessness are robust but are lawfully made. It should be recognised that many staff are new into post and a full training programme is being developed to ensure that staff in all areas of work are provided with the technical skills and knowledge to ensure that decisions around the taking of homelessness applications are always correctly applied.

8. Is effective joint working evident and is the local authority making full use of partners to tackle homelessness?

Low risk – There are many aspects of partnership working that are excellent. There is a genuine commitment to partnership working and much of the work to tackle homelessness is provided through the Council's partners.

There is a multi agency Homelessness Strategy Group with sub groups covering all major policy areas. Action plans are developed through this process which feed into the annual review of the Council's Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy Group appears to be a constructive partnership where problems and solutions are genuinely owned, as opposed to the council 'dictating' what should happen. The Council is also held to account for progress against agreed actions through both the sub groups and the annual Multi-Agency Strategy conference. The conference provides a further opportunity to contribute to the setting of new priorities for the coming year.

In any large city it is difficult to ensure that there is a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and its underlying causes through the involvement of all statutory and voluntary sector partners. What is impressive in Cardiff is the effectiveness of its strategic approach and success in implementing its strategy action plan. There are areas where further work is needed including the development of clear protocols between services and the further development of partnership work with health, Children's Services and Education. These partnerships are traditionally more difficult to establish by local authorities. However, they are essential if longer term solutions to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness are to be developed within the context of tackling social exclusion.

2.0 Background (Update)

The issue of homelessness in Wales has become of increasing importance in recent years as numbers of presentations and homeless acceptances rise as the supply of new housing slows down, leading to numbers of households in temporary accommodation increasing.

Fig. 1 Homelessness Presentations and Acceptances Wales 2001-2004

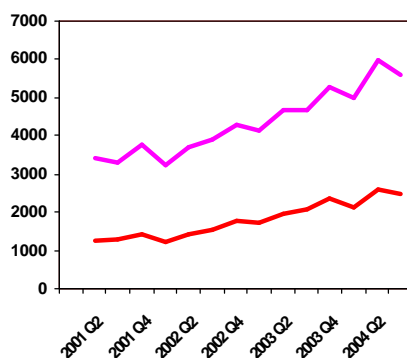
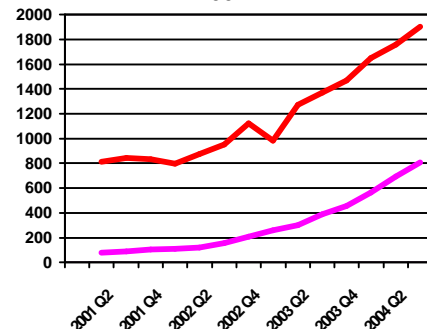


Fig. 2 Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation (and of which those in B&B) Wales 2001-2004



Source: Welsh Housing Statistics Homelessness Bulletin

2.1 Between 1997 and 2004, Welsh Councils reported a 100% increase in homeless acceptances, with a 215% increase in temporary accommodation and a nearly 500% increase in the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation. The response of WAG was to encourage and support new approaches to prevent homelessness through early intervention and the provision of housing options. The last annually released statistics for 2005 indicate that many Welsh councils have firmly adopted this approach leading to a fall in the number of households accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty of 16.5% compared to 20%. The end of December 2005 quarter alone recorded an exceptional decrease of 35% compared to the same period in 2004. This is a demonstration that many Welsh local authorities have not just adopted the principles of homelessness prevention and options but have firmly embedded this approach into front-line service delivery. This improving position has been maintained in 2006. Homelessness is estimated to fall by a further 16% bringing it in line with levels

Wales last seen in 2001.

2.2 The Welsh Assembly and UK National Governments have placed a number of new requirements upon Welsh Authorities over recent years. These have required authorities to look in detail at how they deliver a homelessness service. In particular the extension of the homelessness safety net via the **Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001** has required councils to provide accommodation for a wider range of vulnerable client groups which in turn has put pressure upon a falling supply of suitable permanent accommodation. This in Wales in general, including Cardiff, has created a mismatch between the demand for social housing from groups of increasingly vulnerable single people, and the supply side of social rented housing which lacks single person units. The result as can be seen from the WAG national homelessness statistics is that a large number of single people have been placed in expensive bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation. There is no evidence that this demand and supply imbalance is being addressed through the provision of more single person social rented units. Inevitably, local authorities will have to look to the private rented sector to meet this growing need. The position in Cardiff is no different from other Welsh Councils. Although bed and breakfast has been eliminated there are a large number of single people in hostel accommodation and the Council will need to considerably increase access to the private rented sector in order to meet the demand.

The **Homelessness Act 2002** required all councils to undertake a local homelessness review in consultation with a broad spectrum of interested parties and from that produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy and detailed action plan. This requirement to produce a review and strategy has helped raise the profile of tackling homelessness in Wales amongst members and other statutory bodies.

2.3 In addition to these legislative changes, WAG has published a number of policy statements and reports that contain strategic objectives for homelessness and housing advice. The broad aims that apply to homelessness are set out in Wales' first National Housing Strategy: **Better Homes for People in Wales (2001)** namely:

- Significantly reducing the numbers of long-term homeless households
- Eliminating the need for rough sleeping
- Promoting and ensuring access to high quality advice services in all areas
- Promoting access to specialist housing advice where this is needed.

2.4 These were expanded to 22 specific objectives in the **National Homelessness Strategy (2002)** based on the principle that everyone in Wales should be able to live in a good quality, affordable home. This national strategy

was revised in November 2005 with much greater emphasis placed on early intervention and homelessness prevention.

2.5 One specific national policy agreement measure between WAG and individual councils is in place for the period 2004-07. This relates to the reduction of the use of B&B and average length of time spent in temporary accommodation. The aim of policy agreements is to financially recognise good performance by local authorities. WAG has agreed targets linked to policy agreements for each authority, and has enacted legislation to restrict the use of B&B starting from April 2007.

2.6 In early 2006 WAG passed the Homelessness Suitability of Accommodation Order restricting the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and young people from April 2007 and requiring local authorities to develop clear plans to eliminate its use by April 2008.

2.7 In addition to looking to address the issue of bed and breakfast accommodation, WAG is also emphasizing the importance of homelessness prevention. WAG published the Tarki Technology Report in June 2005. This report recommends that Welsh Councils and their partners should radically alter their approach to tackling homelessness, moving from processing homelessness to early intervention in order to prevent it. Many of the recommendations from that report were incorporated into the revised WAG National Homelessness Strategy and action plan published in November 2005. There is little doubt that WAG expects councils such as Cardiff to significantly alter its approach to tackling homelessness and increase resources for front line prevention and intervention.

2.8 As well as expecting Councils to review the level of resources allocated to tackle homelessness, WAG also announced a further increase in funding for the period 2005 – 2008. The figures for the 'Homelessness and Rough Sleeping' budget were:

2005/ 06 was £4,917, 000 now £4,999,000
2006/ 07 was £4,917,000 now £5,883,000
2007/ 08 was £4,917,000 now £5,969,000

Cardiff has bid successfully for resources through this fund and a further round of Section 180 funding has been announced by WAG in January 2007 to cover the period over the next three years.

2.9 Managing Homelessness: how is Cardiff performing compared to other Welsh local authorities?

Table 1 (below) shows Cardiff's performance in regard to the number of households accepted as homeless compared to all other Welsh local authorities. The table compares performance over three years 2003/2004/2005. These figures demonstrate falling levels of homelessness acceptances over the last two years with the council recording 589 homeless cases accepted in 2005 a fall of 29% on 2004.

Most notably in 2005:

1. The Council recorded an acceptance level per thousand households in Wales at 4.8 per thousand households compared to a Welsh average of 6.9 per thousand. This figure is the lowest in Wales for any urban council and is comparable or lower than other South East Wales Councils despite the city recording the most significant housing market pressures.
2. Falls in homelessness in 2005 need to be put into context. There were a large number of homelessness applications that remained undetermined from this period and action has had to be taken over the last six months to rectify this situation. As a result homeless acceptances in 2006 are likely to be in excess of 850, an increase of 30%. However, the review found that the underlying trend, when case backlog applications are taken out of the equation, is still downward due to tighter administration and management of the process over the last six months and the introduction of further measures to prevent homelessness.
3. At the end of March 2006 the Council recorded the highest number of households in all forms of temporary accommodation. However, this is hardly surprising given the size of the City compared to all other Welsh Councils. Of greater importance is the action taken to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Cardiff is the only Council in Wales to have eliminated its use and this is a significant achievement.

2.10 Cardiff's 2005/06 performance against WAG homelessness National indicators and service block indicators reveal the following:

- **HHSA 001:** Number of families who have used B & B during the year
Performance: Worst quartile
- Average number of days all homeless households spend in TA.
Performance: Worst quartile

HHAS002:

- Average number of working days between homeless presentation and discharge of duty for households found to be statutory homeless.
Performance: Best quartile.
- **HHA 003:** The number of homelessness presentations received by the local authority during the year per 1000 households.
Performance: Best quartile.
- **HHA004:** The amount of General fund resources spent on Bed and Breakfast accommodation during the year as a percentage of the total General Fund resources allocated to the homeless and housing advice service.
Performance: Middle quartile.

HHA005: The percentage of homelessness presentations decided within 33 working days.
Performance: Worst quartile.

HHA006: (a) The number of requests for a review following local authority decisions on homeless presentations.
Performance: Worst quartile.

HHA006: (b) The percentage of local authority decisions on homeless presentations that were upheld following a review.
Performance: Middle quartile.

HHA007: (a) The total number of households having used Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
Performance: Worst quartile.

HHA007: (b) The total number of homeless households having used other forms of temporary accommodation.
Performance: Worst quartile.

This is the first set of WAG published performance indicators. The Council showed the best performance for two indicators; two are in the middle range and

six in the bottom performance range. However, it is difficult to read too much in these indicators regarding current performance. The size of the City will always result in higher homelessness presentations, numbers in temporary accommodation and time spent in temporary accommodation. In 2006/07 indicators relating to speed of casework, bed and breakfast, temporary accommodation costs, and reviews should improve significantly. Council's with higher homeless demand are more likely to perform poorly on these set of indicators. As such the relatively poor performance recorded is not necessarily an accurate record of performance and the Council's position needs to be considered in this context. From next year WAG may well introduce a further indicator on homeless prevention and it is performance in this area that will ultimately record the effectiveness of the Council's Homelessness service in the future.

Table 1: Homelessness Acceptances 2005 compared to 2004 and 2003 plus homelessness recorded as a percentage of acceptances per 1,000 households, by authority

Authority	Homeless acceptances 2003	Homeless Acceptances 2004	Homeless acceptances 2005 and % change	Number Households In LA Area From 2001 Census	Acceptances per1,000 households 2004
Isle of Anglesey	143	298	175 -41%	28,356	10.5
Gwynedd	302	409	362 -11%	49,237	8.3
Conwy	233	346	353 +2%	48,062	7.2
Denbigh	162	252	203 -19%	39,891	6.3
Flintshire	420	550	459 -17%	60,539	9.1
Wrexham	264	321	291 -9%	53,226	6.0
Powys	485	522	388 -26%	53,865	9.7
Ceredigion	188	362	217 -40%	30,972	11.7
Pembrokeshire	458	537	564 +5%	48,176	11.1
Carmarthenshire	562	686	441 -36%	73,112	9.4
Swansea	961	1124	984 -12%	94,400	12.0
Neath Port Talbot	240	380	334 -12%	57,609	6.6
Bridgend	711	754	778 +3%	53,342	14.1
The Vale of Glamorgan	314	314	172 -45%	48,753	6.4
Cardiff	832	834	589 -29%	123,580	6.7
Rhondda Cynon Taf	675	571	341 -40%	94,553	6.0
Merthyr Tydfil	231	264	140 -47%	23,145	11.4
Caerphilly	480	447	327 -27%	69,341	6.4
Blaenau Gwent	68	82	147 +79%	29,585	2.8
Torfaen	363	420	364 -13%	37,576	11.1
Monmouthshire	175	258	284 +10%	35,193	7.3
Newport	245	309	463 +50%	56,535	5.5
Wales	8,512	10,040	8376 -16.5%	1,209,048	8.3

(Source: Welsh Housing Statistics 2003 and 2004 and provisional 2005 plus Census 2001)

Table 5 Homeless households accommodated temporarily at the end of March 2006.

Number of households

	Placed directly with a private sector landlord	Private sector accommodation leased by LA	Private sector accommodat ion leased by RSL	Local authority stock
Isle of Anglesey	0	21	0	117
Gwynedd	0	1	0	1
Conwy	19	74	2	0
Denbighshire	0	35	0	1
Flintshire	0	10	0	95
Wrexham	0	0	0	18
Powys	0	2	0	9
Ceredigion	0	28	0	5
Pembrokeshire	1	0	0	85
Carmarthenshire	0	13	0	2
Swansea	0	0	0	0
Neath Port Talbot	0	1	0	20
Bridgend	0	0	0	0
The Vale of Glamorgan	3	0	0	0
Cardiff	0	160	10	106
Rhondda Cynon Taf	0	0	0	22
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	0	0
Caerphilly	0	0	26	36
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	0	0
Torfaen	0	0	0	19
Monmouthshire	0	74	0	5
Newport	1	22	4	0
Wales	24	441	42	541

Source WAG National Statistical Release.

Homeless households accommodated temporarily at the end March 2006 (cont)

Number of househ

Hostels	Women's refuges	Bed and breakfast	Other	Homeles s at Home	Total	
1	1	34	0	110	288	Isle of Ar
8	6	71	4	15	106	Gwyn
3	4	35	0	8	145	Conwy
0	2	10	2	0	55	Denbig
40	0	43	0	0	230	Flintsh
11	0	24	0	0	53	Wrexh
25	1	0	0	98	135	Powys
	0	13	0	32	78	Ceredi
6	1	73	2	256	430	Pembr
0	14	25	6	0	60	Carma
8	3	24	1	282	322	Swans
12	2	17	0	11	63	Neath
14	10	16	0	62	102	Bridge
						The Vi
32	0	8	0	25	68	Glamo
126	0	46	227	0	687	Cardif
						Rhond
14	6	31	0	0	73	Taf
2	3	1	0	0	6	Merthy
15	7	16	0	21	121	Caerpi
13	0	9	0	0	22	Blaena
12	0	40	27	29	127	Torfae
2	2	9	22	0	114	Monm
33	9	48	8	32	157	Newpc
377	71	593	299	981	3442	Wales

Source WAG National Statistical Release

Cardiff Council 'critical friend' Review – Detailed Findings.

3.1 Staff Structure and staff resources

3.2 The Council's Homelessness Service has been subject to an ongoing restructure over the last two years. The time taken to restructure had led to some frustration and anxiety amongst staff. Up to eighteen months ago the advice function was operated from a shop front Housing Help Centre. There were concerns that this service was not fully able to embrace new working methods regarding options and homelessness prevention and that the links between the Help Centre and the Homelessness assessment team were fragmented with poor working relationships.

3.3 As a result in 2005 the Housing Help Centre was moved and the service restructured so that advice and homelessness assessment staff provided a generic service covering advice, homelessness prevention and casework. This clearly did not work for a number of reasons. It failed to take into account the skills, experience and preferences of existing team members. Furthermore, given the size of the service and the City it was always going to be difficult to ensure that staff were able to cover all the functions expected of them adequately. There also appeared to be resentment from some members of the original Housing Advice Service in having to take on responsibilities relating to statutory homelessness, after many years being employed in Housing Advice. The result of all these issues was that the service experienced a great deal of unrest and instability. The new structure clearly failed to bring about the improvements required leading to low staff morale; some experienced staff leaving; and poor performance particularly in relation to preventing homelessness and statutory homelessness casework. Large backlogs of cases developed with insufficient management control over the administration of homelessness. The backlog was not created as a result of the restructure but as a result of the old structure and systems. The new service inherited considerable problems and has worked hard to clear the backlog of outstanding work.

3.4 It is to the credit of the Council's Management team that they recognise that the new structure wasn't working and took swift action to rectify the problem. A new structure has been implemented providing staff with clear roles and focus. Most importantly the function of advice and prevention was separated from homelessness casework. A post of Advice and Support Manager was created and recruited to, providing clear operational management control. The staff interviewed during the review universally felt

motivated and understood their role and what is expected of them. Team meetings, personal development plans and away team planning days had a been introduced and were appreciated. One area of risk to note however is that the Advice and Prevention function has lost a number of staff with substantial experience. The balance of the team is either new staff or staff who are new to role. There is a need to ensure that the team receives full training to ensure that it is able to implement advice and prevention to its maximum effectiveness. This issue is recognised by the management team and a structured training programme is being developed.

3.5 The unit has been renamed the Housing Advice Unit. The new unit has prime focus on preventing homelessness and has been divided into four streams, with the teams within these streams each 'owning' a different part of the process. A senior manager has responsibility for advice and prevention, with the separate responsibility of processing statutory applications and decision-making falling to another senior manager.

3.6 The first team provides the Reception service which consists of the General Advice team providing advice and information on different housing options, administering emergency homelessness applications and making referrals to the Prevention team and other agencies. There are 5 Housing Advice staff undertaking this role and this team is relatively well resourced. There are also 5 admin support officers within the team.

3.7 Within the Prevention Team there are 8 dedicated prevention officers who provide the back up service for cases referred from the general advice team that need specialist prevention advice and casework.

3.8 The assessment team covers the functions for casework assessment of statutory homelessness applications and decisions and arranges and administers temporary accommodation. Referrals are taken from the General Advice and Prevention Team where homelessness cannot be averted or where a statutory homelessness application has been triggered. There is one Senior assessment officer and 3 Assessment Officers. Two officers deal with more complicated casework and one undertakes quick assessment of more routine cases or where all the information has been obtained through the advice or prevention teams. In addition there is a Liaison and Enforcement Officer responsible for facilitating structured evictions. The function of managing placements into temporary accommodation also falls within this unit. This also incorporates the movement of households between temporary accommodation facilities and from emergency provision including hostels.

3.9 It is the General Advice and Prevention functions along with casework assessment and temporary accommodation that were the focus of this review.

3.10 The review did not look at the allocations function and this I understand is subject to a separate piece of work by a consultant. There have clearly been improvements in this area of work over the last six months. Nominations arrangements have been improved with RSLs and increased access for homeless households negotiated. A new allocations policy has been introduced providing homeless households with quotas and the Council is taking a tighter approach regarding applicant's area of choice in recognition of the limited re-housing opportunities that exist. It is clear from the review that these changes are long overdue.

3.11 However, it is surprising that the allocations function is not part of the Strategy, Advice and Support Service. It remains within the Housing Management service. It was notable that the time period between accepting a homelessness duty and a case being made live under the Council's allocations scheme was in some cases far too long. There is a procedure in place to refer cases to the Housing Safety Unit to check on previous rent arrears or previous behavioural problems. This system appeared to be highly bureaucratic leading to unacceptable delays in some cases. There is a danger that this process may also risk claims of maladministration due to delays in considering applicants for re-housing.

3.12 With regard to the staff complement for the Advice, Prevention and Casework functions there remain insufficient resources to fully implement all the service improvements required in relation to homelessness prevention and options. As a minimum it is essential that any revised structure ensures that:

- Every person approaching the Council in housing need is able to receive an options and homelessness prevention interview backed by the resources and initiatives that will ensure that early intervention is effective. This will include a full home visiting service whereby all potentially threatened with homelessness applicants are able to be visited within their homes to verify circumstances and negotiate with the household threatening to exclude them: *and that*
- Every potential statutory homeless applicant is able to receive a full interview on the first day they present as homeless, to ensure that duties are not accepted to applicants who are in fact not homeless or threatened with homelessness and that a thorough investigation of their circumstances takes place in order to determine whether a duty is owed.

3.13 To achieve these aims the Council should consider:

- Increasing the staff complement by two full time homeless prevention visiting officers. These posts are essential for the Council to be able to develop a full outward facing prevention and options service. In addition whilst the new service is being 'bedded down' it is recommended that the Council appoint an additional homelessness assessment caseworker on a 12 month contract. Until the prevention strategy is fully implemented there will be increased pressure on casework assessment especially at peak periods or where there is sickness or leave. The current staff complement for casework assessment is 'light' when compared to other similar size cities in England. These permanent and temporary posts should be paid for on an 'invest to save' basis using savings within the 2007/08 temporary accommodation budget.

Recommendations

Cardiff should consider the following options or combination thereof:

- I. Recruit two prevention home visiting officers.*
- II. Recruit one temporary member of staff for the casework assessment team to ensure that sufficient resources are available overall to fully implement prevention and options.*
- III. Job evaluate all posts in the new Allocations and advice team to ensure that the grades for all functions reflect the increased responsibilities.*

|

4.0 The administration of Homelessness.

4.1 As discussed in the executive summary section of the report the administration of the statutory homeless function is an area of improving performance. The key review findings in this area were:

4.2 It is evident that the implementation of the revised structure is leading to control over the administration of homelessness. However, this is not being reflected in the overall figures relating to the number of applications accepted as homeless in 2006/07. This is because large backlogs of cases were built up over the last twelve months that have had to be assessed and determined under the new structure. Inevitably where applications have been outstanding for a long period there is little choice but to accept a full homelessness duty. As a result homeless accepted cases for 2006/07 will be up on the previous year by up to 30% but this is not an accurate reflection on what is an improving service for both homeless prevention and a correct assessment of who is owed a statutory homeless duty. Households accepted as being owed a full homelessness duty for the period Jan – Dec 2006 were 791.

4.3 The Council has clearly become more effective at administering homelessness over the last 6 months. Homelessness Officers are more confident of the law and how to apply it to who is and isn't owed a homelessness duty. A series of template letters have been developed to speed up decision making and to try and ensure that decision letters meet legal requirements. All placements into temporary accommodation have to be signed off by the Senior Caseworker for Assessment. As a result placements into temporary accommodation have fallen from an average of 16 a day to just 2/3 a day.

4.4 There are good systems now in place for filtering cases. All cases that are potentially homeless and in priority need are seen by the General Advice Team and the Prevention Team. Only where there is no opportunity to prevent the homelessness will responsibility pass to the Homelessness Assessment team. This change in procedure since the restructure will undoubtedly contribute to falling homelessness applications over time as prevention becomes more effective. It should also result in much of the preparatory casework and verification of circumstances being completed at the Advice and prevention stage further speeding up the assessment process. However the current staff complement of three homeless assessment officers and one senior officer may be insufficient until the positive effects of the new prevention approach are fully realised. As is stated in the section on structure, the Council should consider carefully recruiting at least one additional temporary assessment officer into the

team and to review the position in twelve months when the full effects of prevention can be more closely analysed.

4.5 Looking at a random selection of cases, files have reasonable levels of case notes and there is overall, sufficient evidence that adequate investigations are being carried out to justify the decision either to accept or reject a homeless application. Evidence is collected to confirm identification, immigration status and responsibility for children. It would be sensible if more inquiries were carried out on cases and the information received recorded in greater detail. This is important given that the service receives a large and increasing number of legal challenges to decisions made. Advice on making enquiries, defending decisions and sensible file management are contained at appendix 4 of the report. Staff should also receive further training for interview skills and statement taking as part of any ongoing training programme.

4.6 Homelessness officers need to continue to keep up to date with changes to legislation through case law. As part of the review refresher training was provided to all relevant Housing staff. However, not all staff in both the assessment and advice teams have their own access to the basic legal textbooks that all front line homeless staff are expected to possess to ensure that they are able to apply the legislation correctly. The core homelessness practitioner textbooks have recently been updated and republished in September 2006 and the Council should take the opportunity to purchase individual copies of these texts for all operational front line staff and managers.

4.7 Case files are well structured and maintained. Case notes are reasonable and it is clear from files how decisions have been reached. Decision letters are reasonable but could be improved by developing more template letters for each type of case decision. Homelessness applications are determined in reasonable time with on average 90% of cases determined within 33 days at the time of the review.

4.8 The Homelessness team have a good working knowledge of the homelessness legislation and case law but should receive ongoing training to develop a more advanced knowledge of the law and its application.

4.9 A Homelessness IT system is being developed using external consultants. Procedures feeding into this system are being developed with the input of all staff. A system of 'on the desk top' workflow procedures will provide clear up to date advice to staff on how they should work and should also simplify working procedures leading to greater efficiency.

4.10 Performance and case decisions are to some extent scrutinised within the homelessness assessment team. This includes the production of lists detailing households accepted as homeless, recording whether cases have been determined. However, the Homeless Process Manager is finding that most of h

time is taken up dealing with statutory homelessness reviews and legal challenges. This limits the amount of time he can spend managing the service and ensuring that systems of supervision and performance management are fully controlled. At the time of the review an additional senior officer had been re-designated to support the Homelessness Process Manager with statutory reviews. It is important that the Service manager is supported in 'letting go' of some of these responsibilities thereby freeing him up to concentrate on other important management tasks.

There is a need for a formal supervision and performance framework for the assessment team. This should include casework supervision meetings on a fortnightly basis and a system for checking and signing off all statutory cases accepted as homeless and introducing a formal long term procedure for checking all placements into temporary accommodation. Ideally good practice suggests that a system of random checks should also be introduced involving the Assistant Advice and Support Manager and the Overall Head of Service for Strategy, Advice and Support.

Recommendations.

- I. All staff in the new Housing Advice service should receive ongoing advanced training on homelessness legislation and case law as well as training in conducting assessments and statement taking. It is important that all staff are trained as a team.*
- II. As a basic tool to undertake their duties all staff should receive their own copy of Arden and Hunter's seventh edition guide to homelessness and allocations; and Luba and Davis's guide to homelessness law. These standard textbooks for this area of work were updated and published in September 2006.*
- III. Standard decision letters should be developed for all types of case decisions and enquiries.*
- IV. The Experian credit referencing system should be introduced as soon as possible to aid case investigations.*
- V. A case quality audit system should be introduced with a randomly selected number of determined cases checked by the Assistant Advice and Support Manager and the overall Head of Service for Strategy Advice and Support to provide a further check on the quality and correctness of the decision made.*

5.0 Homelessness Prevention and Housing Options.

5.1 Homelessness Prevention is a primary aim of the WAG revised National Homelessness Strategy published in November 2005. In Cardiff good progress has been made on implementing the prevention agenda. There are excellent examples of partnership working focused on homelessness prevention and the service restructure has put in place the building blocks to develop fully a prevention and options service. However, there are a number of gaps. Most notable is the need to commit more resources to introduce a home visiting service aimed at preventing homelessness from applicants threatened exclusic from parents, relatives and friends and landlords. The Council has also been unable to fully 'open up' the private rented sector to provide realistic housing options for large numbers of statutory homeless. The main review findings in th area are:

5.2 The balance of staff resources for the service is concentrated on preventing homelessness and promoting housing options. In total 14 (FTE) staff are involv in preventing homelessness compared to just 9 involved in processing homelessness applications. Councils that have fully implemented homeless prevention aim for 70% of staff time to be spent on preventing homelessness a 30% on processing homelessness claims. In Cardiff the split is estimated at 74/26%. Although there is more to do to fully implement prevention the allocati of staff time and resources is appropriate to achieve this task.

5.3 Cardiff Council introduced one of the first Mediation partnerships aimed at preventing homelessness in the UK. Llamau operate housing advice, homelessness prevention and mediation from the HOPS team that are co-located within the Homelessness service. All applicants under the age of 21 are referred to the HOPS team. The Llamau mediation service provides a service f young people and their parents. This ground breaking scheme has been highly effective at preventing youth homelessness. Inevitably there are some minor tensions relating to the referral process from the HOPS team to the assessmer team and how the role of the HOPS team should be developed. The Council is seeking to review its service level agreement with Llamau to fully describe each party's responsibilities. This is a sensible approach that can only enhance the effectiveness of what has proved to be a groundbreaking and valuable service. The success of both the HOPS advice team and the Mediation service is impressive. Taking the last quarter for mediation (July 2006 to September 2006

- 89 cases were referred
- 42% of young people were able to remain at home.
- 8% were able to return home with ongoing mediation support.

For the HOPS young persons advice service:

- 341 individuals were seen.

- 51% returned home or remained home with mediation involvement.
- 40% were referred to supported accommodation.
- 10% accessed supported accommodation.
- Only 10% were referred on to the Council's homeless assessment service.

5.4 Despite there being an informal 'invest to save policy' this has not been translated into an active prevention of homelessness fund that is understood and fully used by all front line officers. It is true that some payments have been made to prevent homelessness. However, there is no culture of using such payments on a regular basis. Nor is there a clear policy backed by an established prevention fund. This is a gap that needs to be addressed to back the new 'can do' culture that the Council is seeking to establish. The Council should formally set up a fund of at least £40,000 for this purpose and develop a clear policy and eligibility criteria.

5.5 The Council has developed specialists within the Homelessness Prevention team building upon what worked well in the previous Housing Help Centre. Although officers work flexibly across all areas of advice and prevention they all specialise in one or more areas. These include rent rescue; housing benefit issues; tenancy relations work; migrant workers issues and hospital discharge arrangements. There is also work carried out within the team on debt and welfare rights by an officer from Shelter Cymru and domestic abuse through an officer from Cardiff Women's Aid. This approach of combining voluntary sector and Council officers to specialise in different aspects of prevention is highly innovative and in time should be highly effective. However, the team is still in its early stages of development and there is insufficient monitoring information or procedures in place to judge effectiveness. These need to be developed. In addition there is no effective outreach intervention with private landlords who have issued notice requiring private sector tenants to leave. The service largely operates on the basis of dealing with applicants who present directly. Good practice elsewhere has determined that it is only when a service is provided face to face with landlords and tenants threatened with homelessness that a council will be able to maximise the effectiveness of this prevention scheme.

5.6 There is no system for home visits to assess whether applicants are genuinely threatened with homelessness from parents and other relatives. All research into homelessness recommends home visiting intervention as a priority in the development of a prevention approach given that exclusion by parents and relatives is the biggest cause of homelessness both in Cardiff and elsewhere in Wales.

5.7 There are good working relationships with housing benefit, a key partnership in preventing homelessness effectively. There is access to a named benefit officer for the Prevention Team and access to the Council's DHP fund (see below). However, all homelessness service staff need training in verification and

basic training in the key housing benefit rules as to their effect on homelessness namely overpayments, backdating of claims, when benefit can be paid on more than one property, and the rules relating to 'first contact' for new claims. Given the importance of effective housing benefit processes in preventing homelessness a joint working service level agreement should be developed to formalise the relationship.

5.8 There is some good work with Housing Management services and RSLs to intervene effectively to prevent homelessness from existing tenants. Debt and welfare advice is available and the Legal Services Commission funds an independent County Court desk through Riverside Advice for all social housing tenants threatened with eviction for rent arrears. In addition the Council's Liaison and Enforcement Officer works closely with the housing management team to ensure that there is early warning of any potential evictions. The Council has also negotiated a Community Housing Agreement with all the leading RSLs. This agreement needs to be developed to include clear commitments from RSLs on how they will help prevent homelessness from tenants facing homelessness due to arrears, anti social behaviour, domestic violence and harassment. Specific protocols may need to be developed for these areas.

5.9 There is a good focus on providing practical options to prevent homelessness from women experiencing domestic violence. There is an officer from Cardiff Women's Aid located within the Prevention team and good arrangements in place with social landlords for dealing with tenants made homeless through domestic abuse. This includes an officer panel that meets to fast track re-housing for such cases. The Council, through its leading role in the South East Wales Local Authority Homelessness Group is looking to develop a sub regional protocol for re-housing domestic abuse cases on a reciprocal basis. However, the Council is yet to develop one of the key homeless prevention initiatives namely a Sanctuary Scheme. There is a 'target hardening' scheme in place but this is no substitute for developing a sanctuary partnership where the option of remaining within the home with professionally installed security is available across all tenures free of charge. Such a scheme is in the early stages of development but should be a priority action for 2007.

5.10 Despite ground breaking work to develop the Cardiff Bond Board, the private rented sector is not being utilised to its full potential in order to provide alternative accommodation options for the statutory homeless. The Cardiff Bond Board was one of the inaugural Bond schemes in the UK and helped develop the Bond concept across the Country. It still fulfils a useful purpose especially for priority single homeless households and couples. There is also a family Bond scheme that has been relatively successful. However, the scheme overall has been described as 'risk averse' requiring a high level of cash Bond guarantees in order to expand its work significantly. There is little staff capacity to market the scheme more professionally or to operate as a charitable lettings agency to maximise the number of private sector lets. Sensibly it would be better to fund

the Bond scheme to concentrate exclusively on the single non priority homeless and fully develop the Calon Lettings scheme to concentrate on private rented options from statutory homeless households threatened with homelessness.

5.11 To this end the Council has developed a partnership with Cadwyn Housing association to develop a private rented lettings scheme. Known as Calon Letting the scheme is critical for the Council in order to exploit the opportunities in the private rented sector to the full. The Council intends to fund the staffing costs of developing a lettings agency run by Cadwyn Housing Association. The RSL would find properties in the private rented sector and offer a management service at a competitive price. There are very few such partnerships of this type in the UK and if successful could be one more innovative scheme for the council in tackling homelessness. However, the initiative must be successful and at least double the number of lettings to potentially priority need households when compared to the current Bond scheme. The Council may need to provide the resources for Calon Lettings to offer further incentives depending on the strength of the private rented market. There is a need for a flexible scheme with possibly a 'toolkit' of options for landlords to offer including rent in advance, rent deposits, and incentive payments. A limit of say £300 per tenancy could be set regardless of how toolkit options are deployed. With such flexibility the Council should be looking to achieve up to 300 private rented lettings a year to prevent homelessness.

5.12 The Council has one of the best records in the UK at maximising its Discretionary Housing Payment fund and utilising it to help prevent homelessness. In 2005/06 the Council was granted a fund of £229,000 the highest in the UK when compared to per head of population. All of this money has been spent, an impressive record given that this is free money from the DVLA to help with housing costs. Many Councils fail to spend this fund resulting in grant funding being reduced in future years. It is also clear that the fund is being targeted effectively at households who would otherwise be threatened with homelessness due to rent shortfalls. The Homelessness Process Manager attends the monthly DHP review panel and there are good links with the housing benefits service relating to the administration of the fund.

5.13 The service is working effectively with other council departments and external agencies to prevent homelessness. There are ad hoc arrangements in place with children's services covering care leavers and intentionally homeless households. In addition Hospital discharge arrangements have been developed for delayed discharge for applicants with mental health problems, and processes agreed with prison link for ex-offenders due for release. Welcome though these ad hoc arrangements are there are few formal protocols agreed or monitoring the effectiveness of arrangements agreed. Nor is it clear that all these other agencies are fully signed up to the prevention of homelessness agenda. Arrangements that merely shift responsibility to the Council's Housing service are not realistic in today's housing climate. Protocols for working with social service

covering care leavers, young people and intentionally homeless families are needed. Hospital discharge protocols need to be formalised as should procedures for working with offender management to prevent homelessness for offenders who hold a tenancy upon sentence and for offenders due to be released from following a custodial sentence.

5.14 The Council has published a document entitled 'Is that all there is' to help options approach. It is a clear document demonstrating honestly and openly the overall shortage of Council accommodation and scarcity of accommodation in certain areas of the City. This provides a reality check to applicants and some agencies that may have unrealistic aspirations regarding the supply of social housing. Sensibly the council should seek to make agencies and members fully aware of the report's findings.

Recommendations.

- I. A system of home visits should be introduced for all family and friend cases of threatened homelessness. The purpose of such visits should be to verify whether homelessness is genuine and to discuss alternative options available to the applicant. This will require the appointment of two dedicated home visiting officers.*
- II. The role of the rent rescue prevention officer should be expanded to ensure that there is direct intervention with private landlords where notice has been given. The aim should be to keep the tenant in the property or find alternative accommodation before homelessness occurs.*
- III. The service should formally establish a homeless prevention fund of at least £40,000 (separate from any rent deposit landlord incentive payments) and develop clear criteria for how this fund should be spent to ensure that all staff are able to access and use the fund to maximise opportunities for homeless prevention.*
- IV. There is a need to develop formal protocols and service level agreements with a range of statutory services and partners pinning down the actions that they will take to prevent homelessness.*
- V. Increase options for women who are homeless or threatened with homelessness due to domestic violence. Options should include the introduction of a sanctuary type scheme to offer DV victims the option of remaining at home with appropriate security, seeking to negotiate a sim*

reciprocal agreement with other South East Wales Councils, and better use to Refuges on-line to provide options for victims of domestic abuse who need to relocate. The dedicated prevention officer for domestic abuse located within the team provides an excellent opportunity to develop DV homelessness prevention services further.

- VI. Review working arrangements with Llamau who operate the HOPS and mediation service so that all parties are clear on their respective roles and responsibilities concerning prevention of homelessness and appropriate referrals. The Council should also consider extending the scope of the service to include young people over the age of 18 and pregnant young women.*
- VII. The Council should carefully consider the level of incentives required to ensure that the Calon Lettings Scheme will be able to develop substantially access to the private rented sector as both a homeless prevention option and as accommodation that can be converted from temporary accommodation to qualifying offers.*
- VIII. In relation to the existing Cardiff Bond Board scheme there is a need to review its operation and focus. Monthly performance information should be recorded and provided to the Council to include:
 - a. Number of new tenancies obtained per month (excluding renewals).*
 - b. Number to single priority need cases and to non priority cases.*
 - c. Number of cases referred by the homeless service compared to self referral.*
 - d. Number of live Bonds.*
 - e. Average length of tenancy procured.*
 - f. Amount of bonded money.*
 - g. Claims against the Bond.*
 - h. Copies of marketing information for landlords and scheme information for clients.**
- IX. Housing benefit should provide full training for front line staff on the rules relating to claim verification, overpayments and backdating, first contact rules on HB applications, and when HB can be paid in special circumstances where the person is not resident. This will ensure that all staff are fully aware of how housing benefit can be used to aid homelessness prevention.*
- X. All internal homelessness staff and partner agencies should be trained as agents for the verification framework so that benefit claims can be processed in quick time.*

- XI. *A service level agreement should be negotiated between the Homelessness and Housing Benefit services. At present cooperation operates on the personal commitment of one or two individuals.*
- XII. *Professionally produced Information leaflets and packs should be produced covering all the areas of homelessness prevention and option work. A pack for single non priority homeless should be produced.*

6.0 Cardiff's Temporary Accommodation services

6.1 Again this is an area of strong performance. The Council has clearly demonstrated a planned strategic approach to the procurement and management of temporary accommodation over the last twelve months or more. The review found that:

- a) The Council has taken decisive and effective action to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all homeless households including single people. This has been achieved despite having one of the highest numbers of households in bed and breakfast accommodation eighteen months previously. This is a considerable achievement meeting WAG legislative requirements.
- b) The review found good administration of temporary accommodation placements. Vacancies are monitored and controlled with homeless households placed in the most appropriate form of temporary accommodation with their support needs assessed.
- c) All temporary accommodation placements at the time of the review were placed within the Council's geographical boundaries a considerable achievement for a Council the size of Cardiff.
- d) There is a wide portfolio of temporary accommodation used including a large number of hostel units with high and low support available; Council leased accommodation; RSL leased and voluntary sector leased accommodation. Each form of accommodation has been carefully planned and assessed to minimise the financial cost to the council and most schemes are cost neutral. The Council has taken a clear decision not to rely on one form of provision hence a range of schemes both in house and contracted out. Impressively virtually all temporary accommodation used has all or some self contained facilities.
- e) The quality of the accommodation used is of a very high standard and the Council takes seriously its responsibility to provide good quality suitable accommodation appropriate to the needs of individual applicants. Good support services are provided including a health visitor for the Council's hostels.
- f) There is a good balance between emergency accommodation, generally provided within the Council's hostels, and second stage accommodation which is largely provided in the leased units.
- g) The management of temporary accommodation is well resourced and comprehensive. The function has been split between a team to manage the property and a team to manage and support the people placed. The

Council is in the process of carrying out a review of accommodation standards to ensure that all temporary accommodation is able to meet WAG future legislative requirements.

- h) Working arrangements and contracts with all external temporary accommodation providers are being reviewed to ensure that they are full cost effective and that any financial risk to the Council is minimised. The arrangements are then being reflected in revised service level agreements of contracts.
- i) The Council needs to be careful to ensure that it does not over commit itself to large number of units that it may not be able to use in the future. There is a need for a more strategic approach to procuring temporary accommodation to ensure that the right type and number of units are procured to meet current and future demand from applicants whose case is under investigation or where a full homelessness duty has been accepted. There is little doubt that as the prevention and options agenda becomes fully effective that the number of temporary accommodation units needed may need to be reduced. The Council needs to undertake full demand and supply analysis and develop a model that will allow it to accurately predict future needs.
- j) The Council has a system to record the status and re housing position of each applicant residing in temporary accommodation. However, this needs to be improved upon, and used as an effective performance monitoring tool. There were a significant number of households whose status was unclear; or who were currently not being considered for a housing offer; or who were awaiting eviction from temporary accommodation. From the list it was not possible to determine what action was being taken on an individual case by case basis. In addition this list was not being used as a performance tool to control who was in temporary accommodation and how they were being monitored effectively to move through the process. In short this list should be extended and used as a management tool to monitor the position of every household in temporary accommodation and ensure that action was in place to move people through the process. For example for the week before the review out of 589 households recorded as being in temporary accommodation:
 - 73 were recorded as closed with no information as to whether they were due for eviction; had moved out; were under notice.
 - 18 were appealing against offers on the grounds of suitability. Some reviews had been outstanding for some time.
 - 87 were deferred for exclusion issues often taken by the Councils Housing and Safety unit. It was not clear how these cases were then to be managed in terms of say ensuring that applicants resolved matters or arrears that had led to the exclusion.

- 97 were accepted full duty homeless cases that were under consideration by the Housing and Safety unit or were in the process. Some of these cases had been awaiting consideration for some time pending written calls for references, etc

6.2 Taken together this represents a large proportion of cases in temporary accommodation who were not being actively considered for settled accommodation due to deferral issues or awaiting information, clarification or references.

- k) The Council has recognised that it needs to do more to free up single person hostel accommodation across the city to ensure that this resource could be used for preventing homelessness and avoiding the unnecessary use of the Council's temporary accommodation resources. A piece of work had emerged from the accommodation sub group of the multi agency Homelessness Forum to review the availability of the City's voluntary sector hostels; who was accessing these facilities and why more applicants were not moving on. The silting up of the City's hostel stock is a considerable problem and the Council needs to ensure that the findings of the accommodation sub group are implemented and reflected in a clear action plan.

Financing Temporary Accommodation and Recovering Costs.

6.3 This area of the review looked at whether the Council was losing money on its temporary accommodation schemes and whether systems were in place to maximise housing benefit temporary accommodation claims in payment and the level of subsidy payable on these claims. An analysis of the way temporary accommodation is financed reveals an improving position in 2006/07 following a number of years where significant losses were made especially as a result of a high number of bed and breakfast placements and poor income recovery processes. Key operational issues in this area are:

6.4 The budget for B&B overspent significantly in 2005/06 with a net cost of £650,000 plus. The budget for 2006/07 will again overspend due to placements in the first quarter of the financial year. Bed and breakfast has now been eliminated. However, the budget for bed and breakfast for both of these years was not set at a realistic level and the service was expected to make up shortfalls using other sources of revenue that could have been targeted on homelessness prevention initiatives. In 2007/08 the Council should set a realistic temporary accommodation budget that covers its costs and provides resources to develop formal investment to save policy.

In the past there had been a lack of clarity amongst managers on how to identify what are gross and net costs for temporary accommodation. This had resulted in problems relating to the recovery of income through housing benefit which were exacerbated by poor procedures relating to the setting up of housing benefit claims for applicants placed into bed and breakfast accommodation. On the evidence available during the time on site these problems have been addressed through close working arrangements between the service and benefits and a strong financial monitoring system in place for this area.

Recommendations.

- I. The Council should be careful not to over commit itself to temporary accommodation given its emerging prevention agenda which may further reduce its need for the current portfolio.*
- II. The Council should improve its system for recording the status and rehousing position of each applicant residing in temporary accommodation. This should be used as an effective performance monitoring tool. Any lists should be used so that managers and staff have a clear picture of what is happening on an individual case by case basis and used to effectively move people through the process.*
- III. Savings from eliminating bed and breakfast should be used to establish formal 'invest to save' fund and reinvested back into front line homelessness prevention.*

7.0 The Council's Homelessness Strategy and Partnership Working.

7.1 This is a strong area of performance and the Council can clearly demonstrate a strategic approach to tackling homelessness which is innovative and inclusive of partner agencies. The review found much work of note in this area including:

- a) The Council's Homelessness Strategy was published in 2003 and its action plan has been regularly updated and monitored through the Multi Agency Homelessness Strategy and Advisory Planning Group.
- b) The Multi Agency Homelessness Strategy Advisory and Planning Group is a well structured and effective body for taking forward work on homelessness in Cardiff. There are a number of sub groups including for example those for accommodation, youth, and direct access hostel services. These groups meet on a monthly basis. Comments obtained during the review indicated that not all the sub groups were working to 'smart' outcomes based agendas, however, taken as a whole the actions emerging from the sub groups are impressive. As part of the Review I attended the Annual Homelessness Conference in September 2006. The conference was inclusive and the Council held itself accountable for progress delivering on the actions agreed the previous year and through the Strategy Group. Many of the comments received from agencies in the action planning session were supportive of the Council and its actions in tackling homelessness.
- c) The strategy action plan is excellent and has been aligned with the recommendations made in the WAG Revised National Homelessness Strategy published in 2005. Its implementation since 2003 has led to many service improvements and it is estimated that over 60% of the original action plan has been fully implemented. More importantly the Strategy action plan is clear and concise with actions that are SMART, costed, and has realistic dates for implementation. It also contains many actions that are customer focused with a clear emphasis on what will benefit the service user.
- d) The Council has invested resources in staffing to ensure that strategic homelessness work is fully developed. The Senior Housing Strategy Officer devotes a considerable amount of her time to homelessness and is supported by a Housing Strategy Officer dedicated to homelessness work. The results of this investment are seen in the development of the multi agency group and sub groups and a work programme which has clearly been developed through the Forum.
- e) The Council is in a strong position to produce a revised up to date Homelessness Strategy by April 2007 to be incorporated into the overall

Housing Strategy as part of WAG's rationalisation of statutory Housing Plans.

7.2 Taken overall there is considerable evidence that the Council's strategic approach to tackling homelessness is well structured, resourced, inclusive and has led to considerable progress in the last year to eighteen months.

7.3 There are other areas of partnership working that are also impressive:

- f) The Council takes a leading and proactive role in the South East Wales Local Authority Homelessness Group. It is willing to share experiences and help other neighbouring Councils learn from its experiences.
- g) Informal training on homelessness and prevention has been provided to number of statutory and voluntary services including health, children's services, NOMS, and refugee and community groups. Sensibly this should be developed into a formal training role to ensure that partners understand the Council's approach and are able to play a full part in helping to prevent homelessness.
- h) The Council has funded Llamau to provide schools based prevention awareness raising in the City's secondary schools. This is in addition to section 180 funding provided by the WAG.
- i) The Council has negotiated with all leading RSLs operating in the City to increase by 5% the proportion of nominations available to the Council to help tackle homelessness.
- j) Services are provided on the basis of who is best placed to deliver a service to the homeless applicant and not always on the basis of in house provision is best. As a result there are numerous aspects of the service provided by partner agencies including, Shelter Cymru, Cardiff Women's Aid, Llamau and various external temporary accommodation providers. There is some impressive work in co-locating services from both the voluntary and statutory sector in the same building and team. This principle breaks down barriers and creates genuine cross sector partnerships to effectively tackle homelessness. The development of a Single Assessment Centre will build on this approach.

Recommendations.

- I. Prioritise the homeless strategy's action plan to identify those actions that will have the greatest impact on homelessness prevention over the next twelve months.*
- II. The Council should seek to take more of a leading role in the South East Wales Local Authority Homelessness Group. Its innovative work will help other neighbouring Councils learn from its experiences.*
- III. Develop a formal training programme for homeless prevention and options for other statutory and voluntary services including health, children's services, NOMS, and refugee and community groups. Sensibly out of the programme should come a commitment from all partners to play a full part in helping to prevent homelessness.*

8.0 Appendices:

8.1 Appendix A- List of people interviewed as part of this review.

Mike Friel – Operational Manager Housing Strategy, Advice and Support
Louise Webster –Advice and Support Services Manager
Rashmi Wilson - Housing Advice Unit Manager
Lawrence Neale – Homelessness Process Manager
Jaqueline James – Temporary Accommodation Placement Manager
Simon Goss – Cardiff Bond Board
Cllr Woodman – Homelessness Champion and Portfolio Member
Janis Sansom – Housing Allocations Team
Joan Jeffrey –Housing Accountant
Jane Thomas – Operational Manager Housing Benefit
Carl Chapple – Cymorth Cymru
Helen Armstrong – Cadwyn Housing Association
Janet Bochel – Taff Housing Association
Jess Thomas – Llamau HOPS
Claire Hill – Cardiff Women's Aid
Natalie Southgate – Senior Housing Strategy Officer

8.2 Appendix B - Bibliography & Document references

- Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001- Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)

- Tarki Technology – 'Tackling Homelessness- Key issues for consideration to Welsh Local Authorities. (June 2005)
- Homelessness Act 2002 - ODPM
- Better Homes for People in Wales (2001) - WAG
- WAG Revised National Homelessness Strategy (2005)
- The Prevention of Homelessness: An Advice Note -WAG (2004)
- Welsh Housing Statistics Homelessness Bulletin for 2004 and up to September 2005 – WAG
- Homelessness – Responding to the New Agenda – Audit Commission 2003
- No Place like Home...Homelessness in Wales – CIH Cymru 2004
- Reducing B&B use and tackling homelessness – What's working: A Good Practice Handbook -ODPM 2003
- Tackling Homelessness: A Good Practice Guide for Local Authorities - London Borough of Harrow 2003
- Homelessness Strategy – Cardiff Council 2003-2008
- Local Housing Strategy – Cardiff Council 2004-2009
- Internal Cardiff Council Cabinet Reports, procedures and budget reports.
- Homelessness files and case decisions
- Report from the Welsh Public Services Ombudsman into Homelessness and Allocations. Feb 2006

Andy Gale - Biography

8.3 Andy Gale has worked in and managed front line homelessness and housing needs services for many years. He was Housing Needs Manager for Harrow Council which was awarded Beacon Council status for tackling homelessness 2003/04. He was previously in charge of Homelessness and Advice in Ealing and spent the Year 2000 on secondment to the Home Office helping to develop their National Support Service (NASS). Between 1995-1999 he was Vice Chair of Housing for Dacorum Borough Council.

8.4 Andy has been active in London wide homelessness and bed and breakfast issues since the mid 1980's. His work includes helping to set up LAWN, which promotes inter regional mobility, and setting up the Sanctuary scheme to help domestic violence victims remain in their home. Andy has recently produced the second edition of a Local Authority 'Good Practice Guide for Tackling Homelessness' which details the Harrow model for homelessness prevention.

8.5 In May 2004 Andy was seconded to the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate at the ODPM as a Specialist Advisor, where he has developed new

'Best Value' Homelessness indicators. He works with Local authorities on helping them improve their services to the homeless.

8.6 He lives in Wales and has been active in working with Welsh Councils helping them to tackle homelessness. He also provides training to Welsh councils on implementing the homelessness legislation and Homelessness prevention. He is a co author of the Tarki Technology report commissioned by the WAG to help provide a 'blueprint' for how homelessness prevention could be implemented in Wales.